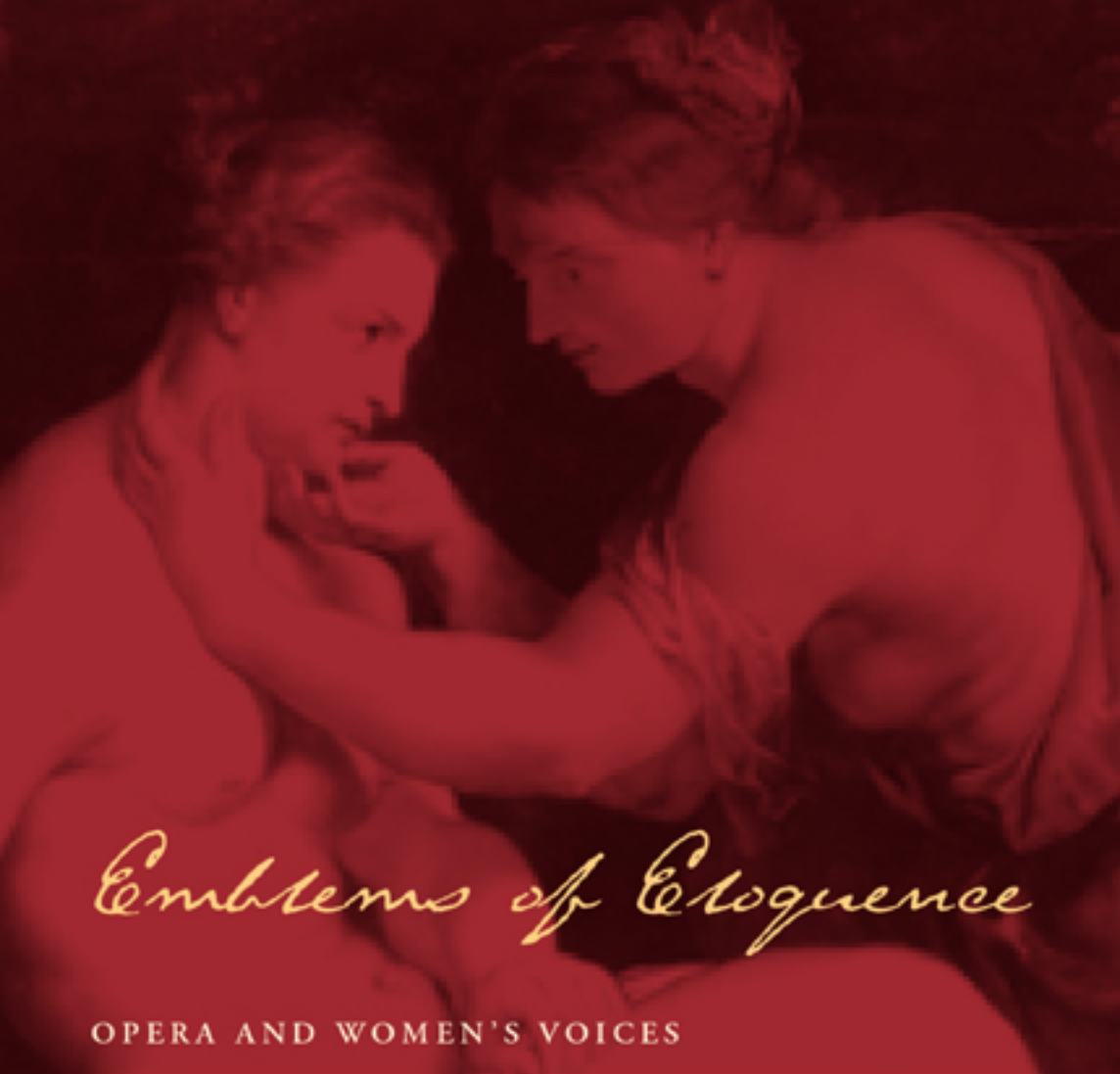




Emblems of Eloquence

OPERA AND WOMEN'S VOICES

IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VENICE

WENDY HELLER

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*Opera and Women's Voices
in Seventeenth-Century Venice*

Wendy Heller

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*To my mother,
Betty Heller*

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many of the ideas that form the basis of this book were first conceived for my doctoral dissertation, "Chastity, Heroism, and Allure: Women in the Opera of Seventeenth-Century Venice" (Brandeis University, 1995). The early nineties were an extraordinary time to be undertaking such a study. I was among a small group of scholars reconsidering opera in the context of gender studies. There was a flurry of publications on gender in the early modern period, and scholars in a variety of disciplines were reconsidering the complex relationships between artworks and the societies that produced them, providing new models for intellectual inquiry. I was profoundly influenced and encouraged by the pioneering work done on Monteverdi and gender by Susan McClary, and my work has benefited in numerous ways from the influence and support of a number of scholars working on gender in opera or early modern music: Tim Carter, Suzanne Cusick, Beth Glixon, Lydia Hammesley, and Mary Ann Smart, to name but a few. I was also fortunate to have begun this study during what was certainly a "renaissance" in the study of seventeenth-century music. The first annual meeting of the Society for Seventeenth-Century Music was held in St. Louis in spring of 1992, providing many younger scholars with a wonderfully supportive and generous community. Perhaps most important, I had the privilege of writing after the publication of two extraordinarily influential books. Ellen Rosand's monumental *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice* became a bible for all of us working on Venetian opera studies, and Eric Chafe's *Monteverdi's Tonal Language* gave us many new tools with which to analyze seventeenth-century music.

The transformation of the dissertation into this book has been a far more complex and rewarding process than I would ever have imagined, and the result is a work that only superficially resembles the original. The change in title is not insignificant, as the book addresses issues that were only implicit

in the dissertation: notions about an evolving mode of female eloquence in Venetian opera, the highly ambivalent ways in which the masculine Republic of Venice incorporated emblematic women into its own special mythology, and the way in which these women forged a new relationship between opera and the ancient world. Chapter 5 of the dissertation, dealing with Cavalli's splendid opera *Veremonda Amazzone di Aragona*, has been replaced by a new chapter on Cavalli's incomparable *La Calisto*, a work that has enjoyed a rebirth in recent years through the marvelous production at Glimmerglass Opera, conducted by Jane Glover, and the wonderful recording by René Jacobs on Harmonia Mundi. With *La Calisto*, I was able to enter into a different level of understanding about operatic women, to leave the sometimes brutal realities of ancient Rome, Carthage, and Troy and spend a brief, idyllic moment in Arcadia, a realm in which so many of the rules for sexual behavior are both expostulated and contradicted. It has also been a delight to explore much new scholarship both in and outside of musicology, to avail myself of modern editions, translations, and studies of some of my primary sources (such as the studies on the writings of the Venetian women Lucrezia Marinella, Moderata Fonte, and Arcangela Tarabotti), and, most importantly, to reframe some of the initial questions that had drawn me to this topic.

I have already published several essays related to this material. "Tacitus Incognito: Opera as History in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*" (*Journal of the American Musicological Society*) and "'O delle donne miserabil sesso': Tarabotti, Ottavia, and *L'incoronazione di Poppea*" (*Il saggiaiore musicale*) develop material incorporated in chapters 2 and 3. An earlier version of chapter 3 was published as "'O castità bugiarda': Cavalli's *Didone* and the Question of Chastity," in *A Woman Scorn'd: Responses to the Dido Myth*. This marvelous collection, edited by Michael Burden, profoundly influenced my thinking about Dido in all her guises.

I am grateful to the many institutions, organizations, libraries, colleagues, and friends that have supported me in countless ways during the years that I worked on this project. My initial dissertation research was supported by grants from the American Musicological Society, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, which also funded several subsequent Venetian trips and supported the publication of this book. Additional research was supported by a Fellowship for Independent Scholars from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1996–97. I acknowledge the support of the Mellon Foundation, which funded my postdoctoral fellowships at the Columbia University Society for Fellows in the Humanities and the American Academy in Rome, as well as the Princeton University Committee on Arts and Social Science Research, which provided funding for research and a subvention for the publication of this book.

Numerous libraries and librarians have assisted me over the years. I would like to thank in particular Darwin Scott at the Brandeis University Library, John Howard and Virginia Danielson at Harvard University, and Paula Matthews at the Mendel Library at Princeton University. In Italy, I was warmly aided by the librarians at the Biblioteca Marciana, Biblioteca Correr, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, and the Biblioteca Casanatense. I owe special thanks to Christine Huemer and the entire staff of the library at the American Academy in Rome.

I am particularly grateful for the communities of scholars that have provided me with intellectual stimulation, encouragement, and friendship while completing this book. The staff, faculty, and fellows at the Society of Fellows in the Humanities at Columbia University provided support and encouragement during the 1997–98 academic year. To the trustees and staff of the American Academy in Rome I owe thanks for an incomparable experience in Rome—in particular for my enchanting view of the garden. I am also grateful to Michael Burden and New College, Oxford for providing me with a Visiting Fellowship in the winter of 2001, where I enjoyed a congenial working environment, replete with marvelous food, wine, and fellowship. I would also like to thank especially all of my colleagues, students, and staff in the Music Department at Princeton University, who have provided such warm support since my arrival at Princeton in 1998.

Many other close friends have supported me in various stages of this project, reading drafts, correcting music examples, and holding my hand at difficult moments. I would like to thank in particular Laurie Blunsom, Michael Burden, Michele Cabrini, Mauro Calcagno, Tim Carter, Joanna Drell, Helen Greenwald, Robert Holzer, Mary Hunter, Mark Kroll, Susan McClary, Kimberlyn Montford, Simon Morrison, Jessie Ann Owens, Maria Purciello, Anna Rossi, Kim Scown, Barbara Sparti, and Andrew Zissos. This book could not have been written without the help, patience, and support of two scholars—whose work is most frequently cited in the pages below—Ellen Rosand and Eric Chafe. My grateful thanks for their years of encouragement and the excellent example of their scholarship. I would like to extend my thanks to Mary Francis and Rachel Berchten at the University of California Press for guiding this book to publication; to Bonnie Blackburn for her patient, wise, and exemplary copyediting, and for making this such a pleasant and enlightening process; and to Leofranc Holford-Strevens for his assistance with the classical citations. I would also like to thank Valeria DeLucca for help in modernizing the Italian texts. There are no words with which I can express my love and gratitude to Irene Alm, whose tragic death in October 2000 has diminished us all.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support throughout this project: my husband, Jack Hill, who has stood by me patiently; my father,

Professor Gerald Heller, who did not live to see the completion of my Ph.D. or this book, but would have so enjoyed having a second “Professor Heller” in the family; my brother, Allen Heller, and his family for their love and encouragement. This book is dedicated to my mother, Betty Heller, who died shortly before its publication. Her love and generosity were unequalled, and she was truly a most exceptional woman.

EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The seventeenth-century Italian texts have been edited according to modern usage. Spellings have been corrected and punctuation has been adjusted lightly for clarity. There is one important exception: the spelling of the word *femina* (rather than the modern *femmina*), which so often appears in the titles and texts of seventeenth-century books about women, seems to convey a notion about seicento femininity, and thus I have left it as it appears in the sources. In the musical examples I have followed similar principles. I have left capital letters for line beginnings so that the reader might have a better understanding of the poetic structures in the absence of full editions of the text. I have maintained original note values and time signatures; all added barlines are indicated with dotted lines, and coloration is indicated with brackets. All figures in the bass are in the original sources.

Character names appear in two forms. I have used the Latin or anglicized version to refer to the historical or mythological person and the Italian for operatic characters (e.g., Callisto/Calisto, Dido/Didone, Endymion/Endimione, Jove/Giove, Octavia/Ottavia, Pan/Pane).

ABBREVIATIONS

LIBRARY SIGLA

A-Wn	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
D-AN	Ansbach, Staatliche Bibliothek Ansbach
I-Fn	Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale
I-Gu	Genoa, Biblioteca Universitaria
I-Nc	Naples, Conservatorio di Musica S. Pietro a Majella, Biblioteca
I-Rn	Rome, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Vittorio Emanuele II
I-Vas	Venice, Archivio di Stato
I-Vmc	Venice, Museo Civico Correr, Biblioteca d'Arte e Storia Veneziana
I-Vnm	Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

AM	<i>Analecta musicologica</i>
COJ	<i>Cambridge Opera Journal</i>
EM	<i>Early Music</i>
EMH	<i>Early Music History</i>
FI	<i>Forum Italicum</i>
JAMS	<i>Journal of the American Musicological Society</i>
JM	<i>Journal of Musicology</i>
JRMA	<i>Journal of the Royal Musical Association</i>
ML	<i>Music & Letters</i>
RIM	<i>Rivista italiana di musicologia</i>
RQ	<i>Renaissance Quarterly</i>
SM	<i>Studi musicali</i>

Introduction

OPERA AND THE MYTHS OF VENICE

Opera in Venice developed during a period in which the position of women, their rights and freedoms, their virtues and sins, their responsibility for the fall of man, their membership in the human race, and even their possession of immortal souls were under constant debate. This polemic was waged in a variety of formats—catalogs of women, biographies, and theological arguments about the relative culpability of Adam and Eve, manuals on behavior, domestic life, or the art of love, and pornographic *novelle*—all testifying to the contradictory notions about women and sexuality that characterize seventeenth-century thought. Much of the controversy, however, manifested itself in the figure of the exceptional woman. Drawn from the realms of legend and history, these women were the heroines of the Venetian version of the “querelles des femmes.” Fashioned and refashioned by poets, artists, librettists, and composers, they could attract or repel. Their images were presented to the public on canvases, engravings, and frescoed walls; their voices were heard in prose and poetry, and in the theater. As emblems of femininity, they reinforced appropriate behaviors and demonstrated the consequences of immoral actions.

Opera was an important means through which the polemic about women was waged in Venice. The intellectual patricians who were the first generation of Venetian librettists incorporated their ambivalent attitudes in what were to become operatic conventions. This can be seen in the misogynist male servants and proto-feminist elderly nurses and the creative embroidering of legend and history to suit the fancy of the librettist and the audience. Most ambivalent was the portrayal of the operatic heroine herself. Myths that depicted her as triumphant, powerful, or threatening could be rewritten so as to limit her power, heighten or reduce her sexual danger,

or be made to resolve in a manner more compatible with Venetian purposes. Indeed, what medium could have been more suitable for the representation of the exceptional woman? She could be seductive, heroic, chaste, or repentant. She could sing with alluring lyricism, exotic chromaticism, modest restraint, or affecting sorrow. With its unique ability to represent women in a manner that was both aurally and visually compelling, opera transformed women into emblems of eloquence, even in those moments in which their voices were ostensibly suppressed.

Much of the ambiguity about women expressed in seventeenth-century Venetian opera reflects Venice's well-known tendency to mythologize herself and her origins, to weave fact and fiction into a single fabric that emphasized her unmatched physical beauty, the divinity of her birth, the perfection of her government, and the wisdom and nobility of her leaders.¹ An integral element of this particular set of myths was the attempt to achieve a balance between a set of seemingly contradictory values. Relative egalitarianism—the much-publicized freedom of the Lagoon City—was regarded paradoxically as a divine privilege conferred by God and the Virgin on a society ruled by a closed, noble class. Liberty may have been one of Venice's most valued commodities; but the source of her apparent invulnerability, longevity, and immunity to the vagaries of fortune may well have been her relative conservatism. The stability of Venice thus appeared to rest precariously on maintaining an almost crippling equilibrium between opposing forces.²

Gender oppositions are yet another aspect of the paradoxical thinking that characterized Venetian mythologizing. Venice's absolute exclusion of women in public life was written into the organization of the Republic. Unlike that of other northern Italian cities such as Mantua or Florence, Venetian social life did not revolve around a central court in which high-ranking women participated, as depicted famously in Castiglione's *Il cortegiano*. Outside of Venice, female rule may have been tolerated, but it was nearly always managed by the adroit manipulation of imagery that emphasized the androgynous, masculine nature of the female rulers.³ In Venice, however, the situation was reversed: exclusive male rule was celebrated by the use of a female icon. Men and women were relegated to different realms, the public and private respectively, but the operating mythology depended on a notion of a female body inhabited by a male governing soul.

Further paradoxes absorbed by the operatic heroines can be seen within the shifting representations of the figure *Venetia*, the female personification of Venice herself that had been well codified by the mid-sixteenth century. This persona, as David Rosand has described, consisted of four separate images: Justice, the goddess of Rome (Dea Roma), the Virgin Mary, and Venus, the goddess of love. *Venetia* thus embodied a number of contradictory female attributes—virtue and licentiousness, impenetrability and seductiveness, Christian piety and pagan mysteries—which together stood for the

differing aspects of the male republic.⁴ By the sixteenth century, as Jutta Sperling has observed, the Virgin Mary and the goddess Venus had become particularly important, and she notes the way in which these seemingly mutually exclusive images were used “alongside without embarrassment, as if they were similes rather than opposites.”⁵ Mary’s virginity was an indicator of Venice’s own purity, reflecting the wisdom, virtue, and purity of the upper classes and the state of perfection that was conferred upon the city and its patrician class at its birth. The notion of virginity also reinforced the perpetual power of Venice’s glory on earth, and was not without its implications for a foreign policy that sought containment, stability, and the maintenance of the status quo at all costs. Venice was the unconquerable maiden—impregnable and invincible, withstanding all attempts to deflower her, as emphasized by both foreign and Venetian writers. For example, the lawyer, poet, and librettist Giovanni Francesco Busenello, author of two works under consideration below (*La Didone* and *L’incoronazione di Poppea*), refers to his native city as the “Vergine regnatrice.” Busenello’s idealized conception of a pure Venice was echoed by such foreign visitors as the Englishman James Howell, who declared that Venice was a “Maiden City . . . both *Christian* and *Independent*, whereof she Glorieth, and that not undeservedly, above all States or Kingdomes.”⁶ Within this construct, the juxtaposition of the goddess Roma and the Virgin Mary had other implications. As Patricia Fortini Brown has observed, Venice was superior by virtue of enjoying *both* a Roman and a Christian past: “the city could claim a foundation before that of Rome and, at the same time, a foundation that was from the outset always Christian.”⁷

Notably, much of this maiden’s purity was attributed to the virtue and patriotism of her men. Howell, for example, observed that while individual Venetian men contributed greatly to their nation’s civic superiority, their true power was in their concerted efforts: “Now, ther are few or none who are greater Patriotts than the Venetian Gentlemen, their prime *study* is public good and glory of their Countrey, and civil prudence is their principall *trade* whereunto they arrive in a high mesure; Yet as it may be easily observed, though these Gentlemen are extraordinary wise when they are *con-junct*, take them *single* they are but as other Men.”⁸ Venice’s virginity was thus associated with the virtues of her male citizens who dominated this elegantly structured, aristocratic oligarchy. Ironically, her purity and the wonder of her accomplishments were the result of a political system that banned women from even symbolic manifestations of power.

The goddess Venus, however, was the alter ego of Venice’s public image; as such, she was variously viewed as either an asset or a liability. Foreign visitors such as James Howell and Thomas Coryate may have praised political Venice as an impenetrable Virgin, a new ideal in an increasingly secularized Europe; yet, the Republic whose maidenhead had remained intact was also renowned for her lack thereof. Venice the Maid was also lauded as

the goddess Venus, a seductive siren, born of the sea. Venice was the city of carnival, of prostitution, and of gaming, a veritable amusement park for Europe.⁹ Thus, although she remained impervious to foreign occupation, tyranny, and absolutism, Venice, like the many courtesans for which she was so famous, was applauded for her accessibility: she was the ultimate destination for the pleasure seeker, providing, as well, a safe haven for those whose libertine thinking placed them at odds with the Inquisition. Free commerce, lack of censorship, a flourishing pleasure industry, public festivals, and, eventually, opera were among the ways in which the Virgin Venice used the goddess Venus to enchant visitors and entertain her citizens.

This Janus-faced image—Venus-Venice/maiden-courtesan—was an essential element in the preservation of Venice's political structure and social stability. Venus in all her guises was an ambivalent icon, readily available for a variety of propagandistic and practical purposes, who could be replicated time and time again on the operatic stage. On the one hand, the maiden Venice kept a strong check on its female population. It was in the name of economic conservatism and Venetian pragmatism that women were excluded from public life, wives kept to their houses, and noble marriages were limited.¹⁰ Patriarchal authority, both within the home and the state, reinforced by legislation from the fourteenth century on, was the link between private and public spheres, necessarily relegating women to a subsidiary position.¹¹ Female sexuality was not so much suppressed as controlled, with two venerable institutions—monachization and prostitution—operating as safety valves for the overflow of desire.¹²

On the other hand, the licentious goddess Venus played an important role in Venetian public policy. Venice's political wisdom was also manifest in the unmatched opportunities for personal liberties and sexual license that she bestowed on her male citizens and visitors; moreover, such moral permissiveness was even justifiable as an expedient to control the population.¹³ Indeed, Venetian stability in the midst of such apparent contradictions was proof positive for all of Europe of Venice's divine destiny and her innate ability to surpass the glories of the ancient world.¹⁴

For some, however, this stability was only an illusion. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the myth that had so comfortably linked Venice's purity with the pleasure in her more lustful nature existed in tandem with a more critical approach that has been termed the anti-myth, reflecting considerable anxiety about the vulnerability of the Republic.¹⁵ This was probably stimulated by a number of disparate factors; the moralizing will of the Counter-Reformation, the drop in population (caused both by plague and by the restrictions placed on noble marriage), disputes within the ranks of the nobles, and the continuing tension with the Turks—all may have increased the dependence on the familiar juxtaposition of the goddess Venus and the Virgin Mary. While the Englishman Thomas Coryate combined his detailed description of Venice's courtesans with provocative political imag-

ery praising Venice for resisting attempts to “defloure” her glorious beauty, other commentators—both foreign and Venetian—used the same metaphor to Venice’s detriment, expressing skepticism as to her innate purity.¹⁶ Tommaso Campanella goes so far as to “slander Venice as a whore,” and his views were echoed later in the century by foreign writers such as Saint-Didier. Jutta Sperling has identified the pivotal point at mid-century, a time, not coincidentally, in which opera was gaining a foothold in Venice. In 1646, due to decreasing numbers among the patrician class, Venice decided to sell memberships to the Great Council in exchange for 100,000 ducats. For some, this marked the ultimate sully of her pure aristocracy.¹⁷ The beautiful immaculate virgin appeared to be an illusion, disguised by political maneuverings and deceit. The elegant balance between closed and open, masculine and feminine, male virtue and female beauty was threatened.

It was in this context that opera became institutionalized in Venice, acquiring its own fictions that mirrored the myth of Venice in intriguing ways. Even by the mid-seventeenth century, opera came to be regarded as an exclusively Venetian accomplishment—another sign of the Republic’s political and social superiority—that could demonstrate Venice’s influence at home and abroad precisely at the time in which her political and economic power was on the wane.¹⁸ Opera became a myth within a myth, whose virtues and vices were thus analogous to those of Venice herself. This is apparent, for example, in Cristoforo Ivanovich’s *Memorie teatrali di Venezia*.¹⁹ Ivanovich was the official chronicler of the Venetian opera industry, although his work has become more renowned for its errors than for its substantive contributions.²⁰ Regardless of his many mistaken attributions, what is most interesting about Ivanovich is the way in which he presents a history of the opera industry that echoes the central tenets—and anxieties—of the myth of Venice.²¹ In his formulation, the opera industry exists in a reciprocal relationship with the Republic. Opera *is* Venice: the industry is economically sound, and the theater system, like the government, is a model of order accommodating the needs of a diverse population. Thus, at its best, opera reflects both the liberal and aristocratic nature of Venice and the noble origins of its founding fathers. At its worst, threatened by increased commercialization, the waning involvement of academics, and the vagaries of audience taste, opera and Venice are both threatened by a lack of nobility and decorum. As such, Ivanovich’s criticisms—not unlike those of subsequent eighteenth-century commentators—may tell us more about Venice’s insecurities than the weaknesses of the operas themselves. Opera, a metaphor for the Republic, is subject to the same degradations and conflicts.

The analogy between Venice and her own opera industry provides us with an important frame for the consideration of female presence and vocalicity in opera throughout the century. It is no coincidence that opera should have emerged as an important political and social force precisely at the time in which the Venetian mythology—and the female icon that stood

for that myth—seemed most vulnerable. Venetian opera does not merely reflect contemporary gender ideology or the admittedly complex Venetian attitudes toward the female sex; nor is it simply a medium through which the mythology could be expressed. Rather, as we shall see, over the course of the seventeenth century opera and operatic women were grafted onto a shifting set of myths in which the relative openness of the Venetian Republic—and the female body that represented it—was under constant scrutiny. Other factors also played an important role: in the sections below we will briefly consider carnival culture, contemporary notions about the body, ideals concerning male and female virtue, courtesans, and shifting views about female rhetoric. Changes in musical style also shaped the way in which the emblematic women of myth and history were reinvented and given voice for the operatic stage. The varied representations of feminine chastity, heroism, and lasciviousness in so many of these works pertain not only to the domestic realm and private behaviors—issues pursued in a variety of artistic mediums throughout early modern Europe—but also to the survival of the nation and the body politic itself.

OPERA, CARNIVAL, AND RITUAL

Opera was only one of the means through which Venice presented herself and her mythology to the public. Carnival, street theater, and other public rituals had always provided ways for the myth to express itself and for the city to glory in its unique physical beauty. Jutta Sperling, for example, notes how these festivals provided an opportunity to “stage” the urban body of Venice, a means for the Republic to “constitute itself in front of its public, to display its dignity and its power visibly” and to “mark out the city through processions.”²² This image was succinctly expressed in the mid-sixteenth century by Luigi Groto, who linked Venice’s physical openness to her theatrical nature: “The fact that Venice has neither material walls that surround her nor gates that seclude her nor keys that lock her prove her broad liberty, and her public generosity; it witnesses that she is a public market, a continuous fair, an open court, an open theater, a general port, and the universal mother of the whole world.”²³ Eugene Johnson has demonstrated ways in which the Piazzetta San Marco was itself a theatrical construct. The upper floors of Sansovino’s library served as boxes for any number of entertainments “performed” between the columns. Affairs of state, carnival festivities, and even executions could thus be presented to the public, with the ducal palace and *bacino* as backdrop.²⁴ This setting even provided a model for opera; as Johnson demonstrates, one of Giacomo Torelli’s stage sets for the 1642 performance of *Il Bellerofonte* created its own version of the Piazzetta “rising from the sea,” thus blurring the line between the various modes of theatricality in Venice. But beyond San Marco, the opening of theaters in the various Venetian parishes supported by the city’s most presti-

gious families also marked Venice's ecclesiastical divisions as theatrical zones in which the city and her myths could be created. Opera thus provided a stylized means to express the Republic's innate theatricality.

Carnival is the link between the theatricalization of Venice on the streets and the management of her mythology on the stage. On the most basic level, carnival provided an opportunity for a Christian society to explore precisely those pleasures that would be forbidden during Lent, albeit with links to pagan traditions. Sobriety, self-denial, and abstinence—behaviors deemed necessary for the contemplation of Christ's own sacrifice—were thus prefaced by a period of unmitigated pleasure, excess, and carnality. Yet, as a number of commentators have suggested, the implications of carnival within a given society are far more profound.²⁵ Carnival was the time in which all officially sanctioned rules could be overturned. Sacred and secular rituals could be parodied; the low could imitate the high, and the high took the opportunity to mingle with the low. Varieties of spectacles, pleasures, and illegal activities were associated with carnival, ranging from the playful to the violent: fireworks, acrobatics, pantomimes, balls, mock and genuine battles, athletic feats, and a host of theatrical undertakings. During this brief period, sexual freedom was matched by licentiousness in song and poetry; courtesans mingled more freely with the population and disguise allowed for ambiguity in class and gender. In carnival, the flesh rather than spirit became the guiding force.

The relationship of carnival to official culture in Venice is particularly complex, raising perennially problematic issues about the function of such events within any given society. Mikhail Bakhtin has emphasized the universal qualities that link all carnival phenomena, and its various stages through history.²⁶ In his view, carnival is an act of renewal and redemption, one that opens up an almost Utopian space for the people in which the celebration of the grotesque body provides social cohesion for an otherwise disenfranchised populace. A number of scholars have since challenged aspects of Bakhtin's ideology, noting instead the complex ways in which carnival interacts with the structures that it purports to dismantle.²⁷ For our purposes what is particularly important is the way in which the universal features of carnival served specifically Venetian sensibilities. In Venice, carnival was not merely a decoration or a tourist attraction, nor was it an act of rebellion by an oppressed populace; rather it was a necessary feature of Venetian existence, built into the system. In some respects, carnival made possible the dynamic tension between Venetian liberty and conservatism, providing a space and time in which the balance of opposites shifted—albeit temporarily—in the direction of the former.

Within the context of carnival, opera was scarcely an autonomous genre; like other entertainments involving song, action, and costume, it was seen and heard alongside fireworks, games, mock battles, street dances, and improvisatory theater. Moreover, as a fixture of the Venetian carnival, this *sec-*

ular entertainment became part of the rhythm of the *liturgical* year. Advent and the post-Christmas season were thus not only marked by religious concerns, but they were also pre-operative seasons, during which composers, impresarios, and librettists were involved in pre-production concerns. At the same time, the sobriety of Lent was probably mitigated by the lingering memory of performances and plans for the following season. Because of its close association with other forms of carnival entertainment, opera's conventions became permeated with carnivalesque thinking and behaviors. Indeed, opera might be understood as a more carefully scripted miniature of carnival, embracing many of the associated oddities and discontinuities. Bakhtin, for example, describes the ways in which the carnival-grotesque elements were present "in all essential manifestations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries," including *commedia dell'arte*, Molière's comedies, and comic novels, despite the outward formalization of these genres.²⁸

Opera's carnival inheritance can be most readily seen in plotting and dramaturgy, as well as in the manipulation of its source material—ancient texts—an area with which this book is much concerned. The indecorous treatment of heroes, the intermingling of seemingly incompatible sources, the juxtaposition of the comic and the serious, the almost haphazard combination of fact and fantasy were an integral part of carnival thinking. Carnival's preoccupation with inversions reveals much about the way in which gender relationships were configured and reconfigured in opera, providing a fertile ground with which early moderns explored changing notions about gender and sexuality. From carnival opera learned much about the power of disguise and transvestism—how to incite desire by concealing one's biological sex and adopting the clothing and habits of another gender. Indeed, the numerous plots in Venetian opera that are propelled by transvestism may have engaged audience imaginations by suggesting the possibility that they, too, might be fooled by a lover dressed as a servant girl or an abandoned lover disguised as a courtier. Opera thus provided an occasion to "stage" many of the fantasies aroused by carnival, albeit in a stylized and less threatening fashion.

But carnival also exerted an influence on the musical texture of opera. While we can only imagine the multiplicity of sounds during carnival, the range of activities, the different social classes and talents among the participants, and the blurry line between spectator and performer suggest that it must have included a stunning variety of musical styles—from the most learned counterpoint to the bawdiest street songs. Michael Bristol, for example, has noted the influence of carnival on the linguistic styles of the Elizabethan theater "as neighboring institutions with similar logic of representation and similar orientation to social reality as a whole."²⁹ In carnival and the theater, he proposed, "the language of day to day productive life and the interaction among disparate linguistic communities comes into familiar contact with the 'ennobled language' of official ideology, official religion,

and high literature. The genres of drama become carnivalized.”³⁰ Bristol’s observations are equally relevant with regard to Venetian opera, with its continuous music and multiplicity of styles. Like Elizabethan theater, Venetian opera absorbed aspects of song, poetry, and speech associated with a wide range of different classes, genders, and social and political situations that became codified as operatic conventions. The result was a sound world that allowed for both high and low forms of expression in which rich and poor, royal and servile, male and female, virtue and vice could be heard in a surprisingly democratic environment. In Venetian opera we hear not only the joys and despairs of kings, queens, and warrior women, but the chatter of pageboys and the wisdom of lecherous nurses, gossiping soldiers, and lustful satyrs, all with appropriate musical gestures. Opera, like carnival, nearly always concludes with the confirmation of existing power relationships: marriage is usually favored over adultery, matriarchy concedes to patriarchy, and class and gender discrepancies are corrected. But, also like carnival, opera provided a space, albeit briefly, in which the rules were overturned, and in which a topsy-turvy universe was not only seen but also heard.

VIRTUE AND THE BODY

The carnivalesque play with gender and sexuality on the operatic stage took place during a time in which basic concepts about male and female bodies were in flux, intersecting in unpredictable ways with shifting ideals about male and female virtue. Many of the conventions for representing emblematic women on the stage—and the conventions for expressing female vocality—were the product of a highly contested view of the female body, largely caused by an incomplete or incorrect understanding of human anatomy.

Modern understanding of the body in the early modern period has been shaped in large part by Thomas Laqueur’s useful and influential study of the history of sexuality.³¹ He emphasizes the importance of what he terms “the one-sex model,” acquired primarily from Aristotle and the second-century physician Galen.³² This model depends on two complementary but essentially different approaches to the problem of sexual difference. First, to borrow Laqueur’s phraseology, there is the reversal in the relationship between destiny and anatomy that pervades Aristotle’s often contradictory writing about sex and gender. For Aristotle, the differences between male and female virtue were natural truths, but this did not necessarily depend upon modern, biological notions of sexual difference (e.g., penis vs. vagina).³³ Instead, as Laqueur notes, Aristotle saw these differences as proceeding from “ideologically charged social constructions of gender—that males are active and females passive.” The capacity for men and women to do good or evil, their inherent virtues, and the roles that they play within society could not be inferred from the biological evidence of sexual differ-

ence. What is so remarkable from a twenty-first-century perspective is that these facts did not emerge as self-evident from the biological facts of sexual difference, but rather from other natural qualities. That is not to say that Aristotle did not consider the question of female biology or conception; from him, for example, comes the view that the semen provided the essence of the soul in the act of conception. But what is most important is that biology is not the cause of difference; rather, it is perhaps only symptomatic of “innate” differences—of natural “social truths” that are resistant to empirical scientific observations.

Galen’s theories about sexual difference demonstrate some of the difficulties of using scientific evidence to argue for or explain cultural constructions of gender. Notably, his views, while modified at times, remained current (albeit in varying degrees) well into the early modern period.³⁴ In Galen’s view, the female body was an imperfect version of the man’s, in which equivalent organs remained inside the body due to women’s innate “insufficient heat.” If the testes, scrotum, and penis were truly the equivalent of the ovaries, uterus, and vagina, then not only were women necessarily inferior to men, but their differences must primarily be attributed to non-empirical factors. However, as Katherine Park has demonstrated, once we take into account the contradictory evidence produced by sixteenth-century anatomical studies, we are left with a more complex and more richly variegated picture, in which the Galenic and Aristotelian legacy is surrounded by contradictions and discrepancies that opera readily appropriated.

For our purposes, the most provocative controversies in the seventeenth century concern the relative fluidity in gender categories and the mechanics of female sexual pleasure. Let us first consider the question of female sexual pleasure in the Galenic sense. If the vagina is an inverted penis, it receives at least an equal amount of pleasure from sex, if not more, as a result of the weaker nature of women. Various theories existed with regard to orgasm and conception, but many held onto the Galenic view that women’s sexual arousal was an essential part of conception, even if that conception was precipitated by the male orgasm, which contained the more important part of the seed. For some physicians, the orgasmic tremor itself was a sign of conception.³⁵ Female desire was something to be courted for procreation under appropriate social circumstances, and to be feared or managed under circumstances deemed less worthy. Katherine Park’s research on the re-discovery of the clitoris in the sixteenth century and the various debates about female anatomy in such cities as Padua and Bologna raises the stakes still further.³⁶ The clitoris provided visual evidence of female desire, a scientific rationale for anxieties about excessive sexual appetite in women such as Messalina or Semiramide, whose operatic representations are considered below. Park notes, for example, a growing unease about women’s ability to pleasure each other, and she describes the ways in which anatomists mapped many of these fears onto non-Western women, who presum-

ably had more obvious anatomical anomalies.³⁷ Moreover, the recognition of the affinity between the penis and the clitoris threatened the primacy of the Galenic model. If, as Park notes, women “already had a full set of genitals corresponding . . . to their male counterparts—ovaries to testicles, uterus to scrotum, vagina to penis”—then they *also* had a “miniature penis”—thus making all women hermaphrodites in some respects.³⁸

The hermaphrodite thus has a special role in a world in which sexual difference is not a fact of science and in which both genders potentially exist in a single individual. Ann Rosland Jones and Peter Stallybrass have described the hermaphrodite as an attempt to order a disordered realm, recurring “where there is an imperative to categorize without one single normative system by which such categorizations can be made.”³⁹ Anxieties about female sexuality are particularly manifest in the asymmetrical ways in which the boundaries between the genders were guarded. Jones and Stallybrass cite a number of commentators who stated that only women could turn into men, scarcely admitting the opposite possibility.⁴⁰ In Venice, however, where women were on the opera stage and where plots involving transvestism were often added to imported works, authors indeed saw sexual transformation as a two-way process: the problem was not only that women might turn into men, but men might turn into women. As Park suggests, discoveries about female anatomy only heightened such discomfort. The recognition of the existence of an “external female penis” raised the possibility that women would not only experience pleasure, but also that they could do so without the participation of men.⁴¹ The seventeenth century is thus marked by the anxiety that women had the potential to become more than merely imperfect males. Gender categories could thus be altered willfully by misbehavior, contained by legal measures, or manipulated within the artificial realm of theater.

This instability with regard to scientific conceptions of sexual difference thus put a greater emphasis on the differentiation of genders in terms of behavior, or what was often referred to as *virtues*. The question as to the capacity of women to have the same sort of moral virtue as men occupied many early modern writers and was a central issue in the operas as well. In the late sixteenth century, for example, Torquato Tasso attempted to reconcile two apparently conflicting views about female virtue taught by Plato and Aristotle. Whereas the Neoplatonics took a more positive view of female beauty, accepting (at least in theory) that both sexes had the potential to attain equal virtue and that it was only custom that prevented women's participation in public life, others continued to repeat Aristotle's claims concerning the innate differences between male and female virtue that, as noted above, were above the scrutiny of science.⁴²

The temperance of a man and of a woman are not, as Socrates maintained, the same; the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obey-

ing . . . All classes must be deemed to have their special attributes; as the poet says of women, silence is the woman's glory, but this is not equally the glory of man . . . A man would be thought to be a coward if he had no more courage than a courageous woman, and a woman would be thought loquacious if she imposed no more restraint on her conversations than the good man.⁴³

Tasso notes that whereas Plato argues in the *Republic* that women's limited role in public life is a result of custom or habit, Aristotle contends that this limited role is a result of nature.⁴⁴ Like Aristotle, however, Tasso was less concerned about the ethical issues involving female virtue than the practical ones. (Indeed, in stating his preference for Aristotle, he observes that the philosopher discussed male and female virtue in the *Politics* rather than in his ethical writings because he presumably recognized that in order for men and women to carry out their prescribed roles in society—to avert chaos—they must conform to [and thus be judged according to] different standards of virtue.) Tasso's definition of “virtù femminile” is formulated precisely to regulate the behavior of “ordinary women” in society:

Thus we will conclude that man is dishonored for cowardice and woman for lack of chastity because that is the characteristic vice for the man and for the woman. I do not deny nevertheless that strength is not still a feminine virtue, but this is not absolute strength, but the strength to obey, as Aristotle said. Nevertheless, many acts of strength in women would not be acts of strength in men, and, on the contrary, many deeds of women would be judged actions of temperance that in men would be considered nothing or a lack of temperance.⁴⁵

Tasso's formulation is particularly instructive for the consideration of operatic women because he also recognized that his rather strict definition of “feminine virtue” did not apply to exceptional women, such as his royal dedicatee or the women of myth and history that are so frequently used as emblems of femininity. For them, Tasso invents a second category, “virtù donnesco,” appropriate to those women who, for whatever reason, cannot or will not be held to his more rigid standards of *virtù femminile*. Economy, for example, a virtue much to be praised in the woman of a civic family, is not desirable for royal women, who must cultivate an image that is pleasing to the senses. Tasso needed still greater feats of logic when dealing with legendary queens such as Cleopatra or Semiramis, whose accomplishments he recognized as comparable to those of heroic men—but who were also well known for their lack of chastity. He resolves this dilemma, however, by arguing (perhaps surprisingly), that unchaste *heroic* women deserve no more praise or blame than unchaste heroic men do: “I will not deny, nevertheless, that Semiramis and Cleopatra would have merited great praise had they not been impure; however, also Caesar, the Trojan [Aeneas], and Alexander would have been worthy of the highest praise had they been temperate as well. And if, for the virtue of temperance, one places Zenobia or Artemisia

against Semiramis or Cleopatra, for the same virtue Scipio would be preferable to Camillus, Caesar, or Alexander.”⁴⁶

With these two categories for female virtue, Tasso bridges an important gap in the way women were viewed at the end of the sixteenth century, creating a definition of feminine virtue that would support the continuation of society in its current state while allowing for inevitable exceptions. Silence and chastity may have been important for the preservation of the social order; but this conception of female virtue could scarcely explain the peculiar qualities of the exceptional woman, who would soon grace the operatic stage. Indeed, the concept of female virtue was of enormous importance for the emerging genre of opera; for if virtue was to be conceded to women based on their silence and chastity, then the opera heroine, with her new-found eloquence, presented a threat of perhaps incalculable dimensions.

COURTESAN CULTURE

The creation of the Venetian opera heroine was not only a result of abstract conceptions of male and female virtue—played out in the representations of mythological and historical figures—but was influenced as well by another decidedly real figure in Venetian life: the courtesan. We have already considered the ways in which courtesan imagery shaped Venice’s own self-image, representing both her libertinism and her capacity for corruption. Yet she was also an important real face of Venetian life, presenting a model for both feminine self-expression and containment that resonated with the historical and mythological exempla and found its way into operatic representations of such women as Poppaea or Messalina. In 1611, for example, Thomas Coryate famously noted that there were some twenty thousand courtesans in Venice and neighboring areas, many “esteemed so loose, that they are said to open their quivers to every arrow,” finding it “a most ungodly thing there should be tolleration of such licentious wantons in so glorious, so potent, so renowned a City.”⁴⁷ In a society intent upon limiting the size of the nobility and managing a somewhat stagnant economy, both monachization and prostitution were viewed as necessary—if sometimes porous—containers for female sexuality. Courtesans not only served the desires of a needy male population, oftentimes forced into reluctant bachelorhood; they were also viewed as an important antidote for those with more dangerous sodomitic tendencies—a sexual outlet that was deemed somewhat more acceptable in many, but not all, social circles. Moreover, as Thomas Coryate reminds us, the courtesans were also a tourist attraction. Indeed, Venice also seems to have understood well the value of this particular commodity in the world market, where liberty—sexual or otherwise—had become the Republic’s most envied possession.

The “public” presence of these extraordinary women seems to have contrasted sharply with the relative invisibility of Venetian wives. Along with

other visitors, Coryate spoke of the relative seclusion of the wives, commenting that “the Gentlemen do even coop up their wives alwaies within the walles of their houses for fear of these inconveniences.”⁴⁸ The inconvenience to which he refers is the possible infidelity of their wives, and (perhaps somewhat disingenuously) he expresses astonishment that Venetian husbands could be thus concerned about their wives’ chastity, given the large number of courtesans that presumably protected wives from philandering husbands. Other contemporary writings suggest that many husbands may have wished to seclude their wives in order to protect them from contact with base and low women, whose influence might lead them to commit acts of debauchery.⁴⁹ While it is not entirely clear how much freedom Venetian wives enjoyed—they retained some economic influence through their control of dowry funds—their public role was highly restricted.⁵⁰ Regardless, the considerable criticism directed at women’s luxuries and outrageous fashions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries does suggest that women may have led a more active social life than suggested by Coryate and other witnesses.⁵¹ Nonetheless, it would appear that courtesans very likely had access to literary and intellectual circles that would have been closed to wives, though they were often criticized for their very public participation.⁵² For wives and even nuns, as we shall see, “la moda” may have been one of the only means of self-expression.

But for our purposes what is most important is the expressive distance between virtuous and licentious women, and the way in which courtesans—including those described as “onesta”—established the model for a certain type of public woman that was later to be engaged by opera. We have already noted the extent to which Venice’s system of government differed from that of the other northern Italian courts, in which a female presence was more easily accommodated within public spaces. Yet, the lack of an official, public court for the display of powerful women only changed the rules of the game, delegating the responsibility for such self-fashioning to the women who transformed the *cortigiano* into a *cortegiana*, reinventing the attributes and vices of the courtier for an ostensibly different purpose. There is something inherently theatrical—and threatening—about the presentation and self-fashioning of the Venetian courtesan, as is apparent in the often unsuccessful attempts made by the Venetian government to discipline the courtesan’s behavior and restrict her access to the various luxuries that constituted her props, costumes, and sets.⁵³ While there were always periodic attempts to control the often conspicuous consumption among the general population, authorities were particularly concerned with the public presentation of prostitutes, and various efforts were made to forbid them the use of silks, fine fabrics, and expensive jewelry and to discourage them from the popular custom of dressing *en travesti* or wearing masks. Nor were courtesans necessarily encouraged to dress modestly; in 1598, for example, they

were forbidden to wear the white silk head covering favored by gentlewomen and nuns; this appearance of modesty, it was argued, might allow them to mix more readily with the general population and thus contaminate their less gainfully employed brethren.⁵⁴ Indeed, as contemporary costume books document, courtesans were particularly adept at emulating the clothing worn by women of the highest nobility.⁵⁵ The importance of feigning modesty in public is emphasized in Francesco Pona's novella *La lucerna*, an intriguing and controversial dialogue between a young student and a lamp inhabited by a variety of spirits. One of these, a former courtesan, recalls modesty as the "condiment" of her charm; despite this, however, she describes herself as more lascivious than all of the Venuses.⁵⁶

The courtesan's setting and costumes, however, were only the backdrop for what was among the most controversial aspects of her activities: speech and song. Margaret Rosenthal's study of Veronica Franco emphasizes, for example, the highly contested nature of her publications and in particular the satirical nature of the response that they engendered, particularly among those who were most desirous of sexual favors.⁵⁷ It is no coincidence that some of the most highly charged satires of prostitution were in the form of dialogues wherein language served not only to seduce but also to demonstrate female autonomy or social mobility. In the most famous example, Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamento*, the reader observes the mother Nanna describing to her daughter her experiences in the three "lives" deemed possible for a woman in early modern Italy: nun, wife, and whore, casting her vote in favor of the last. Notably, Nanna's preference for the life of the courtesan is not based merely on a taste for erotic pleasures—in her description, the convent provided as many opportunities for sexual expression as any brothel. The difference, in Nanna's view, is in the relative power, freedom, and opportunity for gain accorded the courtesan. As Paula Findlen explains, Nanna's choice of whoredom as the best profession for women "transforms herself from a consumer of erotica into a creator and manipulator of the pornographic gaze."⁵⁸ The beautiful young novice, as yet untaught in the art of love, trickery, or dishonesty, offered the reader a worthy object of desire; the decrepit instructress, who could no longer arouse with her body, seduced the young woman into her new life with her voice. Language as much as appearance becomes the signifier of virtue or lack thereof, for it is not long before the young girl, too, adopts the sexually explicit speech of the instructress. The reader, presumably male, becomes not only a voyeur but also an eavesdropper on a dialogue about female secrets and sexuality, in which the older woman, the instructress, assumes a special power through her skill with erotic language. This is a model that opera will adopt numerous times. As we shall see below, the empress Octavia, Nero's wife, will receive such advice from her Nurse, and will choose not to follow it. A chaste nymph will learn about erotic speech from the sexual ecstasy of the

nymph Callisto; the lascivious Messalina, the most explicit representative of the courtesan considered here, will be transformed from novice to teacher by the end of the opera.

Notably, by the mid-seventeenth century, this presentation of female speech is translated into terms specifically associated with music and rhetoric, invoking at the same time the Renaissance predilection for using gendered metaphors to discuss “good” and “bad” rhetoric.⁵⁹ This is particularly apparent in an important descendent of Aretino’s *Ragionamento*, entitled *La retorica delle puttane*, published by the notorious Francesco Pallavicino, who was linked with the Venetian Accademia degli Incogniti, considered below in chapter 2. The title of the work is significant; what Pallavicino produces in 1642, just a few years after the establishment of public opera in Venice, is a rhetoric manual for the prostitute, openly modeled on a popular and widely distributed schoolboy rhetoric textbook by the Jesuit Cipriano Suarez. In so doing, Pallavicino scarcely limits the scope of satire; indeed, the Jesuits have as much to fear from his pen as do the prostitutes of Venice. Nonetheless, Pallavicino’s satire makes explicit a shift from the visual to the verbal, emphasizing the power of the voice in creating an erotic experience. He adopts both Cipriano’s organization and his terminology, defining the various parts of speech and rhetorical devices that the prostitute can use to entice, seduce, enthrall, and deceive the prospective customer. As in Aretino, the instructress still manipulates the pornographic gaze; here, however, the analogy with rhetorical devices relocates attention to the aural realm, which reigns supreme.

Pallavicino’s female rhetoric, however, did not merely substitute seduction and deception for male oratory. As we shall see in chapter 2, he emphasizes the connection between voice and seduction. Gesture can ravish by insinuating itself through the eyes; however, still more powerful is the voice that moves the affections by penetrating the ear, particularly when engaged in the production of music. While the link between music and sexuality is perhaps commonplace, Pallavicino and his contemporaries emphasize the centrality of music in the rhetoric of the whore. The courtesan-spirit in Pona’s *La lucerna* claims that while her beauty was merely average, music was the “most powerful of the nets” that she used to entrap her clients.⁶⁰ And the indefatigable Thomas Coryate describes his own experience with the eloquent courtesan:

Moreover shee will endeavor to enchant thee partly with her melodious notes that shee warbles out upon her lute, which shee fingers with as laudable a stroake as many men that are excellent professors in the noble science of Musicke; and partly with that heart-tempting harmony of her voice. Also thou wilt finde the Venetian Cortezan (if shee be a selected woman indeede) a good Rhetorician, and a most elegant discourser, so that if shee cannot move thee with these foresaid delights, shee will assay thy constancy with her Rhetoricall tongue.⁶¹

Coryate's formulation reminds us of the importance of the courtesan image to the creation of the Venetian operatic heroine. Here, music is linked to persuasion, and is part of a female rhetoric of seduction that assailed the senses, threatened the constancy of even the most virtuous of men, and could gain women the sort of social mobility that would otherwise be denied them. The point here is not merely that music was associated with prostitution, or that singing actresses were regarded as morally suspect, however common that sentiment might have been. Rather, for our purposes, the importance of the courtesan has to do with the mechanisms of female fashioning and self-fashioning. The courtesan was both the creator of images and the object of image making. She used all of the same tools that would be annexed by opera in the seventeenth century: costumes, jewelry, speech, and ultimately music; and she was also the focus for the gaze and the generator of sound for the ears of numerous admirers and detractors who variously attempted to control her mode of presentation. Both the opera industry and the sex industry turned women into theater.

OPERA AND THEATRICAL GENDER

The conflation of concepts concerning virtue and gender, the relative confusion about biological sex, and the theatricality of the courtesans were all of importance in the theater, where gender categories were frequently displaced by castrati, boys, and plots involving transvestism. Like the anatomical demonstrations that so often took place during carnival, the theater provided a space in which the unstable body could be defined and examined, in which the shifting grounds between biological sex and gender could be repeatedly reinvented by a focus on androgyny (in which women assume masculine characteristics), by transvestism, and even transvestite theater.⁶² As long as virtue retained its association with gender, many exceptional women—whose deeds were inappropriate to their sex—would appear to be endowed with masculine characteristics. But by borrowing such traits, these powerful operatic women not only accomplished feats traditionally associated with men; their absorption of the masculine almost invariably resulted in the loss of stature—and masculinity—for the men with whom they were juxtaposed. Or, to put it another way, the theater allowed them to give better “performances” as men than were possible for the men themselves.⁶³ At the same time, disguise—theatrical illusion—offered an alternative way of blurring the genders. As Stephen Orgel notes regarding Elizabethan theater: “The dangers of women in erotic situations, whatever they may be, can be disarmed by having the women play men, just as in the theatre the dangers of having women on the stage (whatever *they* may be) can be disarmed by having men play the women. The interchangeability of the sexes is, on both the fictive and the material level, an assumption of this theater.”⁶⁴

In Venetian opera, however, these sorts of assumptions produced rather different results. The play with transvestism and gender boundaries took place on a stage in which the danger of the female body was heightened rather than reduced. In opera, to recast Orgel's phraseology, clothing alone did not make the man or woman. Gender and biological sex could be signaled to a lesser and greater degree by body, gesture, and voice. Relative masculinity and femininity were apparent not only by means of pitch or timbre, but also by the manner of expression, all of which is exaggerated by opera's annexation of the aural realm. Castrati, of course, complicated the issue, performing a rather different function than the Shakespearean boy actor.⁶⁵ This was a different kind of hemaphroditic being, one that linked adult male virtues—and vulnerabilities—to a female-like vocality. In Venetian opera, for the most part, castrati played male characters—a formulation that both divided and blurred a two-gender system. Castrati were presented as men (in relation to female singers and characters) and could be viewed as "effeminate" as compared with "real men." This creates a series of tensions that were part of the game of theater, heightened in an operatic context.⁶⁶ We will see, for example, that most of the characters played by castrati were feminized either literally (by cross-dressing) or figuratively (by falling victim to love): Didone's suitor Iarba (chapter 3), Diana's paramour Endimione (chapter 5), and Messalina's lover Caio (chapter 7) were all castrati heroes who suffered from the pangs of love. Poppea's husband Ottone (chapter 4) and Semiramide's son Nino (chapter 6) exacerbate their femininity by dressing as women.

But, as we shall see, the castrato is not the cause of gender ambivalence in Venetian opera; rather, he is but a symptom of a way of thinking about gender and sexuality that influences these operas and librettos at every juncture. For example, in Cavalli's *La Calisto*, when Giove assumes Diana's body and her voice, suddenly changing from bass to soprano, the transformation actually increases his potency, revealing both the anxiety and fascination surrounding the rediscovery of the clitoris. The question of unstable gender roles is brought to the fore in the operatic treatments of the Semiramis tale in chapter 6. Semiramide assumes her son's gender (and identity) in order to go to war, leaving him to play the queen dressed as a woman. And finally, the image of Messalina, whose sexual appetite shames even the goddess Venus, is placed in opposition with a more virtuous female in male dress. In the carnival world of Venetian opera, operatic women—like the image of Venice herself—relied on an ambivalent view of the masculine for definition.

REPRESENTING FEMALE ELOQUENCE

Influenced by the idiosyncratic mechanisms of carnival and the city's own special mythologies, opera librettists, composers, and producers presented

to their public a richly varied array of eloquent, emblematic women who resist easy categorization according to modern biological or behavioral norms. This book is concerned with the ways in which this was achieved—the complex layers of myth, drama, and music that gave voice to these extraordinary women. My readings of the operas are grounded in the rich body of contemporary sources (essays, *novelle*, letters, poems, and treatises) that expressed a variety of seventeenth-century views on gender, sexuality, and the emblematic women under consideration. Beyond that, the primary evidence is drawn from the librettos and the music of the operas themselves. I have tried as much as possible to recreate the librettists' workshops, to leaf through the books that "lay open" on their tables, to imagine myself browsing the shelves of the Venetian booksellers, and to patronize the private libraries of the operagoers that informed their experiences in the theater. Finally, I consider the most elusive and intriguing "layer"—the reading of the text embedded in the composer's realization of the libretto. My interpretations of the operas are in no way intended to be definitive or static; rather, this book explores the fluid body of knowledge that might have been shared by librettists, composers, and audience members and proposes a broad range of ways in which these operas might have been understood in the context of contemporary ideologies and expectations.

At the heart of this endeavor are the libretto and its links to the ancient world. While the birth of opera might have been inspired by the Greek ideal of sung drama, the spectacle of early modern opera owed much to a different sort of legacy from the ancients: the myths, epic poems, and philosophical writings, and the paintings, engravings, and other artifacts transmitted by the Greeks to the Romans to become the basic building blocks of Western culture. These were further filtered through a lens that was crafted by early modern thinking. Many of the most important sources for librettos were homogenizations of old and new, in which the purity of the transmission was rarely the principal goal. Prolific humanists such as Lodovico Dolce added allegories, commentaries, and interpolations to their translations of the classics; mythographers such as Giovanni Boccaccio and Vincenzo Cartari provided painters and librettists with a guidebook to the pagan world, offering Christians palatable explanations for non-Christian symbols. Genre and style were infinitely negotiable: ancient verse was translated into prose or modern poetic meters, and tragic narratives could be reworked into comedic spectacles that satisfied early modern sensibilities. Paintings and frescoes, the visual evidence of the distant world, inspired early modern fantasies and stage spectacle.

Like Charon escorting travelers across the River Styx, it was the librettist who mediated between the ancient and early modern world, reconciling opera's classical legacy with an emerging consciousness about operatic verisimilitude and operatic convention. The librettist determined in large part *when* women sang, *what* they sang, and, to some degree, *how* they sang. In

some instances, as we shall see, the ancient sources themselves provided the clues for the placement and mode of female eloquence. This is particularly true with lamentations, one of the few permissible moments for female speech and song in the epic poems. In chapter 3, for example, we will see how Dido's lamentations, crafted by Virgil under the influence of Apollonius, Catullus, and Homer, were informed in the early modern period by Ovid's somewhat different vision of Dido and subsequently shaped by a long tradition of Virgilian reception in Venice before reaching the operatic stage. In other instances, female song was only implicit in the original source. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* tells us almost nothing of Callisto's carefree existence as a nymph in Diana's band before the fire and the arrival of Jove; but Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara's translation of the *Metamorphoses* situates the rape of the nymph at a fountain; Faustini and Cavalli give her arias that express her thirst and her pleasure in the water.

Thus, by conflating separate sources, using different versions of the same myth, or changing chronology, librettists had the opportunity to juxtapose different types of women and rhetoric. In *La Calisto* we hear Diana's desire for the shepherd Endimione as compared with Calisto's desire for Diana. Busenello's decision to set the first act of *La Didone* in Troy (rather than Carthage) allows us to compare Hecuba's mode of lamentation with that of Didone herself. Librettists also gave voice to many imagined women who never appear in the ancient sources: the nurses, confidantes, servants, and even heroines whose virtue or lack thereof provided a contrasting model for female speech. In chapter 6, for example, Semiramide's sexual aggression is contrasted with the virtue and passivity of the slave girl Iside, a particularly effective librettist invention. Messalina (chapter 7) is likewise shamed—or made more intriguing—by the example of more virtuous, non-historical women.

Moreover, the librettist not only managed the sources, but also controlled much of the relationship between aria and recitative. Text intended for recitative was placed in *versi sciolti*—essentially, the Italian version of blank verse—comprised of a mixture of 7- and 11-syllable lines without any rigid rhyme scheme. Texts intended to be set as arias were usually written in stanzas of varying lengths (e.g., five or *quinari*, seven or *settenari*, eight or *ottonari*, etc.), with one of several accentuation patterns at the end of a verse (the accent on the penultimate syllable or *piano*, antepenultimate or *sdrucchiolo*, and final syllable or *tronco*) and with a regular rhyme scheme.⁶⁷ While the composer could accept the instructions suggested by the librettist and adapt them according to his own musical preferences or conceptions of character, the librettist was the arbiter for the initial dramaturgical decisions regarding the placement of arias, the choice of poetic meter, and the circumstances in which any woman would be heard. In the seventeenth century, where the musico-dramatic conventions were more fluid, such de-

terminations went a long way to shape any given character. We will see, for example, the curious ways in which a variety of early modern ideologies and long-standing views about emblematic women determined even the number of arias allotted to infamous women, who often were accorded less eloquence than the invented characters.

Female eloquence also depended on changing notions of operatic verisimilitude. Nino Pirrotta commented long ago on the importance of verisimilitude in early opera in the control of operatic eloquence. Song was more apt to emanate from characters “exempt from the laws governing human behavior”: comic characters, gods and goddesses, children, and serious characters under extraordinary circumstances.⁶⁸ But as opera became increasingly accustomed to song, “verisimilitude” operated in a different way: librettists and composers not only differentiated between gods and humans, servants and masters, men and women, but also between different types of women. Monteverdi, for example, famously reminds us of the importance that gender had in his own creative process. Arianna, he told us, “moved us because she was a woman” and Orpheus “because he was a man.”⁶⁹ While the impetus to song shared by both of these characters is rooted in the ancient sources—Ariadne’s abandonment, Orpheus’s musical skills and famous lament—the specific poetic and musical conventions for their differing representations owes much to early modern conceptions of verisimilitude regarding gender behavior. Arianna’s disordered emotions, the use of recitative rather than song, her obsession with death, and, as we shall see, even the silencing of her most threatening urges were a part both of her classical heritage *and* her womanhood. Indeed, as we shall also see, modes of representing masculinity in opera likewise play an important role in this study, for much of what we know about female eloquence is apparent in comparison with the rather different means of managing masculine speech and eloquence.

This study spans a forty-year period in which aria becomes the primary mode of expression in opera, and in which the works produced by academically inclined “amateur” librettists are replaced by the more market-oriented efforts of professionals. In the chapters to follow, I consider a number of musical devices through which composers celebrate, control, or suppress the eloquence of their heroines. In many cases the musical features that provide the most profound clues about gender are embedded in the most basic surface features of the style. In the earliest operas under consideration here, the mere use of lyricism (aria vs. recitative) could be an important indicator of a woman’s status or relative virtue. This is apparent in my consideration of Cavalli’s *Didone* (chapter 3) and Monteverdi’s *Ottavia* (chapter 4), where chastity is linked to a static, non-ornate mode of expression. In other instances, composers express notions about female virtue and eloquence through affective indicators such as meter, phrase struc-

ture, rhythmic and melodic design, text painting, use of chromaticism, tonal style, and formal organization, often “reinventing” the text provided by the librettist in revealing ways.

Of all of these features, it is perhaps the question of tonal style that requires the most explanation. Some of the discussions below, particularly in chapters 3 and 4, are informed by Eric Chafe’s influential work on Monteverdi’s tonal language.⁷⁰ Chafe considers the relationship between the emerging tonality and the ideals of the “seconda prattica”—the extent to which music should be dominated by *oratio*, that is by text and rhetoric—and demonstrates how tonality became a principal means of extra-musical or allegorical expression during the early decades of the seventeenth century. Recognizing the discrepancy between modal theory and practice—and the problems of interpreting modality within a pseudo-tonal framework—Chafe describes the workings of what he terms the “modal-hexachordal” system that underlies much of Monteverdi’s music and that of his contemporaries. In this system, the chordal content of a given passage can be understood as belonging to one of four theoretical hexachords: those with two flats, one flat, natural, and one sharp. The hexachords themselves belong to “systems”—either *cantus durus* or *cantus mollis*, designated by the presence or absence of the one-flat key signature. While there is much about seventeenth-century tonal language that we do not understand, this way of thinking provides a useful framework in which to understand the many works that only partially conform to modern tonal practice.

All of this, of course, only complicates the question of how one both analyzes and describes this music, and to what extent the use of terminology based on tonal practices—key areas, dominant, tonic, modulation—is appropriate or desirable. The reader of this book will observe that my approach is based more on pragmatism than ideology. While I recognize that many of these terms are anachronistic in that they do not correspond with the contemporary music theory, the fact of the matter is that much of this music—particularly in the second half of the century—functions in a manner that is sufficiently tonal so as to render its description in modal terms not only awkward but inaccurate. Indeed, in some instances, composers chose a particularly modern tonal style—with a relatively slow harmonic rhythm, clear modulations to the dominant or the relative minor, and a restricted chordal vocabulary—to depict a certain character or affect. At the same time, an awareness of the vestiges of the older system is particularly useful because it highlights features of the musical style that are less intuitive to modern ears.

As we shall see, the shifts between hexachord and system (e.g., *durus* or *mollis*) or the use of a specific mode with a given profile were particularly effective in marking moments of intense tragedy, expressing divergent emotions within a single monologue, unifying representations of a character over the course of a work, and emphasizing important stage actions. The

tragic despair of Hecuba and Didone's guilt (chapter 3) and Ottavia's shifts between chastity and self-blame (chapter 4), or Calisto's thirst and transformation into a bear (chapter 5) are all marked with striking tonal events by the composers. While tonal analysis is a valuable tool, caution is nevertheless necessary. It is all too tempting to posit interpretations based on the compatibility of one binary system (*durus* and *mollis*) with another (male and female). Tonality, as we shall see, was only one of the many tools that composers used to tell the stories of emblematic women and to express their own notions about the female voice.

A word about reception and sources: As Ellen Rosand's monumental study of Venetian opera has shown, there is only a limited amount of evidence on the reception of these works that provides substantive interpretive or aesthetic information. Therefore, the reader will notice that this is a book that does not rely primarily on external evidence. Thus, we cannot know to what extent the interpretations offered here might have been confirmed or contradicted by the listening or viewing experiences of seventeenth-century audiences. We know, for example, that Cavalli's *La Calisto* (chapter 5) was a financial disaster⁷¹ and that *La Semiramide* (chapter 6) was also reported by one observer as a failure "despite excellent singing."⁷² But in neither case can we assume with any confidence that these failures were a result of the highly provocative treatment of gender. The lives of the singers have been somewhat less elusive; Beth Glixon's exhaustive work in the Venetian archives has provided us with an intriguing glimpse into the often complex lives of the women who actually sang these roles, and a number of poems written in their honor can be found in contemporary printed books. But even when Venetian authors refer to talents of specific singers or even the creation of a given role—as we will see in the poems written in honor of Anna Renzi—the implications for the interpretation of these works can be highly ambiguous. In the conclusion of chapter 4, for example, I demonstrate how Renzi's power as a star performer in the creation of the role of Ottavia in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* influenced at least one observer to describe the opera—and the character—in a manner that seems to contradict unequivocal features of the music and text. The testimony of this anonymous poet is not to be discounted; we have long known that individual performers have the power to overwhelm an artwork. In this instance, however, the dissonance between a description of the performance and the musical and poetic text (as well as other aspects of the cultural context) reminds us that all readings and viewings—even those grounded in contemporary sources—are contingent and subjective, and always depend upon one's seat in the theater.

In the chapters that follow we see a variety of ways in which unstable notions about gender and sexuality play themselves out on both the musical and the

dramatic plane. The Venetian writings by and about women that reveal the contemporary attitudes toward gender and sexuality are discussed in the first part of the book. This includes philosophical and religious tracts, *novelle*, plays, catalogs of heroines, essays, behavior manuals, and librettos (in which the authors virulently debated the “female question,” often invoking the heroines themselves) that form an essential background for the production of opera in Venice. The heroine of chapter 1 is the “exceptional woman” of legend and history—the emblematic figure drawn from the ancient world whose virtues and vices were fashioned and refashioned to express early modern notions of femininity. We will hear, for example, the crescendo in the voices and increased theatricality of Venetian literary men and women involved in the debate about women. Chapter 2 focuses on the Venetian Accademia degli Incogniti, whose involvement in the opera industry has been well documented, and whose idiosyncratic philosophies about women and gender shaped opera’s most basic conventions. The essays of Incogniti founder and leader Francesco Loredano, the polemics on women’s souls and luxury with the proto-feminist nun Arcangela Tarabotti, and the works of such writers as Francesco Pona, Angelico Aprosio, Ferrante Pallavicino, and Antonio Rocco demonstrate this group’s apparent anxiety about gender mutability, fear of female luxury, cynicism about a woman’s virtues, and an apparent fascination with the rhetorical power of the exceptional woman—all issues that find expression in the opera of Venice.

The remainder of the book is a “catalog” of operatic women, reclaimed from the ancient world and fashioned for the Venetian operatic stage. Each chapter considers a specific historical or mythological female and her treatment in the ancient and early modern sources, considering in detail the transformation of myth and history enacted by composer and librettist. Chapters 3 and 4 introduce us to two important heroines from operas set to librettos by Incognito Giovanni Francesco Busenello: Dido, queen of Carthage, in Francesco Cavalli’s *La Didone* (1641) and Octavia, wife of Nero, in Claudio Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea* (1643). Both of these operas confront in varying ways the problem of female rule and chastity lost or enforced; these are women who lament their abandonment and loss of power, adopting behaviors and modes of expression whose treatment contradicts their representations in the ancient sources while at the same time reflecting their Incogniti genesis. In Chapter 5, we leave the earthbound concerns of epic and history and enter the mythical realm of Arcadia in Francesco Cavalli’s *La Calisto* (1651), set to a libretto by Giovanni Faustini. Arcadia, as we shall see, is a realm in which sexuality is both celebrated and suppressed, operating according to an entirely different set of rules. Faustini’s recasting of Ovid’s story of the nymph Callisto is only one of several myths intertwined that present highly unusual—and explicit—operatic manifestations of female desire. Chapter 6 explores the musical consequences of transvestism in the operatic representation of Queen Semiramis, who was praised for

her political skill and military victories and condemned for her various crimes. Pietro Ziani's *La Semiramide* (1671), set to a Viennese libretto that was heavily revised for "Venetian use" by Matteo Noris, reveals the continued Venetian predilections for carnivalesque play with gender and sexuality in the operas in the latter half of the century and the ways in which gender exchange is manifest even in the music of a second-rank composer. The catalog concludes with another Roman empress, Messalina, the adulterous wife of the emperor Claudius, who in *Messalina* (1680) brought to the luxurious stage of the Teatro San Grisostomo an unmatched reputation for decadence and sexual excess.

Indeed, by the 1680s, the fascination with Messalina provides an acknowledgment of the degradation with which the Republic—and her female icon—had increasingly become associated. That Messalina's legendary depravity would be both celebrated and subtly condemned by an almost systematic suppression of her operatic eloquence is symptomatic of the changing status of Venice's operatic women at the end of the century. Opera would submit to its fear of female vocality and unfettered sexuality and abandon these most dangerous and exciting women in favor of more appropriate models of behavior. But, at least for a while, the voices of these emblematic women were heard in the opera theaters of Venice.

Chapter 1

The Emblematic Woman

Because many things are necessary to men at the same time, that is to say prudence, eloquence, expertise at governing the Republic, talent, memory, art, and industry to rule life, justice, liberality, magnanimity, and so many other things that it would be too long to list them all. . . . But in the woman one does not look for profound eloquence, subtle talent, or the highest prudence, the art of living, or the administration of the Republic, justice, or anything else, except for chastity. . . . Oh, said Lucrezia, what else is there to be saved when chastity is lost? And, yet, in the violated body there was a chaste soul.¹

LUDOVICO DOLCE, *Dialogo della institution delle donne* (1547)

In mid-seventeenth-century Venice, opera was introduced to a public that was already accustomed to examining the position of women in society.² As residents of one of the major European publishing centers, the citizens of Venice could read a vast array of books concerning the training and education of women, their appropriate behaviors, their virtues and vices, and their position within early modern society. Some of these writings were overtly anti-female, but many treatises took the defense of women as their ostensible goal. These writers rarely argued for any social change in the modern sense; instead such defenses of the female sex more often served to confirm contemporary attitudes, to damn with faint praise, or to reinforce traditional views of women through the mind-numbing repetition of what appear to be pro- or anti-female commonplaces.

The Venetian version of the “querelles des femmes” has a number of important implications for our consideration of women in Venetian opera. First, like opera, the writings about women are yet another facet of the Venetian humanist project, with patriotic overtones. Authors well versed in classical literature used their vast knowledge of ancient sources to validate their prescriptions concerning appropriate behaviors in their own society. The virtues and vices of women were not considered in the context of “real” life; instead they were illuminated through discussions of a well-codified set of mythical and historical exemplary women—many of whom also appear in opera—whose virtues and vices could be altered according to the preferences of the author. Second, in early seventeenth-century Venice the discourse about women became increasingly polemical, in terms of both the vehemence of the attacks and the enthusiasm of the defense, such that a few

women actually participated in the defense of their own sex. Moreover, perhaps as a result of the rising influence of opera, the debate about femininity and the representations of these exceptional women took on an increasingly dramatic tone. Finally, what is most important is that this crescendo in women's voices in the Venetian literary world—and the dramatization of the debate about women—paralleled the establishment of opera in Venice.

Thus, what develops throughout the century is a symbiotic relationship between a shared repertory of operatic and non-operatic women, in which the increasing eloquence of operatic women on the stage matched the heightened threat of women off the stage.³ Women's voices gained greater power in both arenas when the purity of Venice's female image seemed most at risk. The conventions for the representation of female bodies and voices in opera were formulated during a time and at a place in which a host of basic conceptions about women and sexuality were in flux, in which Venice's legendary virginity was at stake, and in which images of women were habitually used to negotiate these problems. It is important to emphasize that these images are rarely entirely positive or negative, despite the surface tendency of both early and modern writers to describe femininity within a binary system—juxtaposing “good women” with “bad women” or virgins with whores. Instead what we find throughout the seventeenth century is that opera complicates, rather than simplifies, the representations of women, celebrating their diversity with an extraordinary range and mixture of characteristics, virtues, and vices that often defy easy categorization according to a conventional binary matrix. Strikingly, this variety will begin to disappear at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when changing conceptions of sex and gender were associated with a host of opera reforms that similarly disciplined the idiosyncratic treatment of gender that had characterized Venetian opera.

VENETIAN HUMANISM AND EMBLEMATIC WOMEN

The Venetian writings about women form part of a larger tradition originating in antiquity and continuing into early modern times in which writers attempted to define the nature of the female sex by considering women apart from the rest of humanity. Sometimes this was done with the stated intention of defending women, other times to condemn them; in the majority of cases the motivations and attitudes of the authors are ambivalent and contradictory. Yet, from classical sources such as Plutarch's *Mulierum virtutes*, Ovid's *Heroides*, and Juvenal's sixth Satire to Christian sources such as St. Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, or the early humanist writings of Petrarch and Boccaccio, a notion of what woman is or is not had been conveyed by means of exemplary women—the women of myth and history—who when presented together could express a given view of the female sex. Exemplary women were usually presented in two different ways. First, they could

be arranged in a catalog: authors would juxtapose a series of famous women who together expressed a view about femininity and a range of possible female behaviors.⁴ Like valued or exotic possessions, these women would be described, arranged, and then presented to the public in any number of media: poetry, prose, prints, paintings, or even theater.⁵ The authorial point of view is often unclear; the reader is left to infer attitudes about women suggested by the organization of the catalog (e.g., it might begin with “good” women and progress to “bad” women), or posit contradictions within the discussion of a single heroine. (A favorite rhetorical device, for example, was for the author to include several different reports about a single woman to distance himself from the more negative or inflammatory comments.) Second, there is what can be described as the “composite approach.” Instead of collecting and arranging the women themselves, authors would cite individual qualities, deeds, or behaviors of famous archetypal figures in order to support a given argument about a female vice or virtue. This is a prescriptive rather than a descriptive method that also provided an ideal opportunity for humanistically inclined writers to demonstrate their erudition to a like-minded audience. Both types of writing furnished librettists and composers with source material, while at the same time providing audiences with a moral and intellectual frame against which a work might be heard and seen. Moreover, once the opera industry had created its own “catalog” of emblematic women, the heroines of opera likewise influenced subsequent authors of catalogs and behavior manuals.

The most widely circulated and influential catalog of women in the late Middle Ages and early modern period was Giovanni Boccaccio’s *De claris mulieribus*, first written ca. 1361–62.⁶ Reprinted in numerous editions in both Latin and the vernacular well into the seventeenth century, this was an extraordinarily important work in the formation of early modern ideas about female heroines, and thus is worth considering at some length. While subsequent writers did not necessarily draw on the same sources as Boccaccio, borrow his format, or adopt the same critical stance toward their heroines, they continued to use these female exempla—adding and subtracting from his list—in order to support their points of view. Boccaccio’s heroines were also well represented in the operas; over thirty of his 106 infamous women found their way onto the opera stage in seventeenth-century Venice.

Boccaccio defined the exceptional woman and established traditions for female biography in Western literature. Indeed, he codified the ways in which certain ancient sources would be used to describe women in the early modern period, endowing them with many of the ambivalent characteristics that would be used in nearly all subsequent representations, including opera. Influenced by Petrarch’s *De viris illustribus* (*Lives of Famous Men*), Boccaccio explains “how little attention women have attracted from writers of this genre” and complains of the “absence of any work devoted especially to

their memory.”⁷ He finds this surprising, because there are so many exceptional women who actually deserve even more praise than men; for while men are expected to possess virtue, strength, and valor, nature has endowed women “with soft frail bodies, and sluggish minds.” How much more deserving are they of praise if they have a “manly spirit” and can accomplish even the most difficult deeds that would be difficult even for men with “remarkable intelligence and bravery.” Boccaccio’s heroines do not achieve their celebrated status by excelling as ordinary women—as mothers or wives in the private world of the family—but rather by transcending the conventionally held limitations of their gender through their unusual forays into the public world of men. The result is a series of portraits with an intriguing mixture of praise and blame that reflect, as Virginia Brown notes, the combination of a medieval and an ancient cultural legacy with humanist leanings gained from his contact with Petrarch.⁸ For example, Boccaccio praises Artemisia, queen of Caria, “as a lasting example of chaste widowhood and of the purest and rarest kind of love”—she famously erected a memorial tomb for her husband Mausolus.⁹ As compared with King Xerxes, who stayed hidden during the battle with Greeks, she fought so bravely that “it was almost *as if she had changed sex with Xerxes*.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, despite this praise, he concludes the biography by casting some doubt on the appropriateness of her accomplishments: “As we admire the deeds of Artemisia, what can we think except that the workings of nature erred in bestowing female sex on a body which God had endowed with a virile and lofty spirit?”¹¹

The contradictory notions of femininity expressed by Boccaccio are even more apparent in those instances in which the appropriate feminine standards of chastity are abandoned. In his portrait of the Assyrian queen Semiramis, whose operatic representation is considered in chapter 6, Boccaccio praises her many brave deeds and accomplishments, which would be marvelous even for a “vigorous male”; however, these were stained by her “unspeakable act of seduction”—her carnal desire, and her love of her son Ninyas, who, “while she exerted herself in battle against her enemies,” languished in bed “*as though he had changed sex with his mother*.”¹² As with Artemisia, Semiramis’s accomplishments can be seen to strip away a man’s masculinity. Both women are included in the catalog—that is to say they are “exceptional”—because of their accomplishments in the public realm; nevertheless, they receive blame or praise for their behavior as women—in the private realm—specifically with regard to feminine chastity.

A somewhat less ambivalent use of the exceptional woman can be seen in Lodovico Dolce’s highly influential *Dialogo della institutione delle donne*.¹³ Dolce was an important literary figure in sixteenth-century Venice, whose close friends included the painter Titian and Pietro Aretino. He was also one of the most prolific writers of the day; as an editor for the Giolito Press, he translated numerous classical texts into the vernacular and composed

many original works on ancient models.¹⁴ His writings were certainly an important resource for seicento librettists.¹⁵ Dolce has been criticized by modern scholars for inaccurate translations, plagiarism, and particularly for rewriting the ancient texts “in the light of some preconceived notion of what it ought to mean.”¹⁶ Indeed, this is precisely what makes these writings so interesting for our purposes: Dolce not only provided his contemporaries with access to ancient texts in the vernacular, but reinterpreted them in terms of what he thought they should mean for himself and fellow Venetians.

Like Boccaccio, Dolce claims to be addressing a special need that had hitherto been ignored: “while there were many books available to teach and familiarize one with the governing of a horse, there were few that showed how to raise, train, and educate women.”¹⁷ His book prescribes the appropriate training and education of a Venetian woman over the three important stages of her life: virginity, marriage, and widowhood. This is done in the form of a decidedly one-sided dialogue in which a Signor Flaminio instructs a widow, Signora Dorothea, on the proper role of women in Venetian society.

Emblematic women play an important role in Flaminio’s lessons about womanhood, and he supports his arguments with numerous examples of prominent virgins, wives, and widows, many of whom will later grace the operatic stage. The heroines were such an integral part of his didactic method that by the end of the third dialogue Signora Dorothea, with self-deprecating charm, urges him to name more female examples that she might better understand his arguments. But unlike Boccaccio, Dolce is not concerned with demonstrating how historical and mythological women transcend the ordinary; instead, his examples show how these exceptional women are also endowed with those qualities to which *all* women should aspire, regardless of their other, less conventional activities. For example, Signor Flaminio proposes that timidity and shame (*timidità* and *vergogna*) are the “basis and foundation of the complete fabric of virtue.”¹⁸ Young women must learn to sew, as thread and wool are the “two things of greatest use to the conservation of the family.”¹⁹ He then produces examples of exemplary women whose virtue was in no small part a result of their occupation with sewing: Tanaquil, the wife of Tarquino Prisco, who was adored as a goddess for no other reason than that she lived constantly working with wool in her hands, or Penelope of Ithaca (wife of Odysseus), who kept suitors away by her weaving.²⁰ He also includes learned women who used their knowledge for virtue rather than vice, who died to preserve their virginity, or who kept their chastity in widowhood. Exemplary women thus played an important role in an elaborate didactic system that instructed women not to *be* exceptional but rather to emulate exceptional woman only insofar as they practiced “ordinary” virtues. The eloquence of operatic women could not have been further away from Dolce’s plan for Venetian women.

POLEMICIZING ABOUT WOMEN

Although Dolce's treatise contains a number of strict prescriptions for female behavior, it is not a polemical document. He does not employ the dialogue format to juxtapose conflicting points of view or to present a controlled exchange of contradictory ideas. Signora Dorothea's function is to listen and to provide an occasional endorsement—in a female voice—of Flaminio's instructions on chastity, wifely obedience, and widows' continence. The lives of exemplary women are thus presented as stable, uncomplicated, and uncontested, and they are certified as such by Signora Dorothea's acquiescence.

By the end of the sixteenth century, however, discussions of exemplary women in Venetian writings became far more contentious. This may have had something to do with ambivalence about marriage and conflicting notions about the ways in which a young man might serve the Republic. While marriage was an important institution for the well-being of the Republic, it was also denied to many in the noble class in order to preserve the patrimony and maintain the purity of the patriciate. One also suspects that the aversion to marriage expressed in some of these writings may have gone along with a preference for a different kind of sexual fulfillment, either with women of lower classes, with courtesans, or with men.²¹ This ambivalence toward marriage can be seen in such satirical, anti-female writings as the dialogue by Torquato Tasso and his brother Ercole entitled *Dello ammogliarsi piacevole contesa* (1595).²² Some late sixteenth-century Paduans have been credited with instigating this newly virulent phase of the male–female debate; however, writers in Venice and nearby cities quickly adopted this mode of thought.²³ Regardless of its source, this surge in misogyny not only led male writers to produce defenses of women, but also stimulated responses from women writers who transformed the conventional terms of the male–female debate in the service of a revised view of women in Venetian society.

The most widely distributed and controversial misogynist work was Giuseppe Passi's encyclopedia of women's faults, *I donneschi difetti*. This book was unusually popular; it was reprinted at least four times between 1599 and 1618, prefaced by sonnets and letters from Passi's many admirers, implying a broad support for his point of view.²⁴ Passi maintains that the purpose of his book is to warn young men about the numerous faults of women.²⁵ He concludes the dedication to a certain Mario Rasponi by assuring him that "young men, in reading this book and learning of the deceits of women, will be obliged only to you."²⁶ If men do not take heed of his warnings, he claims, their families and homes will go into decline, their children will suffer, and entire families will be disconsolate, because women are the cause of our "ruin." He continues: "And if we then would like to consider carefully and discuss the infinite events that have befallen men on account of women, we would first have to count the stars one by one or the innumerable sands

of the sea; and as these two things are not possible, so would it be impossible to tell the infinite evils of wicked women."²⁷

Passi's condemnation of women relies on an eclectic assortment of over two hundred authorities that are listed alphabetically at the beginning of the book. While he includes such "modern" writers as Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Ariosto, he places the greatest emphasis on Aristotle and the Church Fathers.²⁸ He also uses exemplary women—primarily to prove the inferiority of the female sex. After a general discussion of women's faults, he devotes each of the remaining chapters to an examination of a particular evil or group of evils attributed to women: pride, avarice, treachery, lust (for which women have an inordinate appetite), wrath, gluttony and drunkenness, envy, pride, ambition, cruelty, adultery, and impudence, associating each with one or more women of myth or history. He is particularly preoccupied with women's unchecked sexuality and their desire for power. Such women as Semiramis, Cleopatra, or Messalina—women who will play significant roles on the operatic stage—were used to represent *lussuria* or ambition;²⁹ even Odysseus's wife Penelope—praised by Dolce for her virtue (and skill at needlework) was suspect in Passi's formulation.³⁰ Whereas Boccaccio concealed women's faults within sometimes ambivalent portraits ostensibly designed to praise them, Passi began with the fault, adapting the exemplum to suit the crime. In his hands, female exempla were a means through which the entire battery of female faults was codified.

Exceptional women also play an important role in Passi's second book about women, *Dello stato maritale* (1602).³¹ By this time he had come under considerable censure for his anti-female views, not the least of which from a Venetian woman, Lucrezia Marinella, considered below. Nevertheless, Passi denies that he intends to condemn women and discourage marriage; rather, he informs the reader that this is the first of four books promised in *I donneschi difetti* on the four states of womanhood: virgin, married, widowed, and cloistered (a striking addition to Lodovico Dolce's list in *Dialogo della institutione delle donne*). *Dello stato maritale* is far less overtly misogynist than *I donneschi difetti*.³² That Passi should attempt to quell his critics with a book in support of marriage is itself a demonstration of the ambivalence toward marriage and women during this period. He recognizes the political importance of marriage for the management of property and to produce children. But he also notes that there are many who do not wish to marry: "many of the ancient philosophers describe it as very difficult and very unhappy . . . because most women are . . . naturally evil and wicked."³³

Following this tepid endorsement, it is difficult to imagine how Passi could have persuaded any of his readers that marriage was a noble undertaking. However, his rhetorical strategies reveal much about the contradictory ways in which exemplary women could be used. After recycling much of the conventional misogynist material from the opening chapters of *I donneschi difetti*, he then extols the truly beneficial aspects of marriage. Anti-female

arguments are juxtaposed with the citation of numerous pro-female commonplaces: women are created in God's image; they are of better material because they were created from Adam, rather than from the earth; women are noble and beautiful. Yet, he also argues that it is this beauty that has the strength to conquer men, mentioning such women as Cleopatra, Bathsheba, and Ariadne. His lengthy catalog of exceptional women known for their military abilities, scientific knowledge, or beauty (proof of respect for the female sex) is followed by a description of the qualities necessary for a good wife: wives should be of a medium age (neither too young nor too old) and not too beautiful; men should avoid strong-willed or independent widows. Men should seek wives from an honest family, of good birth, with a body of the appropriate physical proportions, and they should consider the country from which the prospective wife comes and its customs. Particular attention should be given to the character of the wife's mother—evil mothers will produce evil daughters. One must keep a wife in her place, and not address her as "signora," as did Claudius with Messalina, the inference being that she will cuckold him.³⁴

Passi thus finds an ingenious way in which to praise women ostensibly while defending himself against his detractors. His description of marriage and the desirable qualities of a wife only serve to emphasize the extent to which all of the extraordinary women invariably fail to conform to suitable standards of female behavior. He indeed differentiates the exceptional woman from the ordinary; yet, in this case, she is an unambiguous demonstration of the failings of the entire sex.

VENETIAN WOMEN RESPOND

It is perhaps not surprising that Venice, with its curious mixture of freedom and suppression, order and disorder, not only allowed for the overt misogyny of a Giuseppe Passi but also permitted a sophisticated proto-feminist response, as is evident in the writings of Lucrezia Marinella and Modesta da Pozza (published under the charmingly synonymous name Moderata Fonte). Female responses to male misogyny were not unknown throughout Europe in the *querelles des femmes*; there were isolated examples in history in which women chose to reject or revise male definitions of femininity and redefine themselves in their own voices, although Venetians were perhaps more accustomed to literary women of dubious moral or social standing, such as the courtesan Veronica Franco.³⁵ These writings should not be confused with expressions of modern-day feminism; as with the male writers, only rarely did these women advocate any genuine social change. At the same time, Marinella and Fonte used distinctively female voices to reveal the covert anti-female ideologies in conventional narratives about women, while demonstrating the ways in which they might be reconfigured to serve new definitions of womanhood.

Lucrezia Marinella (1571–1653) was the daughter of the doctor and writer Giovanni Marinello, known for his writings on female beauty, hygiene, and health, and who probably provided a thorough humanist education for his daughter.³⁶ Marinella is best known today for her response to Passi: *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne co' difetti et mancamenti de gli huomini* (1600). This was only one of thirteen works (not including reprints) she published between 1595 and 1648 (sacred dramas and poems, epic poems, and pastoral dramas), mostly prior to 1610. It is unclear to what extent family responsibilities might have influenced her writing; by the 1640s, she seems to have withdrawn somewhat both from society and literature; her final work, *Essertationi alle donne e gli altri se farano loro a grado*, urges women to be more retiring.³⁷ Regardless, Marinella was certainly a well-known presence in the Venetian literary world in the decades prior to the advent of opera in Venice; during the late 1640s, when the Accademia degli Incogniti became involved both in opera and polemics with another Venetian writer, the outspoken nun Arcangela Tarabotti, Marinella may well have provided an alternative—and perhaps more agreeable—model for a female writer.

The majority of Marinella's publications focused on women's spirituality and morality. Yet even in those instances in which she wrote in an ostensibly secular context, she adopted an allegorical subtext or manipulated generic and narrative conventions so as to emphasize female religiosity, virginity, and independence. In her poem *Amore innamorato e impazzato* (1598), for example, Cupid is actually defeated by a virtuous woman; her 1605 pastoral drama *Arcadia felice* also contradicts generic expectations by involving none of the women characters in love plots.³⁸ In her response to Giuseppe Passi, she demonstrates the same skill at finding alternatives to conventional narratives about exemplary women, while at the same time crafting for herself an unconventional voice in seventeenth-century Venice.

Marinella mimics and expands on Passi's format and method of argument, using his own authorities against him, while at the same time incorporating Neoplatonic ideals about love and female beauty. Passi, we recall, had devoted each chapter to a single female defect, which he defines and then links to women by means of exempla and authoritative citations; Marinella does the same for each of the various virtues of the female sex, while at the same time devoting the second half of the book to an exposé of male defects. She makes a strong move toward a sort of "equality" for women by adding men to the equation. If she subjected men to the same kinds of examination that were conventionally used for women, the superior nobility and virtue of women would be self-evident:

Having shown clearly woman's nobility, with invincible reasoning and examples, which through comparison can be seen without doubt to be superior to that of men, I turn to the defects of men. I ask you to compare them to the women's defects as described by Passi, in order that once and for all you stub-

born readers can be conquered and won over. I speak about those that have little salt in the head and wander blindly about.³⁹

Male exempla only strengthened her position. She continues:

With invincible reasoning, therefore, I believe I have shown that men are more evil than women. But I do not deny that there may be depraved women and worse; but in comparison with ruffian and wicked men, one could call them excellent. Moreover, I believe that if we joined together all of the women that were, are, or will be evil and wicked, they would not be in any way equal to the villainous Nero, who enjoyed the suffering of others while burning most of Rome. He was unrestrained and lewd; he frequently became intoxicated, and he spent the night and entire days at banquets gambling and singing. He killed his mother and murdered his wife Poppaea with a kick when she was pregnant, for the most insubstantial reasons.⁴⁰

Marinella's defense of women is predicated on a broad conception of female superiority that reconfigures the standard early modern equations between biological sex and natural virtue. She directly challenges Aristotle's views about the imperfection of women due to their lack of heat, arguing instead that it is precisely their more temperate nature that makes them more virtuous. Men are virtuous only when they have managed to acquire this more temperate nature. Physical strength alone does not signify nobility, otherwise the Roman army would be deemed nobler than the senators. Power, she maintains, lies in the faculties of reason, which women possess more naturally because of their greater prudence. And disputing Tasso's claims in his *Discorso sulla virtù femminile e donnesca* (to which she devotes an entire chapter), Marinella argues that prudence is a quality irrespective of power or gender, proceeding from a certain maturity of thought and spirit. Moreover, as she points out, to assign prudence on the basis of gender is illogical. On the one hand, numerous women demonstrate prudence in command: "But who will deny that there were many women most judicious in military matters and peace? They should read my chapter on prudent women. And who will deny that a woman demonstrates the highest prudence in governing the home? No one, in my judgment. Such rule belongs only to her, not to the husband, as one reads in the *Economicus*."⁴¹ Moreover, she argues, if men have the prudence of obedience, and follow the commands of their prince, how can they at the same time also have the prudence of command with regard to their wives?

Marinella was particularly interested in those Christian and pagan women who eschewed conventional love either for spiritual or heroic reasons. She draws on an extensive list of female exempla, reconstructing many of Passi's women in a far more favorable light. Her exempla prove women's superiority to men because they possess a mixture of masculine and feminine virtues; thus, when she presents women who may excel in masculine realms, she must also demonstrate that they behave properly according to

the precepts of female virtue. She describes emblematic women who testify to female prudence, chastity, and loyalty. Her exempla are temperate and chaste, just and loyal, prudent and wise, demonstrating love to father, husbands, brothers, sons, and country. Several of her chapters deal specifically with those who have excelled in traditionally male realms: *Delle donne forti e intrepide* [Of strong and fearless women], *Delle donne nell'arte militare, e nel guerreggiare illustri e famose* [Of illustrious and famous women in military arts and war], *Delle donne di forti membra, e della delicatezza sprezzatrici* [Of women of strong limbs and disdainful of weakness]. She does not hesitate to choose whichever version of the history or legend presents the exemplum in the most admirable fashion, occasionally juxtaposing contradictory sources. In praising Dido for her courage and skill as a ruler, for example, she rejects Passi's (and Virgil's) anachronistic version in which Dido falls in love with Aeneas, but later praises her for generosity to him.⁴² Marinella also defends the honor of those infinitely flexible exempla such as Semiramis and Cleopatra, praising only their accomplishments and minimizing or omitting their well-known indiscretions or sexual crimes. She writes of a desire to hear the "the cry of womanly deeds" in science and other fields resounding not only in Venice, but also in diverse cities and various provinces. In so doing, she makes a rare recommendation for actual social change: the demand for equal education:

O that God might grant that in our times women were permitted to train in arms and in literature, so that one would see such wonderful and unheard-of things in the preservation and expansion of kingdoms. And who would be more ready to make a shield with their fearless breasts in defense of the fatherland than women? And with what readiness and ardor one would see them spill blood and life itself in defense of men! Women, as I have proved, are thus nobler in actions than men. . . . I wish that they would make this experiment: to train a boy and girl of the same age, both of a good nature and cleverness in literature and arms, and they would see in a shorter time how much more expertly the girl would be instructed than the boy, and thus she would beat him by a large margin, as Moderata Fonte has written.⁴³

A description of Moderata Fonte's life by her contemporary Giovanni Nicolò Dogliani in 1592 emphasizes the exceptional nature of this young writer and dramatizes the inequities in educating women and men in late cinquecento Venice to which Marinella refers. Dogliano, who was married to the daughter of Fonte's guardian, recounts in highly dramatic terms various anecdotes about this precocious and articulate female child whose career he facilitated: she was described by a priest as possessing a "spirit without a body," she learned Latin by persuading her brother to teach her all that he studied at school, and she was so devoted to her writing that she once persuaded a carriage driver to stop in order to pick up some papers that had fallen out during a journey.⁴⁴ A number of Fonte's writings survive, including the chivalric romance *Il Floridoro* (1581), in which she deals with

the issue of female education, as well as a *Passion* (1582), various poetry, canzone, and madrigals. She also played a surprising role in Venice's theatrical life; she was the author of a number of *rappresentazioni*, pre-operative entertainments performed for the doge on St. Stephen's Day, which were presumably published anonymously.

Il merito delle donne was written just prior to the author's death during the birth of her fourth child in 1592, thus predating both *La nobiltà delle donne* and *I donneschi difetti*. Regardless of whether it was written in response to any specific attacks on women, it was published posthumously in 1600 under the supervision of her family (the dedication was composed by her daughter), thus giving it perhaps an unintended role in the public rebuke of Giuseppe Passi. Moreover, Dogliano's reverential biography of Fonte, which was circulated in manuscript prior to the publication of *Il merito delle donne*, provided another compelling argument against Passi's view of women.

Il merito delle donne is a highly original work, one that both participates in and completely reinvents conventional debating about women. It is organized as a lengthy "domestic conversation" among a group of seven noblewomen of varying ages and marital status in an idyllic Venetian garden. Its structure is similar to that of Renaissance dialogues such as Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano*; however, unlike Castiglione's conversations, in which women participate only minimally (occasionally to their own detriment), Fonte articulates her vision of a Utopian world based on *amicizia* (friendship) as practiced by women—entirely with women's voices.⁴⁵ The conversation takes place over two days. On the first day, the women divide themselves into two groups, presided over by the benevolent oldest woman, the widow Adriana, in order to argue the relative merits of the male sex. On the second day, the conversation is far more wide-ranging, touching on numerous topics that demonstrate by example the education, refinement, and intellectual capacity of the female sex.

Exceptional women play an important role in conversations of these Venetian noblewomen. The hostess Leonora, for example, presents an exhaustive list of heroic women as an example of female fortitude, and the learned Corinna and the bride Cornelia later amend this list. When Leonora observes that men should be told about examples of women who loved their husbands, Corinna simply replies that "they" (men) already know about them, but "pretend not to."⁴⁶ Implicit in Fonte's discourse is the fact that the best evidence for female strength, intelligence, eloquence, and diversity is not to be found in the distant figures of myth and history but rather in these women, who, not coincidentally, are named after famous exemplary females.⁴⁷

The image of a utopian world that emerges from *Il merito delle donne* also results from her vivid evocation of the visual realm. Fonte describes the setting with a cinematographic precision that transforms this highly intellectual domestic conversation into a dramatic event, in which Venice herself

(and, implicitly, the power of the Republic) is an active participant. She opens the book with conventional praise of Venice: its physical beauty, its relationship to the sea, its richness, freedoms, and the order of its government, the virtue of its men, the chastity of its women, its special relationship to God, and the grace and wisdom of the doge. Within this idyllic realm, she locates her group of “noble and spirited” female friends who, despite differences in age, marital status, and experience, have formed a private sphere in which to exchange ideas freely, to share writings, or even to perform music.⁴⁸ She then provides detailed stage directions for the drama: the gathering of the friends at a balcony over the Grand Canal, the arrival of the new bride Helena, and their withdrawal to the stage carefully set for the dialogues: an idyllic Venetian garden filled with emerald-green shrubs in a variety of shapes, trees of all sorts, all perfectly arranged “without a leaf out of place.” She describes the smells as well: “the loveliest orange trees and lemon trees to be seen, with such sweet-smelling flowers and fruit that they gladdened the heart with their scent as much as they delighted the eyes.”⁴⁹ The center of this stage is commanded by a fountain made with “such rare and diligent mastery that it is impossible to describe.” At each of the façades of the fountain is placed the figure of a woman with braided hair adorned with garlands, whose breasts spout forth the most abundant fresh, cold, clear water, like double fountains.⁵⁰ Fonte’s statues, however, have an allegorical significance that reveals much about the author’s point of view. Each woman carries in her left hand an olive branch wrapped in a banner engraved with a distinctive motto that corresponds to a symbolic object held in her right, representing various allegorical messages (chastity, solitude, liberty, the deception of women, and male cruelty) that will be of significance throughout the discourse.⁵¹ The figures, designed by Leonora’s free-thinking aunt, were meant as a statement of the way in which she had intended to live her life and her views against the male sex. Thus, in this pastoral world surrounded by the watery beauty of the Venetian Republic, Fonte’s exceptional women create a theater that they dominate through their intellect and their command of language, with a physical beauty that is uniquely feminine.

The extent to which such a debate about women came to be regarded as a Venetian phenomenon is reflected over twenty years later in Lucrezio Bursati’s *La vittoria delle donne*. Although written by a man, this is yet another work arguing ostensibly for women’s superiority to men. Bursati imitates Fonte’s theatrical sense—and in particular her use of Venice herself as a backdrop—to produce a set of dialogues about women that borrows heavily from both Passi and Marinella. What is most unusual, however, is the manner in which the debates are presented: two illustrious gentlemen, a Venetian, Alessandro Salusti, and a Veronese, Gaudentio Mareschi, are overheard by the writer discussing the nature of women amid the splendor of the *Sensa*, the special Venetian celebration of Ascension Day.

Over the course of six dialogues, Gaudentio and Alessandro argue about nearly every facet of the nature of women: feminine beauty and love, marriage, the education of women, the appropriate treatment of wives, and women warriors. The Veronese Gaudentio argues for female superiority, while, not surprisingly, the Venetian Alessandro represents the anti-female point of view, although he finally capitulates at the end of the last dialogue. Mostly, they draw on well-known arguments for and against women, citing numerous exemplary women as well as quoting Passi and Marinella, among others. But in some instances the discussion touches on quintessentially Venetian practices regarding the preservation of the patrimony and the purity of the patriciate, thus relocating a familiar debate in terms associated with Venice herself.⁵²

Most significant, however, is Bursati's choice of the *Sensa* as the backdrop for the debate. The *Sensa* was Venice's most elaborate spring festival, the Venetian equivalent, as Edward Muir describes, of a "fertility rite," with all the associated implications.⁵³ Bursati dramatizes the *Sensa* with loving detail: the hundreds of boats and gondolas that united transform the lagoon into "a city planted in the middle of the water" and the crowds of visitors awaiting the arrival of the doge in his special boat, the golden *Bucintoro*. As Alessandro remarks in the opening of the first dialogue, "you will never see a more noble or beautiful festival, where one sees a great crowd including every sex, every rank, and every condition, and where is heard the sweetest concerts of voices and musical instruments that fill the air with the sweetest melody." The sense of theater is heightened by dramatic events that frame each dialogue: the delivery of a letter for Alessandro by gondola, the storm that threatens the boats in the lagoon, a congenial drink shared by the two friendly adversaries, and finally the climactic arrival of the doge and his entire entourage—senators, ambassadors, and courtiers—who accompany him across the lagoon as he prepares to throw the golden ring into the water, thus celebrating Venice's marriage to the sea.

This juxtaposition of the two events—the debate about women and the *Sensa*—is particularly relevant to our consideration of women and opera in Venice. It is through this ritual that Venice celebrated her dominion over the sea; it was evidence of the symbiotic relationship between male rule and female beauty on which the Republic depended, a demonstration of the special nature of Venetian power that relied on a metaphorical association with the institution of marriage as it was understood in Venice. This was the ultimate demonstration of paternal power, the time, as Stanley Chojnacki has emphasized, in which the "symbolic grandeur of the patrician husbandhood was vividly displayed."⁵⁴ This raises the stakes in the debate about women carried out in the shadow of the *Sensa*. How seriously can we take Gaudentio's apparent triumph—the victory of women announced in the title—in the middle of a ceremony in which the male Republic celebrates its mastery over the female sea? What use are Gaudentio's protestations

about women's right to an education, their skill in government or war, or the endless lists of exemplary women, in the context of this elaborate demonstration of the masculine prerogative in Venice? For by staging this familiar contest as part of the *Sensa*, Bursati dramatizes the ambiguity about women that was so central to Venice's political self-preservation. In presenting this counter-version of Fonte's feminized society, he reminds us of the extent to which the debate had become an integral part of the Venetian identity, and was intrinsically bound to the ritualistic and theatrical representation of the Republic's power.

A THEATER OF WOMEN

The Venetian debates about women had the effect of heightening the visibility of the exceptional woman, emphasizing her importance as a means of defining the nature of femininity, while at the same demonstrating her potential as a dramatic entity. Perhaps as part of the aforementioned baroque tendency to conceive of reality in theatrical terms, or even the influence of opera and the rise of solo singing in the seventeenth century, some seventeenth-century writers explored the increased visibility and theatricality of the heroines. One intriguing example from the early seventeenth century is Pietro Paolo di Ribera's *Le glorie immortali di trionfi et heroiche imprese d'ottocento quarantacinque donne illustri antiche, e moderne dotate di conditioni e scienze segnalate*. Ribera's thirteen chapters detail the accomplishments of an astounding 845 illustrious women, noted for their undertakings in the sacred scriptures, theology, prophecy, philosophy, rhetoric, grammar, medicine, astrology, civil laws, painting, music, arms, and other superior virtues.⁵⁵ He thus not only expands Boccaccio's catalog—finding nearly seven times as many exemplary women—he also redefines the criteria for exceptional women, including both ancient and modern women who excelled in the sciences, arts, and humanities. Nevertheless, Ribera's debt to Dolce and even Passi is apparent in the organization of the catalog: his 845 women are listed in descending order by degree of sexual purity, beginning with virgins, continuing to martyrs, and then wives. Women of artistic and literary accomplishments—who cannot easily be categorized—are isolated in the final two books.

The rhetorical power of the exceptional woman is made more explicit in another book, Francesco Agostino Della Chiesa's *Theatro delle donne letterate* (Mondovì, 1620). His catalog is prefaced by an essay on the preeminence and perfection of the female sex that relies heavily on Marinella's work, while providing a few unusual twists on the conventional anti-misogynist viewpoints. In Della Chiesa's formulation, for example, the blame for the Trojan war is placed not on Helen but on the vices of the men who desired her. He is surprisingly approving of female warriors and even applauds fe-

male rulers; yet, he nonetheless proposes that women surpass men primarily because of their superior purity and chastity.

This somewhat traditional defense of women is but a preface to a highly unconventional catalog of women. Della Chiesa explains that he seeks to represent wise women who shine like stars to the "immortal glory of the female sex" in scholarship as well as gentleness and manners, but who are neglected by modern writers because of "envy or some other passion that is not mentioned in their writings."⁵⁶ He informs the reader that he will represent to the world "a theater" in which "neither armed horsemen, robust gladiators, tigers, bears, lions, nor other furious animals appear to tear off limbs as the Romans were accustomed to do in ancient times in order to amuse the people."⁵⁷ Instead of the atrocities of the Roman Colisseum, he offers a lengthy catalog of primarily literary ladies—"holy women, valorous queens, and other grand ladies . . . endowed with high virtue and subtle intellect, who with their writings and works prove that the female sex is no less adequate than ours in learning and liberal arts."⁵⁸ Unlike Ribera, who lists his women in descending order of their relative purity, Della Chiesa's list is in egalitarian alphabetical order, and he urges the great noblewomen and princesses in the theater not to be offended at their inclusion along with women of lesser rank and others "more literate than pure and continent," because the "intention of the author was not to present women who were illustrious because of political power or nobility of blood, but rather because of virtue and culture."⁵⁹ Thus, Lucrezia Marinella finds herself intermingled with such conventional exempla as Artemisia and Cleopatra.

What is particularly striking about Della Chiesa's catalog is that he not only credits his exempla with their traditional accomplishments, but also commends them for rhetorical ability and literary skills that previous commentators had failed to recognize. In this theater of women, the heroines have voice. Cleopatra's enticement of Caesar, for example, was not only the result of her sweet manner and beauty, but also her eloquent tongue. Quickly dismissing her various amorous entanglements (for which the reader can easily consult Plutarch), he instead extols her skill as linguist. Rarely did Cleopatra depend on an interpreter; rather, she herself communicated with the Ethiopians, Hebrews, Arabs, Syrians, and Greeks.⁶⁰ Regarding Zenobia, Queen of Palmira, he cites the best-known features of her life: her beauty, virtue, ability as warrior and general, loyalty to her husband, and eventual capture by Aurelian. Yet, she is also cited for her scholarly accomplishments: her knowledge of Greek, Egyptian, and Persian, her ability to memorize Greek, Latin, and barbarian histories with the highest diligence, her reduction and abridgment of Alexandrine verses, and the dedicated tutoring of her sons. Finally he notes the many elegant orations that she recited to her soldiers, with her helmet on her head.⁶¹ Thus, on Della Chiesa's stage, the lesson is not learned merely from gazing at exemplary women, but rather from listening to them. Their superiority consists in their ability to speak for

themselves with greater eloquence than their male counterparts, a skill they were to exploit with considerable effect on the operatic stage.

But several other texts present a far more negative view of female eloquence, such as Girolamo Ercolani's *Le eroine della solitudine sacra ovvero vite d'alcune romite sacre* and Paolo Botti's *La donna di poche parole commendata*.⁶² Ercolani, a Paduan doctor of theology, invoked a set of heroines in order to condemn women's sexuality and to demonstrate the appropriate manner of repentance. He claims to have the utmost regard for women; yet, he writes of his intent to demonstrate that "retirement and solitude" are women's greatest ornament. His heroines find absolution, Christian piety, chastity, or forgiveness in the act of seclusion. Ercolani gives this concept visual representation; each chapter is prefaced by an engraving that displays a woman in a small enclosure such as a cave or hut, aglow with redemptive light, as in the picture of Thais shown in figure 1.

He writes of the flames of impurity that in women are "harbored as in the Trojan horse," that devour pure spirits, and nonetheless "color his pen with tears." His heroines are those who while keeping silent, speak wisely, and "although mute [they] give wise counsel, and although dead give life to [the] souls, transmitting in themselves the most vivid ideal of Christian virtue."⁶³ His portrait of Thais, the notorious courtesan of Alexandria, graphically shows the way in which the most lascivious of women can attain Christian piety through seclusion and repentance. He describes in great detail her beauty and lasciviousness—the result of an over-indulgent mother⁶⁴—that lured men away from their homes, emptying cities and villages, causing jealousies, hatreds, and war:⁶⁵

Oh Lord! How true it is that this vain beauty is nothing other than a fishhook of the devil with which he entices and makes a prey of the soul; a net which he holds toward the heavens to impede the entrance of mortals therein; a siren that lulls one to sleep and kills; a beverage that inebriates the senses and poisons the spirit; a mortal spell of the souls, a fecund seed of complaints; a harvest abundant in horrors and errors. . . . She [Thais] made the whole world a hospital of incurables.⁶⁶

Ercolani then tells the dismal tale of Thais's condemnation, repentance, and eventual sainthood through the efforts of a virtuous religious man who points out the error of her ways. For Ercolani, the lesson to all women was quite simple: in addition to the more obvious sins of the body, any self-aggrandizement, ambition, or luxury was to be avoided. Following a lurid description of Thais's three years of imprisonment in a filthy cave in the desert (after which time she was redeemed by a divine light and profound repentance), Ercolani addresses his female readers directly, warning that only "through mortality does one become immortal":

Eve, when she thought [herself] to be a goddess, became a criminal; and just at the time she thought herself to be immortal, through universal damnation



FIGURE 1. Thais (Taide), from Girolamo Ercolani, *Le eroine della solitudine sacra ovvero vite d'alcune romite sacre* (Venice: Baba, 1655). Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice.

she saw herself as all too mortal. Why live as illustrious when all of your luster will end in shadow? Let luxury exalt you to a proud position, increase you in every way, for the more you exalt yourself and aggrandize yourself, you will always be under the foot of death . . . Learn thus together with Thais to humiliate yourselves; that only this is the ladder of Jacob through which you can ascend to true glory.⁶⁷

In *La donna di poche parole*, Paolo Botti likewise seeks to silence women, claiming speech as a uniquely male prerogative.⁶⁸ He explains in the preface that his book is intended to persuade “the female sex to talk less, although it contains many words.”⁶⁹ The frontispiece (fig. 2) provides an intriguing visual image of his ideals concerning female speech. A woman stands on a proscenium, framed by curtains, accompanied by a courtier of diminutive proportions, who gallantly bows to her in a mock gesture of civility. She places a finger in front of her lips, thus hushing her female audience, but wears a dress embroidered, curiously, with eyes and ears. In this representation, women are ornaments, who might see and hear and even dwarf the courtier but should not speak on the stage.

In over 300 pages and nineteen chapters, Botti provides a painfully detailed exposition of the many rewards that a woman can expect by speaking less: She will acquire wisdom, accomplish great deeds, earn merit with God, exempt herself from disgrace, demonstrate good breeding, please nature, and, most importantly, lose the ability to sin. Notably, for both Ercolani and Botti, silence is not only the pathway to virtue; it is that which most enhances a woman's beauty. While Ercolani notes frequently the many ways in which isolation and seclusion are “becoming to a woman,” Botti's second chapter considers “how it beautifies a woman to speak less” and the third chapter merely reverses the conceit: “She who is taciturn appears to be more beautiful.” By invoking this sort of reasoning, Botti and Ercolani are participating in an ancient discourse on women, speech, and ornamentation that is of fundamental importance for understanding the ways in which male and female speech—and ultimately song—were differentiated. The power of the orator to move and persuade his audiences depended on his ability to use the appropriate devices and embellishments; at the same time, for women such a talent was a liability. Female beauty was thus signified not by the presence of eloquence but rather its absence; not by sound but rather by silence.

Notably, Botti provides an example of how silence and withdrawal could nonetheless serve female desire. He includes a lengthy description of one famous operatic and historical figure, Poppaea Sabina, the second wife of the emperor Nero, who, as Tacitus described, made her beauty more desirable by wearing a veil across her face in public. In Botti's version, the veil covers her lips rather than her face. He writes:

Poppaea Sabina, who knew how to make herself the mistress of affections in a brief time and to capture two hearts—one of Otho and the other, harder than



FIGURE 2. Paolo Botti, *La donna di poche parole commendata* (Padua: n.p., 1663), frontispiece. Courtesy of the Biblioteca d'arte e storia veneziana del Civico Museo Correr, Venice.

marble, that of Nero—rarely, Tacitus said, was seen in public; perhaps because the less her beauty was seen the more it was venerated. Moreover, she usually wore a veil that covered half of her lips in order to force herself to dedicate part of her mouth to silence, reserving the other for speaking when necessity required it. In order to speak well to one such as Nero, to change his inborn cruelty to affection, Poppaea said to herself: you would be better to be silent about thousands and thousands of things and a million times, therefore cover your tongue with a veil. So that this prince so cruel will desire to hear your voice, since he cannot satiate himself by gazing at your face, you always will say to him half of what he desires; therefore, you will always keep your mouth half-covered.⁷⁰

Botti embroiders Tacitus's description of Poppaea so that it is not merely her beauty that is used to seduce Nero, but also her silence. Tacitus may have been primarily concerned about the dangers of Poppaea's face. For Botti, however, writing in the middle of the seventeenth century, the voice—or lack thereof—was just as potent. In the same way that the veil made her beauty more tempting, so silence became a powerful seductive weapon. Moreover, by speaking rarely, Botti tells us, Poppaea was able to control the cruel and unpredictable passions of Nero, keeping him as desirous of hearing her voice as he was of seeing her face. Woman's silence, he implies, thus protects her from a cruel husband. Since readers would probably have known from Tacitus that the pregnant Poppaea would die as a result of Nero's cruelty, his warning merited serious consideration. At the same time, still others might also have recognized Poppaea as the heroine of Monteverdi's opera, in which silence was the least of her virtues.

Ironically, it is emphatically not the silence, but rather the eloquence of a Poppaea and the other exceptional women that commanded so much attention on the opera stage. Indeed, writing in 1663, at a time when opera was firmly established, Botti's admonitions against women's voices might well have been offered with opera in mind. For in opera, women's eloquence was not only in word but also in sound, often surpassing that of men. The emblematic woman, celebrated and condemned in the early modern debates and catalogs, was a natural focus for opera during the more theatrically minded Seicento. And as the producers of culture in Venice began to recognize the inherent power of their products to control and influence their audiences, these women offered an ideal medium for staging the debate.

Chapter 2

Bizzarrie Feminite

Opera and the Accademia degli Incogniti

With the Venetian Accademia degli Incogniti, the ambivalent views about gender that characterized seventeenth-century thought intersected with the developing genre of opera. Founded in 1630 by the writer and Venetian patrician Giovanni Francesco Loredano, the Incogniti included nearly all the prominent intellectual patricians of Venice, along with many non-Venetians who were to become active in the Venetian literary-intellectual world.¹ The Incogniti dominated literary life in Venice in the middle part of the century, publishing extensively on topics that ranged from the serious to the seemingly frivolous: histories, poems, letters, plays, *novelle*, and travesties of the classics. They also played a prominent role in Venetian political life. Regardless of their often controversial literary activities, the Incogniti were ardent patriots, active in Venetian government, and strongly committed to the preservation of state and perpetuation of Venetian mythology.

The Incogniti's sphere of influence also extended to the emerging opera industry in Venice. It is perhaps a fortuitous coincidence that the height of Incognito prestige should have so perfectly coincided with the growing popularity of the new genre.² By the early 1640s members of the Incogniti were not only engaged in opera as librettists and impresarios, but may also have been involved in the establishment of a new theater, the Teatro Novissimo.³ Astutely, this intellectual community recognized the potential of the new genre as a means for prominent Venetians to acquire prestige both locally and internationally, and as a vehicle for propaganda. As a centerpiece of carnival, opera was inherently linked to subversive modes of expression; it was thus an ideal public venue for the covert expression of private philosophical, moral, and political ideas in play within Academic circles. Thus, the peculiar ideologies of the Accademia degli Incogniti were to become an integral part of opera's conventions, practically from its inception in Venice.

Under Incogniti influence opera not only informed its viewers and lis-

teners about the glory of Venice and its political strength; it placed on display fundamental social issues, including the nature of love and female sexuality that, while symptomatic of seventeenth-century thought in general, were particularly problematic in the carnival city of Venice. Certainly the Incogniti's attitudes toward women were shaped by the same sorts of concerns that had preoccupied Europe for much of the early modern period. Members of the Accademia degli Incogniti probably would have known the writings of Fonte, Marinella, and Passi; they may have overheard or participated in debates not unlike the one dramatized by Lucrezio Bursati, and might even have educated their women according to the principles prescribed by Lodovico Dolce. Nonetheless, the combination of eroticism, satire, and overt anti-female sentiment expressed in numerous Incogniti writings is in many respects quite distinct from the well-rehearsed conventions of the *querelles des femmes*, reflecting issues that had become particularly critical in mid-seventeenth-century Venice. This was a highly idiosyncratic manifestation of the pan-European controversies about the nature of women, one that seemed particularly sensitive to the newly prominent female voice in Venice. On the one hand, the Incogniti supported opera and the central role of women therein: most of their operas focused on exemplary women rather than heroic men, and they also wrote elegies and poems in praise of certain women singers.⁴ On the other hand, their writings—and even the operas themselves—are filled with satirical and even antagonistic responses to a variety of modes of female self-expression, as is evident in their tempestuous dealings with one of the most important female Venetian writers of the period, the nun Arcangela Tarabotti.

A central feature of the Incogniti philosophical stance—and one that has made the nature of their impact on opera so difficult to decipher—is their peculiar mixture of conservative patriotism and *libertinismo*. Regarding themselves and their homeland as the true inheritors of the glory of ancient Rome, both Venetian and foreign members of the Accademia degli Incogniti were, above all, committed to praising the great Republic. A substantial number of their literary efforts were thus directed toward the perpetuation of the “myth of Venice”; they wrote in praise of the doges, in honor of military victories, penning histories that traced the rise of Venetian power, and their brand of patriotism permeates the librettos produced under their auspices.⁵ But this was also a period of relative political stasis, a time in which the image of Venice's purity seemed most difficult to sustain; the overt rebellion that resulted in the Interdict and the glorious age of Paolo Sarpi had passed. The emphasis was thus on preservation rather than innovation, on diplomacy rather than rebellion: Venetian public policy was concerned with protecting the status quo at all costs.⁶ Moreover, the Republic that they were so intent on preserving was renowned throughout Europe for its unique political system: a male oligarchy, regulated by an elegant set of checks and balances that ostensibly protected Venice from the corrup-

tion, jealousies, and treason to which monarchies were inevitably susceptible. And, not incidentally, as we have seen, this resulted in a government that was structured so as to exclude women completely from any participation in public life.

The conflict between *libertinismo* and conservatism is particularly apparent in the highly ambivalent treatment of women. A central element of Venetian public policy required the suppression of women through the institutions of the Church and marriage and the support of a vibrant pleasure industry. Venice, it must be remembered, prided herself on the availability of all pleasures, marketing herself to the world as Europe's playground, home of the most famous carnival, where liberties—sexual and otherwise—might be sampled with minimal interference from the watchful eye of the Inquisition.⁷ The publication of forbidden books, the interest in erotica, and even the sensory stimulation of public opera could be justified as demonstrations of Republican freedoms and patriotic duty. Indeed, it is not surprising that members of the Accademia degli Incogniti were also admirers of the erotic content and imaginative conceits in the poetry of Giambattista Marino and defended him strongly during the controversies surrounding the publication of *Adone*.⁸

For the management of this delicate balance between politics and sexuality, the Incogniti did not look directly to either Seneca or Tacitus, but rather to Aristotle and their studies at the University of Padua with the last of that university's great Aristotelians, Cesare Cremonini.⁹ Cremonini's speculations on such potentially blasphemous issues as the mortality of the soul, the importance of natural instinct, or the political origins of religion profoundly influenced attitudes toward women and sexuality in this group of primarily Venetian patricians, many of whom had grown up with the Interdict or had gravitated to the Veneto to escape papal pressure.¹⁰

Like his predecessors, Cremonini subscribed to a naturalistic brand of Aristotelianism that paid minimal heed to certain Christian theological precepts concerning the creation of the world, the immortality of the soul, or the power of divine providence. The critical issue—the one that nearly sealed his doom with the Inquisition—had to do with the mortality of the soul.¹¹ In Cremonini's view, not only were the sensations of the body necessary for the functions of the soul, but the soul was intrinsically tied to the body and could not exist as an individual entity without it.¹² Physical urges were something to be satisfied, not suppressed, an essential part of the combined workings of mind and body. And since the soul would perish along with the body, there was no need to fear divine retribution for the sins of the flesh. Cremonini himself never overtly stated his opposition to Christian theology; he simply claimed that the goal of his work was to interpret Aristotle and that he himself was a devout believer. Nevertheless, it is likely that these somewhat blasphemous views were well known to his Venetian admirers.¹³ There is little question that continued attempts at prosecution by the

Inquisition were largely unsuccessful as a result of Cremonini's support from the highest levels of Venetian government, where he was regarded as a state treasure.¹⁴

It is no coincidence that Cremonini became the guiding star for an entire generation of Venetian noblemen, for his teachings provided the ruling classes with a philosophy that justified their views regarding public and private life: a selective indifference to the Church, and license to explore one's own sexual predilections, all in the context of an intellectual tradition that had long rationalized misogyny. By following the implications of Cremonini's ideas with respect to the "sovereignty of instinct," physical pleasure, and skepticism about conventional Christian morality to their logical conclusion, the Incogniti found a moral philosophy compatible with contemporary Venetian thinking about women. Man had an inherent right and even obligation to enjoy physical pleasure and sexual release, which—as Galen had taught—were necessary for maintaining a healthy body, and women were the most obvious, though not the only, means through which this pleasure could be obtained. At the same time, however, the Incogniti recognized that this attitude was necessarily at odds with practical considerations concerning the management of the Venetian population. Women may have been necessary to satisfy male physical needs; yet, they were also a distraction for the patriotic male, for whom service to the Republic was the highest calling. It was only by instructing women on those virtues appropriate to their gender (e.g., silence and chastity)—as opposed to those appropriate for themselves (e.g., eloquence and courage)—that men could engage in the civic service that was so necessary for the well-being of the Republic.¹⁵

Cremonini's former students in the Accademia degli Incogniti did not necessarily pursue rigorous intellectual inquiries; nor did they contribute substantially to the body of political writings for which the preceding generation had been so renowned. Rather, they moved seamlessly from the patriotic to the erotic, without sacrificing either integrity or credibility. In this particular version of the myth of Venice, the public and private, the sensual and the political coexisted in an elegant balance. The repeated celebration of the full range of pleasures available to the Venetian was not a sign of moral corruption but rather served to heighten the Republic's reputation for unmatched freedom and political wisdom. For the outside world, the Incogniti provided a vivid demonstration of Venice's relative autonomy from the Church, Inquisition, or any other absolutist authority. The exploration of the erotic that characterized so many of their writings served as an open declaration of man's inherent right to the pleasures of the flesh, for these works—produced by and for men—rejected religious hypocrisy and stoic deprivation. The domination of the Venetian printing presses by Loredano and the Incogniti and their frequent flirtations with the *Index librorum prohibitorum* were a highly visible advertisement of the many liberties, sexual and otherwise, enjoyed by men fortunate enough to live under this

unique form of government. On a more private level, however, the Academy also created for its members an ideal space for sensual and philosophical self-exploration: a homosocial environment that insisted upon male primacy in private as well as public life. And while such societies existed throughout Italy, only in Venice—ruled exclusively by an oligarchy rather than a court system—could such an organization reflect so closely the body politic. This was the Venetian Republic in miniature: an exclusively male sphere, a meeting place in which women were sometimes admitted, yet in which, as the surviving debates attest, the vices, liabilities, and dangerous attractions of women were among the most popular topics for discussion.¹⁶

Within this realm, female speech, female bodies, and the sensual allure of opera itself were curiosities, a source of fascination and pleasure, but were also regarded with deep suspicion. In the eyes of the Incogniti, women's abilities to attract and distract, to cause pleasure and pain, and to feel pleasure themselves were a source of endless speculation. The various published academic discourses such as Loredano's *Bizzarrie accademiche*, the vignettes or the "grilli" by Padre Angelico Aprosio, the *novelle* of such writers as Ferrante Pallavicino and Francesco Pona, the various plays, satires, and opera librettos reveal a persistent and irreconcilable conflict about female sexuality that lies at the heart of many of the operas with which we are concerned: the physical desire for women and fascination with their beauty—which is their inherent privilege to enjoy and the pride of a Republic that advertises herself as the word's pleasure capital—and a profound fear of women's power both sexually and politically to ensnare men and poison their hearts and souls.¹⁷ In the literary world created and sustained by the Incogniti, female virtue is relative, female self-expression through writing, singing, or fashion is suspect, bodies are unstable, and the lure of the erotic is ever present. And it is precisely this way of thinking that inhabits the conventions of the operas produced under their auspices, and shapes the voices and destinies of operatic women and the men with whom they share the stage.

FALSE VIRTUES: LOREDANO AND THE ACADEMIC DISCOURSES

The published discourses and debates of the Accademia degli Incogniti provide insight into the prominence accorded "the female question" at meetings of the Academy, as well as the philosophical moral inclinations of its mysterious leader and founder, Giovanni Francesco Loredano. Loredano is the shadowy figure behind nearly every publishing endeavor in Venice during the middle years of the seventeenth century. His own writings—including the academic discourses published under the title *Bizzarrie accademiche*—were among the most frequently reprinted books in seventeenth-century Europe.¹⁸ Loredano was also the explicit dedicatee for many works, was lauded effusively in others, and very likely facilitated the publication of several forbidden books with fictional imprints, discussed below. Although

he does not appear to have had any official role in opera production, he is credited with having developed the plot for an intriguing work, *Amore innamorato* (1642), which was set to poetry by another Incognito, Pietro Michiele, and revised by still another, Giovanni Battista Fusconi.¹⁹ Nonetheless, his only theatrical work, *La forza d'amore* (considered below), demonstrates an absolute familiarity with the literary conventions of the Venetian opera libretto and also articulates Incogniti philosophies regarding women with extraordinary clarity. Loredano's complete domination of the Venetian publishing world, his intimate involvement in all aspects of book production, and his close relationships with artists and musicians both in and outside of the Republic, attest to his unambiguous role as the arbiter of taste in mid-seventeenth-century Venice.

Despite their seeming banality, Loredano's discourses engage a number of issues noted above with which Venetian opera was also concerned: the danger of women for their lovers, the equivocal nature of female chastity, the inherent right of men to sexual pleasure, and the impossibility of female silence. They are public rather than private writings, designed to be spoken by a masculine voice and heard by an audience that, at least according to some reports, included women. Their inherent theatricality is in part what links them to opera, and also makes them so difficult to interpret: this is an exaggerated rhetoric, filled with satire and double meanings, encoded for a knowing audience, in which, like the operas of the period, the serious and the comic are often difficult to differentiate. Although the tone is often playful and the speaker claims to be open to opposing viewpoints, what emerges is a negative view of women masked by a pretense of chivalry that is at once exaggerated and patronizing. Unlike the writings of Lodovico Dolce and Torquato Tasso, these discourses are not primarily didactic: they do not give explicit instructions about the education of women or present a definitive view about male or female virtue, nor do they emulate the gentle banter between the sexes depicted by Castiglione. Instead, Loredano and his colleagues present us with a world in which courtly love has gone awry, and in which women have little capacity to achieve any sort of virtue.

This way of thinking shaped opera plotting, characterizations, and musical rhetoric, providing an ideological frame in which classical texts were reinvented and conventional poetic tropes transformed in a manner no doubt influenced by Giambattista Marino, the Incogniti hero. In the Incogniti writings, a woman's glance or touch does not necessarily inspire love. For example, Loredano writes of the effect of a woman's gaze on the lover: the "poison darting from the eyes of the beautiful woman that takes away the lover's life" and turns his face black.²⁰ This blackened face might move a lady to pity so that she will bestow her favors, yet it is also the only appropriate color for depicting the lover's soul, which is necessarily "too much oppressed to leave signs of joy upon the face."²¹ Moreover, "what greater honor," he asks, can a lover give the woman he loves than to "serve as the

shadow to her beauty?"²² In another instance, he considers the "greatest favor that a lover can receive from a lady of honor."²³ Woman, Loredano told his listeners, is the richest of nature's treasures—"an amorous heaven" who spreads grace and gives innumerable favors to her lovers; yet the honor to which he refers is nothing less than being trampled upon by this treasure of nature.²⁴ He deftly explains this contradiction by reference to the usual authorities: since Aristotle had argued that the foot was the coldest member, a lady who stomps on her lover is only demonstrating her high regard, showing that her "love had warmed even that part which was furthest from her heart, and therefore the most frozen."²⁵ Moreover, the lover, thus wounded in the foot, might consider himself compared to the great Achilles.²⁶ This notion of the destructive power of a woman's love is echoed in other discourses. Incognito Girolamo Brusoni proposes that a woman can punish a man who has been unfaithful to her by continuing to love him, thus making him the most castigated, miserable man in the world.²⁷ Conversely, in the essay that follows, he concludes that a woman should reward the man who has been faithful to her by leaving him.

Implicit in all of these discourses is the belief that all women are insufficiently generous with their gifts. In one essay, Loredano considers whether or not it is better for the lover to steal pleasures from an unresponsive woman or wait for them to be given more freely.²⁸ (Indeed, this is an issue with which the god Jove grapples in his dealings with the nymph Callisto in chapter 5.) Loredano justifies rape (or at the very least vigorous seduction) as a male prerogative. Waiting for the gifts of a lover is a sign of fear and modesty, but to take those gifts by force is an act of courage, and this action rather than passivity will always enhance a man's self-esteem.²⁹ For this same reason, men should reward their lovers with money rather than love. Sexual congress, Loredano argues, is a "natural pleasure" and a "great thing," permissible both by law and for the "maintenance of good health, which carries with it satisfaction as much to the one who gives as the one who receives it," but nonetheless has negative consequences for men.³⁰ After the act of love, man sees himself as corrupt and imperfect, similar to the vilest animals on the earth. Through sexual gratification men lose themselves and their superiority, become crazed and irrational, enchained and enchanted. The necessity of paying women for their services can act as a restraint upon lust; were it not for man's greed, how many more men—particularly youths—would corrupt themselves and their health in pursuit of the pleasures of the senses? Thus, in order to attain more humanity for himself and imitate the beneficence of God, he makes a gift to the woman. With a brilliant and quintessentially Venetian logical gambit, Loredano finds a sacred justification for prostitution, likening the relationship of man and the prostitute to that of a loving God to his people. Prostitution is thus a valuable weapon whereby man retains his superiority to women in the face of their dangerous sexuality. Whereas men possess glory, he tells us, woman is an imperfect

animal, rich solely in vice, although there are many admirable, exemplary women (his list, notably, includes Tarabotti and Marinella). But, he observes, when men allow themselves to be enchained in the arms of lovers, they “become inferior and lose their superiority.” However, once they have satisfied themselves, slept, and paid the woman, a man can “return to himself” and hence subjugate the woman once again.³¹ Man has an inherent right to the pleasures of the flesh; yet, the lover himself is by definition unbalanced (this, for example, is the fate of Didone’s crazed Iarba in *La Didone*), and must after the pleasure find a way to “return to himself”—“torna in se stessa”—as the unfortunate Ottone tells himself repeatedly with regard to his love for Poppea, as represented in *L’incoronazione di Poppea*.

Such concerns about the danger of women, however, did not result in conventional prescriptions concerning female silence and chastity. On the one hand, silence, Loredano tells us, enhances a woman’s beauty more than “all the pride of Asia or novelties of Africa.”³² However, silence is not always a virtue. If women could hope for silence in men, he argues, they would be freer with their favors as they would no longer fear for their reputations.³³ Instead of being a virtue to which women should aspire, chastity, he proposes, is the quality that most distorts or compromises beauty; this most basic female virtue is a “melancholy devil” that prevents a woman from adorning herself, from looking in the mirror or braiding “her hair in order to take lovers into that labyrinth,” thus deceiving the eye with artifice.³⁴ (Indeed, as we shall see, the question of women’s ornaments is one that will be debated with considerable intensity by one of Loredano’s fellow Academicians, Francesco Buoninsegni, and the Venetian nun Arcangela Tarabotti.) Chastity requires the lowering of the eyes, a woman’s chief ornament; should a beautiful woman attempt to maintain her chastity, this beauty must unhappily hide itself under armor, deprived of pleasure, ever vigilant of corruption. Yet, if beauty is incompatible with chastity, Loredano necessarily concludes that beauty itself must be unchaste. Venus, he notes, “the fairest of all goddesses,” is also the least pure, thus beauty is always damaged by chastity.³⁵ Women are doubly damned: if chaste, they fail to move because they are not beautiful; if beautiful, they fail because they cannot possibly be chaste.³⁶ However, because women are sexually insatiable, any woman who is content with only one man might be considered chaste.³⁷ Loredano argues elsewhere that women are actually more faithful to men than men are to women, but not as a result of their superior virtue. Instead, he acknowledges a double standard whereby women are more chaste than men because they fear a greater punishment for their sins. “If man is faithful to a woman,” he notes, “he does not gain any more than a slight reputation that he does not have the ingenuity to procure new loves.” The faithful woman, he tells us, “is admired and praised by all, and if unfaithful is accompanied with curses and abuses from all.”³⁸

This basic skepticism about women’s capacity to achieve any sort of virtue

underlies Loredano's most succinct statement on the female sex: an essay entitled "In censure of women."³⁹ Indeed, this provides a striking example of the excessive rhetorical style that pervades so many Incogniti writings about women. He begins with what appears to be another explication in praise of women, composed of a number of commonplaces from the pro-female literature:

Woman, illustrious and most virtuous academicians, is the fairest and most amiable object that one can find in the world, the greatest and most precious gift God has given to humanity. Because by means of her, the spirit of man raises itself to contemplation, and contemplation carries desire to the knowledge of things divine.⁴⁰

The criticism, however, makes itself apparent rather quickly. It is through women and their beauty, he continues, that man "forgets himself," becomes his "own enemy":

and if at any time, he fixes his eyes upon a most beautiful face, his limbs tremble, and at the same instant he burns and freezes, and resembling those who unexpectedly see something divine, he finds himself agitated and moved to a [state of] celestial fury. Finally, when he regains his spirits and returns to himself, he [again] reveres the woman in his thoughts, bows to her with his intellect, and acknowledging all that which is due to a deity, offers himself upon the altar of a lady's heart as victim and sacrifice.⁴¹

This vision of the male sacrificed on the altar of women's beauty and love causes Loredano to change his approach. With the oft-cited Incogniti tendency to argue both sides of a debate, he moves abruptly from praise to blame:

But here I am now against women, who must glorify in their fortune that the most imperfect of all academics prepares to find again their reproaches. Woman, most virtuous gentlemen, is an imperfect animal, an error of nature, and a monster of our species. If ugly she is a torment to the eye, if beautiful anguish to the heart. If loved, she becomes a tyrant, if hated, an enemy. She knows no mean, cannot appreciate reason, and does not recognize what justice is. She is inconstant in her thoughts, extravagant in her desires, and implacable in her anger. Her love is born from interest, her faith from necessity, and her chastity from fear. If she speaks, she lies, if she laughs, she deceives, and if she weeps, she betrays. Her mouth is ordinarily filled with the honey of flattery, but her breast with the poison of envy. With her eyes she enchants, with her arms enchains, with kisses stupefies, and with the other delights robs the intellect and reason, and changes men into beasts. In conclusion, the tempests of the sea, the fury of torrents, the greediness of fire, the miseries of poverty, and all other evils are small in comparison to woman, who is so great an evil that it cannot be described.⁴²

Loredano has begun with Aristotle's well-known comments about woman as the "imperfect animal" and "error of nature," and adopts other common-

places regarding her inconstancy and uncontrollable desires, documenting his discussion with footnotes from a lengthy list of authorities: Homer, St. Jerome, Plato, Horace, Plutarch, Catullus, Juvenal, Euripides, and Ariosto. We see a repetition of the same contradiction with regard to female beauty: the deformed woman offends the eye, the beautiful woman the heart. It is here that Loredano provides the most explicit statement about the falseness of female virtues: women are not moved to love, chastity, or faith by any genuine sense of virtue but rather by self-interest, fear, or necessity. This same duplicity is evident in women's self-expression: kisses, smiling, weeping, speech, and probably—though not specifically mentioned—singing. Women rob men of intellect and powers of reason, turning them into beasts. Yet, while there would seem to be little ambivalence in Loredano's attitude toward women, the conclusion of his discourse leaves the reader wondering as to the sincerity of any of the remarks: "I believe, most virtuous academicians, that I have satisfied my obligation. Women will pardon me if they have taken any offense at my words, because I was constrained to obey, speaking evil of a sex that is holy and to which I acknowledge my indebtedness. But he who speaks evil says nothing to me; nor does the sun lose any of its brightness if it is cursed by the Ethiopians."⁴³

We might wonder whether Loredano was actually compelled to argue against women solely for the sake of the debate, and what sorts of challenges he might have received. Is his disclaimer merely an attempt at a self-deprecating civility, the vestiges of the courtly love tradition, adopted to mask the most blatant anti-female sentiments, perhaps even in front of female guests? Indeed, it is often difficult to determine whether this apparent misogyny was an integral part of Incogniti thought, an intellectual game, or a little of both. Regardless, it is evident that the Incogniti brought to the genre of opera a highly idiosyncratic attitude toward female virtue, sexuality, and beauty, in a manner that rarely worked to the advantage of operatic women such as Dido, the goddess Diana, or the lustful Messalina. For, if a woman's weeping, kisses, smiles, and speech had the power to deceive, then the song of the opera singer was very likely regarded as even more dangerous.⁴⁴

ARCANGELA TARABOTTI AND FEMALE SELF-EXPRESSION

The strong anti-female stance taken by some members of the Incogniti also inspired debate beyond the doors of the academy, as suggested by this published letter from Loredano addressed to the Venetian nun Arcangela Tarabotti:⁴⁵

I receive from Your Ladyship a satire because, for reasons of obedience, I held a discourse at the Academy against women. Truly, the female sex is most ungrateful. Where I expected thanks, I find myself scolded. I neglected intentionally an examination of the major part of the defects of women, and still Your Ladyship in your letter has given me a thousand curses. I was quiet then

for the sake of manners, whereas the prickings of my conscience obligated me to tell all. But if I encounter a new opportunity I wish to make Your Ladyship regret having provoked her servant with the satire. In this one sin do I call myself repentant, because I assigned many defects to women. In this I confess error, and I ask pardon for it, for everyone knows that woman is entirely a single defect. Signora Arcangela, woman is a monster of our species, not to say what the heretics have proved. She holds reason in her senses, her honesty at the will of man, and her virtue in hiding vice. Holy Scripture itself calls woman worse than death. Thus it is, my Signora Arcangela. It is necessary to accommodate ourselves to patience, because *God made us, not we ourselves*.⁴⁶

Loredano's letter is by no means entirely serious; it appears along with other "facetious letters" addressed to various literary colleagues, women of his acquaintance, and friends. Nevertheless, it is evident that at least one of his descriptions of women's defects was received with apparent displeasure by Tarabotti, the most outspoken proto-feminist voice in Venice in the middle of the seventeenth century.

Arcangela Tarabotti was in many respects no different from the many other young women of marriageable age who were subjected to varying degrees of persuasion and coercion to pass their lives as brides of Christ.⁴⁷ Tarabotti, born Elena Cassandra in 1604, was the eldest daughter in a family of *cittadini*; described as "beautiful but lame," she was no doubt deemed unworthy of marriage as compared with her sisters.⁴⁸ Her fate was thus all but sealed by economic necessities—and the early modern conventions for the treatment of female sexuality that, as Guido Ruggiero succinctly describes, "placed sexually mature women in an institutional frame similar to marriage, which gave them a social place, and at least theoretically protected society from their sexuality."⁴⁹ She entered the Benedictine convent Sant'Anna in the *sestiere* Castello at the age of 13, took the veil at 16, and was consecrated at 25.⁵⁰ Tarabotti's response to this situation was, however, hardly typical. She used her involuntary imprisonment to embark upon a literary career, the primary purpose of which was to expose and denounce the social and political circumstances in Venice that permitted this forced confinement of young women in convents, to defend the female sex against attacks by all and sundry, and to decry her own destiny. Despite her physical isolation, however, her career did not languish in obscurity. She exchanged letters and writings not only with Loredano, but also with other prominent writers connected with the Accademia degli Incogniti, including several opera librettists. Her influence via the circulation of both published books and unpublished manuscripts reached its apex during the first decade of public opera in Venice, the period in which the Incogniti involvement in opera was at its height.

Tarabotti has a special importance for the consideration of opera that is a result both of the unexpected strength (and controversial nature) of her presence in the Venetian literary world and the unique way in which she ex-

pressed herself in the debates about women. First, she eschewed the well-established conventions in the early modern debates about women, presenting her viewpoint in a manner that differed profoundly from Marinella's measured response to Passi or Fonte's idyllic female dialogue. Instead, she argued with the Venetian patriarchal powers in a deeply personal manner that revealed genuine insight into the Republic's multi-pronged strategies for the disposition of its female population. Moreover, she did this at a crucial point in Venice's history: at a time in which the decision to "sell" memberships to the nobility had seemed to threaten the purity of the female icon with which Venice represented herself. Second, she provided an entirely different kind of model for an eloquent female, one whose virtue was not in question and who expressed discontent with her position in society. Moreover, her intense involvement in an important debate about female luxuries opened up a host of issues concerning female self-expression and self-fashioning, the importance of luxuries and clothing to define societal roles both on the street and within the theater. Opera not only absorbed the Incogniti's ambivalent views about women, it was also imprinted by the sound of Tarabotti's unique voice.

Tarabotti's first work, *Tirannia paterna*, published posthumously and with false publication information under the title of *Semplicità ingannata*, was in fact a biting condemnation of Venetian patriarchal forces, both in the political and familial sense. In her view, forced monachization was nothing less than a corrupt manifestation of "ragione di stato": rampant religious hypocrisy and the resulting sacrifice of daughters served both economic and political expedience. Tarabotti described the fathers who forced their daughters into convents as worse than the most infamous tyrants of history, such as Nero or Diocletian.⁵¹ This is a striking rhetorical gesture, for by invoking the tyrants of imperial Rome she inverted a basic tenet of the Republic's mythology: Venice's presumed superiority to her great ancestor Rome, whose failure to preserve republican government reflected favorably upon Venice herself. This trafficking in women by the Venetian fathers, moreover, offended not only the laws of man, but also those of God and nature:

If you consider that the great number of daughters is damaging for reasons of state, because if they all married the nobility would increase and impoverish the families with the outlay of so many dowries, accept the company that is destined for you by God, without thought of money; for, in any case, to buy slaves as you do wives, it would be more decent if you spent gold, and not that they emptied treasures to buy a patron. And because in making harems for women and in other barbarous customs you imitate the abuses of the Thracians, you should also imitate them by killing male children immediately after birth, preserving only one per family. And this would be a much smaller sin than burying alive your own flesh.⁵²

Tarabotti, however, is not only concerned with forced monachization. Considered together, her writings present a strong statement concerning

women's inherent rights and their superiority to men, and an ardent protection of the female sex against misogynous attacks. Her defense of women is based, first of all, on the principle that women, like men, are endowed with free will (*libero arbitrio*). To deny them this is "the greatest abuse and the most inexcusable error," as free will—intellect, memory, and volition—is a gift to both man and woman from the highest Providence.⁵³ This liberty is a gift more precious than life itself, and she refers to Cleopatra as a most fortunate woman, not only because she was a young, rich, and beautiful queen, but also because she avoided becoming a subject of Caesar (and a demonstration of his triumphs) by killing herself.⁵⁴ Even the daughter of Jephthah, she proposes, was more blessed than she: while she too may have been sacrificed by her father, her death came quickly and therefore she was not condemned to endure her lack of freedom.⁵⁵

Indeed, Tarabotti was also not unaware of the treatment of women outside the convent, at least as revealed to her within the *parlatorio* or through the secular writings to which she apparently had access. Her lost *Purgatorio delle mal maritate* was presumably written in response to the tales of the badly treated wives whose complaints she heard in the *parlatorio* at Sant'Anna. And she learned enough about the world from her readings and foreign visitors to complain that Venetian women had far fewer freedoms than those of other countries, such as France and Germany, where they ruled their houses and ran businesses.⁵⁶ Like Marinella and Fonte, she contends that women have a superior intellect, and demands that they be permitted to enjoy the same right to education at the universities.⁵⁷ She even provides a list of both ancient and modern exempla that demonstrate women's superior intellectual abilities: Sappho, Portia, Penelope, and the Muses along with Lucrezia Marinella, Vittoria Colonna, and Isabella Andreini.⁵⁸ Yet, she takes the argument somewhat further than Marinella, arguing that despite the fact that men have been privileged to hear the great masters of their century, in the end they have shown how little they have learned, and remain more stupid and ignorant than before.⁵⁹ Thus, she did not express these beliefs as abstract concepts, but rather challenged fundamental early modern economic and social structures in terms that were specific to the political ideologies of Republican Venice and its pride in its many freedoms.

Tarabotti's impact in mid-seventeenth-century Venice, however, was not merely a result of what she said but rather the singular way in which she expressed herself. Indeed, she presents a distinctive voice that defies categorization, fashioning herself variously in comic, tragic, and satirical modes. On the one hand, she emerges from the pages of *Semplicità ingannata* and, in particular, *L'inferno monacale* as a tragic figure, whose complaints, unlike those of the heroines of myth and history, were very much bound to contemporary circumstances.⁶⁰ *L'inferno monacale*, Tarabotti's most personal work, is the first installment in her own *Divine Comedy*. Despite the use of the third person, she delves into autobiography as she contrasts the fates of two

daughters, one destined for marriage and the other for the convent, who compete for scarce economic resources like “two starving dogs fighting for food.” The marriageable daughter enjoys the pleasures of sensuality, of which, as Tarabotti describes, “all human happiness consists”; while the nun, who lives under the “most severe law of chastity” and suffers the “plainest existence under the gravest hardships,” is deprived of this most basic of human pleasures.⁶¹ Invoking the baroque metaphor of life as theater, Tarabotti describes the arrival of the young novice at the convent as the prelude to a tragedy: this is a dramatic event manifest in reality rather than feigned appearances, in which “the nun is destined to die more than once.”⁶² The final ceremony in which the vows are pronounced resembles little the joyous marriage ceremony enjoyed by the more fortunate sister. Rather, as she reiterates, it is a “funesto spettacolo,” a performance more appropriate to celebrate death than life.⁶³ At the same time, Tarabotti’s writings radiate a genuine pleasure in the art of debate, an ability to twist cleverly anti-female commonplaces to the benefit of women in a manner not dissimilar to that of the Incogniti members, and even a mischievous sense of humor. She was sufficiently well regarded in Venice to have created a kind of “salon” in the *parlatorio* at Sant’Anna, where she was visited not only by Venetian wives with complaints about their husbands, but by illustrious foreign and Venetian visitors, who provided her with access to a wide range of contemporary writings, including poems, *novelle*, and many of the more controversial works penned by the Incogniti themselves.

All of this makes it difficult to decipher the complex relationship between Tarabotti and the members of the Accademia degli Incogniti, and her role in new conceptions of the female voice in Venice. How did she grapple with the anti-female tone of so much of their writings? And, more importantly for our purposes, how did the Incogniti feel about this genuinely eloquent woman, who chose to challenge many of their misogynous—albeit teasing and satirical—attitudes toward women? Despite surface incongruities, she seems to have enjoyed a close though volatile relationship with the Incogniti, based on a combination of mutual dependency, admiration, curiosity, and, at times, antagonism. For Tarabotti, acceptance by the Incogniti was not only desirable—evidence of her success as an author—but a necessity. It was among the Incogniti that she first circulated her manuscripts and established her reputation. She was entirely dependent upon Incogniti support to get her works published—particularly from Loredano, who virtually controlled publishing in Venice, and whose approval, as her letters suggest, was also of enormous personal importance for her. Indeed, their correspondence reflects the esteem in which she held this prominent author and Venetian patrician.⁶⁴ Tarabotti was also highly effusive in her praise of such writers as Loredano and Francesco Pona and the librettists Pietro Paolo Bissari and Giovanni Francesco Busenello. In one letter to Loredano, for example, she commends him for his *Scherzi geniali*—a frequently re-

printed collection of imagined monologues for such characters as Poppaea, Seneca, and Agrippina—comparing it to the songs of Orpheus that would calm wild beasts, free Euridice from Pluto, and had the “power to alleviate the passions of those condemned to the *inferno* of the living.”⁶⁵ Tarabotti also apparently cast an approving eye over at least one contemporary opera libretto, proclaiming that Bissari’s “bellissima” *Bradamante* would make everyone realize that his “divine intellect” surpassed that of the original author “in the same way that the heavens are masters over our baseness.”⁶⁶

At the same time, many of her writings contain direct refutations of Incogniti-sponsored publications that ranged in tone from teasing refutations to direct condemnations. In a set of poems entitled “Proposte e Risposte,” for example, Bissari includes a teasing lyric about the pangs of love directed to the “belle dame ch’insieme dormendo si scherzavano” (beautiful women who tease while sleeping), and follows this with a poetic response attributed to Arcangela Tarabotti. Tarabotti’s poem parodies and inverts the sentiments expressed by Bissari; however, in her version corporeal is changed to divine love, and she locates the mortal wounds not as the pains of love but rather the lasciviousness of man, who always “nurtures evil in his heart.”⁶⁷ She expresses this same ironic attitude toward Academy writings in the opening of her *Antisatira* (discussed below), referring to the academic discourses as delusions and insanities, since they cannot discuss worthwhile material without “offending the sex that is the glory of the world.”⁶⁸

Loredano’s charges concerning female chastity elicited a strong attack from Tarabotti on men’s lack of ability to control their own libido. Men are wrong, she argues, to blame women for their inability to control their sexual appetite, which is the principal cause of every evil. It is with “looks, letters, presents, spies, messengers, and hidden and blatant assaults” that men take the “tower of chastity by storm.”⁶⁹ Then, they wish only to blame their passion on women, to whom God has given beauty: “I would like to know,” Tarabotti asks, “how it is possible for there to be impure, fornicating, and adulterous women without the cooperation of men,” who are like the Devil as they trap women into temptation.⁷⁰ Men, she complains, condemn wives for adultery for three principal reasons: because of honor, the problem of legitimate children, or the possibility of being killed by an adulterer who wishes to protect his own wife. These, Tarabotti claims, are all inventions that only allow men to sin more freely and demonstrate the ignorance of the soul.⁷¹

In the concluding portion of the posthumous *Semplicità ingannata*, she even censures a number of anti-female opponents (without mentioning any names), referring to Giuseppe Passi as a “pazzi,” denouncing the infamous Ferrante Pallavicino for his condemnations of women and nuns in *Corriero svagliato*, and chiding Loredano for his highly uncomplimentary portrayal of Eve in *L’Adamo*.⁷² Her last completed work, *Che le donne siano della spetie degli huomini. Difesa delle donne* (1650), defends women against the Venetian

publication—probably under Incogniti auspices—of a popular sixteenth-century tract arguing that women do not have souls, and thus are not of the human race.⁷³

As for Tarabotti, the source of her appeal to the Incogniti may have rested on her bold rejection of authority—particularly ecclesiastical—and her sharp condemnation of religious hypocrisy, a theme that recurs frequently in Incogniti writings. Indeed, as shown by the prefatory sonnets and letters in *Paradiso monacale*, she earned considerable praise from members as well as from the more general Venetian public, particularly when her views were expressed somewhat less stridently. Loredano was certainly Tarabotti's literary champion; despite the disagreements suggested in the facetious letter quoted above, he certainly facilitated the publication of her works and protected her from attack. And, as noted earlier, she had support from such writers as Paolo Pietro Bissari and Giovanni Dandolo.⁷⁴ Giovanni Francesco Busenello, author of the librettos for *La Didone* and *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, was also acquainted with Tarabotti. We know that he visited her at least once in the *parlatorio*, and that she was captivated both by him and his works.⁷⁵

Nonetheless, Tarabotti's primary focus was the elimination of forced monachization, an essential safety valve for the management of Venice's female population. Moreover, the hypocrisy that she condemned so vehemently was practiced not only within the Church, but by the entire Venetian patriarchy—to which many of the Incogniti themselves belonged. Despite the fact that men were also oppressed through marriage restrictions—Ferante Pallavicino himself was a reluctant monk—theoretical agreement with Tarabotti on Church hypocrisy did not necessarily mean that they would tolerate the social implications of the elimination of even the most benign form of forced monachization. The novelty of the "literary nun" seems to have faded as she attacked the patriarchal structures upon which Venice proudly stood or when she spoke in a voice that was deemed "impertinent."

This is particularly apparent in what was perhaps the most vehement controversy in which Tarabotti was involved, the debate about female luxury initiated by the publication of Francesco Buoninsegni's satire entitled *Contro 'l lusso donnesco*.⁷⁶ The details of the controversy are worth recounting in that they reveal much both about the popularity of the topic and its volatility, particularly when Tarabotti herself was involved. Buoninsegni's satire was originally read at the Accademia degli Intronati in Siena to great applause. In 1639, the publisher Sarzina put forth the satire with a somewhat mild and jovial response by Giovanni Battista Torretti, dedicated to Loredano.⁷⁷ Some six years later, the publisher Valvasense, perhaps recognizing the marketing opportunity in such debates, published Buoninsegni's satire along with Tarabotti's response, entitled the *Antisatira*. Even before its publication her response caused a fair amount of furor: she had first shown it to her brother-in-law Giacomo Pighetti, who sent it to his former ally Pa-

dre Angelico Aprosio.⁷⁸ Both urged her to retract the book, which she apparently refused to do, and Aprosio retaliated by writing his own highly polemical response, entitled *La maschera scoperta di Filofilo Misonoponero in risposta dell'Antisatira D.A.T. scritto contra la Satira Menippea del Signor Francesco Buoninsegni*.⁷⁹ Aprosio claims to have been highly offended by the *Antisatira*, which he describes as “full of a thousand mistakes and not a few impertinences.” His opposition to her is quite overt and personal; he condemns her chattering against the masculine sex, and calls her such names “La Signora Smascherata” and “La Signora Apologista.” (His mockery is apparent in his veiled allusions to her lameness.) *La maschera scoperta* was never published, largely due to the effort of Tarabotti and her highly placed friends, including Loredano, although it probably received a fairly broad distribution in manuscript.⁸⁰ Instead, Aprosio recycled some of this material into a somewhat less blatantly misogynistic tract, *Lo scudo di Rinaldo overo lo specchio di disganno* (1646), which ostensibly takes female fashion as its primary topic, intermingling both praise and blame of the female sex.

That Tarabotti, from behind the convent walls, should choose to defend women's right to fashion and luxuries is particularly intriguing in both a theatrical and a non-theatrical context. The seriousness and even virulence of the rhetoric of writers on both sides of the debate suggest that there was considerably more at stake than the question of women's jewelry or fashion. At the heart of the question regarding “female luxuries” are a number of issues that concern women's public appearances, the power of female beauty, the enticement of adornments, and the connection of these matters to women's moral behavior. This has important implications with regard to not only the way that women were viewed and treated in mid-seventeenth-century Venice, but also the ways in which they were represented on the operatic stage.

Both Buoninsegni and Aprosio invest female luxuries—jewelry, silks, clothing, and fashions—with a variety of metaphorical meanings that demonstrate their danger to men and society. Buoninsegni describes gold, jewels, and women's dresses as weapons that not only pierce the hearts of young men, but compensate for a woman's biological deficiencies: women use these because they do not possess more “sturdy members.”⁸¹ All of this, of course, is associated with uncontrolled female sexuality. He demonstrates the link between female ornamentation and promiscuity with etymological evidence by showing the relationship between *lusso* (luxury) and *lussuria* (wantonness), a connection that, we shall see, is exploited in the treatment of wanton women in several operas treated in this study. Moreover, excessive female preoccupation with luxury is also evidence of women's slavery to men, and is part of their punishment for the “antico peccato”—Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden.⁸² Buoninsegni even finds a way to associate female vanity with women's inferior intellect. He argues that “no one can dissuade women from vanity in their clothing,” if first we do not “undress” them of

their ignorance.⁸³ Women dress themselves in silk, which is nothing more than the excrement of worms; thus woman herself is "nothing more than a worm that rots the hearts of lovers, a delicate vomit of nature, and a gilded tomb of human hearts."⁸⁴

One of the striking elements of Buoninsegni's satire is the way in which he refashions several well-known tales from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, endowing women's clothing with the power to enact various transformations. For example, he compares silk with Deianira's poisoned robe that killed Hercules. This poisoned only its wearer, Buoninsegni tells us; women's silk gowns do not actually kill those who wear them (even though he believes that would be far better), but rather the husbands who pay for them and the lovers who gaze upon them.⁸⁵ The famous high wooden shoes worn by Venetian women also inspired Ovidian musings. As in the story of Daphne and Apollo, Buoninsegni speculates that all women will someday turn themselves into trees, beginning not with the head but with the feet.⁸⁶ (And if they wear shoes of gold and silver, he notes, "one could say that they were upside-down statues, with feet of gold and a head of wood.") He concludes facetiously that women's heads cannot be wood, because a woman's true head is man himself.⁸⁷ Finally, anticipating the fury of his female readers at his condemnations of women's clothing, Buoninsegni provides another interpretation of an Ovidian tale, this time invoking the most famous of operatic heroes, Orpheus. First, he imagines that only the voice of an Orpheus could animate these senseless articles of clothing: even though he does not possess Orpheus's voice, he will share his death, as one is "safer among the infernal furies than between two offended women." Orpheus, who was admired by all living things and nature, as well as monsters and furies, was persecuted by the Bacchantes. The stones, Buoninsegni tells us, may have come to life through Orpheus's song, but in the hands of the Bacchantes they "returned to their proper nature," now killing the same Orpheus who had silenced the barking of Cerberus. This only provides testimony to the fact that "hell is more easily placated than the heart of a woman."⁸⁸

Tarabotti responds to nearly every one of Buoninsegni's accusations, cleverly demonstrating the variety of gendered interpretations for any given literary citation. In her reading of the Orpheus tale, for example, the culprit is men's hatred of women, and she accuses storytellers of exaggerating the cruelty of the Bacchantes, commending their pity for giving death to a profane singer who, like Buoninsegni himself, was known less for the "sweetness of song" than for "loathing for the female sex."⁸⁹ First, she suggests that Buoninsegni and his colleagues have little to fear from women in the way of revenge or reprisals: women are not vindictive or scornful, but most benign and indulgent, with great souls that do not seek vengeance; it is only through the evil of men that they are deprived of either arms or the knowledge with which they could avenge themselves.⁹⁰ Second, she shows insight into the important role that luxuries play in relation to dowries and marriage prac-

tices. Men do everything possible to acquire wives with large dowries (they bring their intended wives gifts and treasures, and profess their ardor); yet, once married, they want them to dress “all’uso della nostra prima madre,” in the manner of our first mother (i.e., with nothing). This, she argues, is only so they can squander their money to adorn prostitutes: “these are the men who deafen the air with their laments?”⁹¹ Third, she maintains that men are equally or more guilty of indulging in excesses (which they use for their own immoral purposes). By condemning female beauty and luxuries, men show their hypocrisy—particularly, she argues, when there is no lack of examples of vain and lascivious men, who are “equally dedicated to their hair, rouge, odors, and perfumes and all of the things that were cursed with so much hatred in women by our most gentle satirist.”⁹² By such vain acts as dying their beards, she observes, they should have been mentioned by Ovid as a miracle of the gods for having been transformed from men into beasts.⁹³

Finally, she proposes that female beauty is part of the way in which women demonstrate their greater glory and moral superiority. Woman was given by God to be a loving companion to man, as a gift. Female beauty is part of a woman’s inheritance from God. Self-adornment is one of the ways in which a woman glorifies that gift that is hers alone and is an integral means of self-expression.⁹⁴ (Indeed, in *L’Inferno monacale* Tarabotti writes movingly of her own personal tragedy of the loss of hair and the necessity of wearing black, as required by Benedictine practice.)

This, therefore, is not a proposal for equality between the sexes. In Tarabotti’s view, beauty is a special virtue of women. Female adornments and beauty are thus linked to the beauty of the soul. Moreover, self-adornment is a female right, and one of the only available means of female self-expression outside of the domestic sphere. By responding to Buoninsegni, Tarabotti trespassed across two invisible boundaries. First of all, she was a nun who chose to speak in favor of female fashions and ornamentation and perhaps, as even she herself suggests, chose to ignore some of the Benedictine strictures regarding female dress.⁹⁵ Second, by publishing this bold refutation of Buoninsegni, Tarabotti was being inappropriately eloquent in a conventionally male arena, particularly given the fact that she had also succeeded in having suppressed Aprosio’s own response.

For Padre Angelico Aprosio, the source of the problem was indeed female self-expression, as is apparent in his published response, *Lo scudo di Rinaldo ovvero lo specchio del disinganno*, a work that ostensibly deals with female fashion or “la moda.”⁹⁶ Like Buoninsegni, Aprosio also views women’s luxuries as weapons from which men need to be protected—a point made by the reference to Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* in his title: “Since knowing that many things needed to be treated by me that have nothing to do with ‘La Moda,’ and having to title my work, I didn’t wish to call it simply

Scudo di Rinaldo, but I wanted to add *Specchio del disinganno*. Fashion is contained under the shield, and the other things under the mirror."⁹⁷

The title reminds Aprosio's readers about a complex set of poetic conceits that trace Armida's enchantment of Rinaldo and his subsequent disenchantment, described by Richard Wallace in a study of Achilles' shield in the famous cross-dressing incident in Scyros.⁹⁸ The mirror, a symbol of female vanity and lasciviousness, is associated with Rinaldo's love for Armida: she gazes at herself in the mirror while Rinaldo, with his head resting in her lap, sees the entire scene reflected in her eyes. Later, it is his shield (like that of Achilles) that becomes a mirror that reveals the truth of his enchantment. Wallace describes this as follows: "When the hero sees himself reflected in the shield, shamefully bedecked in soft clothes, rich ornaments, and flowers, he awakes from his enchantment with a shock. He remembers his mission as a crusader and suffers agonies of embarrassment for his feminine surrender."⁹⁹ Aprosio's book thus holds up Rinaldo's shield to men, warning them against the weapons of Venus and the consequences of female luxury and influence. But the mirror of deceit also refers to the falseness of the image reflected by Armida's gaze, the danger of female beauty, and the anti-female discourse with which the book is filled.

Unlike Buoninsegni, who was addressing an academic audience in a somewhat jovial manner, Aprosio takes a pseudo-scholarly approach. The first portion of the book, for example, purports to be a historical survey of women's clothing and fashion. Chapter 2 examines the origins and purposes of clothing and chapter 3 traces how clothing was used by the ancients, concluding, notably, with a section in which women are condemned (as the author himself asserts). Chapter 4 describes how mankind "learned of the invention of vain clothing from the Devil and why he would want to teach this more quickly to women than to men." After this fanciful historical reconstruction, he directs his attention to specific female self-beautifications (makeup, hair, jewelry, etc.), interweaving more direct comments about female virtues, the culpability of Eve, women's greed, and speculation as to why women should be prevented from studying literature or bearing arms. In sum, Aprosio uses his own erudition as a weapon with which to separate Tarabotti and women from the world of men, demonstrating his superior education with a multitude of Greek and Latin citations, no doubt intended to marginalize female readers and condemn Tarabotti and her contemporaries for their limited intellectual capacity. Their lack of learning, he claims, is not the fault of men, but a result of their inherent laziness: they make an effort only for the sake of vanity or greed: "They are truly lovers of letters," he exclaims, "but of those they read imprinted on the coins of silver and gold."¹⁰⁰

Clothes and jewelry, moreover, are not the only female adornments with which Aprosio is concerned. In one of the more curious chapters of the

book, he examines the female breast as an “ornament” and considers the question whether women should expose their breasts in public. First, he explores the biblical significance of this particular female ornament. Breasts, like clothing, are among the devices that women use to enslave men, and provide evidence of their responsibility for the “peccato antico.” The Devil used the apple to introduce sin into the world; thus, he also persuaded women to reveal the “apples of their chests” as a means of transfusing poison to all the descendents of Adam.¹⁰¹ Thus, he ingeniously unites one of the most often-cited arguments against women—their responsibility for the fall of man in the Garden of Eden—with a denunciation of the most visible symbol of their sexuality, their breasts.¹⁰² Nevertheless, as with so many of the Incogniti responses to female sexuality, Apro시오 does not simply condemn. After providing a teasing discussion of women’s habits regarding breast exposure (“they expose them at home for their dearest lovers, yet cover them up on the streets”), he proceeds to describe the ideal breast: medium size (if too large, women appear more like beasts), purer than alabaster, whiter than the whitest rose. Yet, lest we assume that such a glowing description was intended in praise of women’s physical beauty, he informs the reader how few women possess breasts that measure up to these standards; it is only by covering them up that they can convince men that they are beautiful.¹⁰³ Apro시오 may claim to be condemning female ornamentation—including the exposure of their breasts—yet he also demonstrates a kind of prurient fascination with female bodies in his obsession with this most feminine adornment, and he very likely sought to arouse more than indignation in his readers.

LUXURIES AND THE TRANSVESTITE BODY

The controversies about female luxury and fashion raise important points about female rhetoric that are of primary importance for the fashioning of women both on and off the stage. Unlike Tarabotti, who encouraged women to luxuriate in precisely that which made them feminine and who did so with a voice that resonated far beyond the convent walls, Apro시오 and his colleagues linked a woman’s self-beautification with the power to attract, transform, and ultimately wound men. Moreover, they did so in a way that collapsed together concerns about both visual and aural transgressions: Tarabotti’s sin was not only her defense of women’s luxuries but the loud voice with which she defended them—the errors, the impertinences, and the power with which she expressed herself. Even breasts, an endowment that could not be purchased, were commodities that spoke to the advantage or disadvantage of a woman. Neither writer makes any specific reference to theatrical women; nevertheless, one would suspect that the anxiety demonstrated in the writings about female luxuries could not help but have been influenced by women on the operatic stage, whose presence was surely far

more dangerous than that of the Venetian women to which Buoninsegni and Aprosio ostensibly referred. This also had musical consequences. For, if silence was the ornament most befitting a woman, then the embellishments used by operatic women could scarcely have failed to incite desire and criticism.

At the same time, a striking element of this debate is the extent to which clothing, luxuries, jewelry, and even speech itself are seen to destabilize societal divisions and blur the boundaries that separate one group—or gender—from another. Writing books, an elite education, or the trappings of scholarship might turn silent women into eloquent men; an inappropriate interest in fashion and self-beautification might turn a nun into a wife or even a courtesan. Conspicuous consumption demonstrated the power and influence of a given family or testified to the size of a dowry, but it could also be used to create the illusion of wealth, political influence, or purity. Clothing and luxuries differentiated the goddess Venus from the Virgin Mary—and could thus define the moral or immoral attributes of Venice's own female icon. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, as Deborah Laycock has shown, the “metamorphosizing” and destabilizing power of female luxuries was discussed explicitly in Ovidian terms, reminding us of Buoninsegni's invocation of Ovid in his discussion of female luxury.¹⁰⁴ Female fashions have a disruptive power; fashion caused “the disappearance of the body” and as Aprosio had noted was part of the way in which women were able to change their appearances in unnatural ways.¹⁰⁵ Clothes, in the words of some English writers, thus became a means of achieving an Ovidian-like transformation, of making the natural, biological functions of the body all but disappear.

Aprosio explores this same anxiety about fashion and gender difference in *Lo scudo di Rinaldo*, in a chapter entitled “Se gli uomini in Donne, e le Donne in uomini possano trasformarsi” (if women can transform themselves into men or men into women). Perhaps sensitive to Tarabotti's accusations concerning male vanities, Aprosio states his concern about the feminizing effect of excessive luxuries: “the sight of today's youth, more effeminate than ever, makes me doubt whether men change into women naturally, or vice versa from women into men.”¹⁰⁶ He supports this notion with a well-known comment of Pliny's—that the transformation of females into males is not an idle tale. He then goes on to mention one of the many popular stories about sexual transformation, in which a woman disguised as a man marries a woman, only to have her true sex discovered shortly after the wedding, to considerable public consternation.¹⁰⁷ The real danger of all of this is apparent in his final warning to his readers, namely that “women in masculine clothing will acquire that which man has lost through his vanity with female ornaments.” If men dress like women and women like men, the men will only jeopardize their social and economic superiority to women. And he cites the example of Venetian men who, “raised an arm and a half

by *zoccoli* [high Venetian shoes],” sustained by a servant on each side, appear in the squares and churches of Venice among the other women, reminiscent of Achilles in the court of Lycomedes. However, Achilles, Apro시오 tells us, was forced by his mother to wear these clothes; the men whom he seeks to condemn do it for vanity or insanity.¹⁰⁸ Notably, Achilles was a well-known figure in a contemporary opera, *La finta pazza*, one of the most widely disseminated and advertised Incogniti opera productions of the century.¹⁰⁹

Surprisingly, this is precisely the same issue that underlies a second controversy with which Tarabotti was also involved. In 1647, there was published in Venice yet another version of the pamphlet refuting the existence of women’s souls that had been in circulation in northern Europe at various times in the preceding century.¹¹⁰ As Spini and Maclean point out, this particular argument was not necessarily directed against women, but rather against Protestants who had sought to demonstrate the ways in which theological arguments could be constructed to defend the indefensible. Nevertheless, the reappearance of this document in Venice at this time is particularly significant. The fictional author, Orazio Plato—who Zanette hypothesized was really Loredano—may not have been concerned with the original purpose of the work.¹¹¹ As the publisher Valvasense realized, any discourse dealing with the soul and the question of immortality—not to mention women—was certain to appeal to the same readers who voraciously consumed Incogniti writings. Unfortunately, after having narrowly missed being censured for a number of other controversial publications (including many by Incogniti), this was the last straw for Valvasense: he was brought up on charges of blasphemy.¹¹² Tarabotti, already positioned to defend the female sex against all detractors, interpreted the work as an attack against women that needed refutation. She devoted her last completed work to the purpose: *Che le donne siano della spetie degli huomini. Difesa delle donne* (1650), also published under a pseudonym and with false publication information.¹¹³ A similar defense was offered a year later in Filippo Maria Bonini’s *La donna combattuta dall’empio e difesa*.¹¹⁴

Many of the arguments presented by the writer of the original pamphlet focus on the supposition that the Bible does not sufficiently clarify whether women were actually members of the human race. At issue, for example, are varying interpretations of the passages in Genesis concerning Eve, the favorite focus of most pro- and anti-female debates. If she is a helpmate, is she really another human being? Why didn’t God just create another man? Woman is not human, but rather merely a means of procreation, and the mother of Cain and Abel. How can a woman be human if she is created in the image of man? If Christ had been intended to save the souls of women, why did he only appear as a man? Bonini and Tarabotti both provide detailed refutations of each of the points made by the anonymous writer, combining commonplaces with some ingenious new arguments.¹¹⁵

For our purposes, what is most intriguing is the way in which theological

arguments concerning men's and women's souls led to some revealing speculations about the relative instability of male and female bodies. The proposition that men and women truly belong to the same species seems, at least in the minds of some commentators, strikingly similar to what Thomas Laqueur has called the "one-sex model." Thus, Bonini uses the hermaphrodite to argue for women's humanity:

If sex differentiates the species, as this wicked one [author of the tract] argues, he must also affirm either that an individual is contrary to himself or that, without the support of so much philosophy, illusion really exists in nature. Take the example of the hermaphrodite, who participates equally in two sexes, whereby it can be said of him that he is man and an animal: rational because he is a male, and not man but beast because he is female. Or else he would at the same time be man and not man, and one would affirm of him at the same time and according to the same reason a contradictory proposition.¹¹⁶

The image of the hermaphrodite that Stallybrass and Jones associate with anxiety about gender categories thus demonstrates that men and women have to be of the same species. For Bonini, the hermaphrodite is an immutable fact of science: he has no doubt that there are beings who are simultaneously of both sexes. This then is proof that women are human, for while a creature can be both woman and man, he or she cannot be both human and inhuman. This allows him to speculate about the same topic that concerned Aprosio: women who turn into men and men who turn into women. He describes the situation as follows:

In order to demonstrate more clearly the perfidious absurdity of this heretic, one can add that if it is only sex that constitutes and distinguishes the species, one could verify that without internal mutation, man can turn into that which is not man: inasmuch as there are many stories about some [men] who lived for many years as women [*in sesso Donnesco*], as not long ago in Genoa someone in the guise of a nun was seen to pass from one sex to the other; and a number of others, having been women for many years, varying thereafter sex, instead of taking a husband, wished for a wife.¹¹⁷

This may indeed seem like a curious claim for a priest intent on defending women and Christian theology against blasphemy. Yet, Bonini's citation of well-known stories in which men and women transform from one into the other is by no means unusual; rather, for him the question of one species—and the nature of the soul—was somehow conflated with the Galenian concepts of sexual difference. Thus, if men and women are part of one sex, as Thomas Laqueur describes, "whose more perfect exemplars were easily deemed male and whose decidedly less perfect ones were labeled female," they are necessarily part of the same species.¹¹⁸ But this was precisely the reason that cultural boundaries of gender—designated by clothing and societal roles—were so important. As Laqueur notes, "in the absence of a purportedly stable system of two sexes, strict sumptuary laws of the body at-

tempted to stabilize gender—woman as woman and man as man—and punishments for transgressions were quite severe.”¹¹⁹

Laqueur’s mention of sumptuary laws in this context returns us full circle to Buoninsegni, Tarabotti, and Aprosio. As with the debate about luxuries, the argument about men’s and women’s souls revealed concerns about the fluidity between the genders that was explored simultaneously on the operatic stage. By condemning or praising female luxuries and focusing on the outward adornment of the body, Tarabotti, Aprosio, and Buoninsegni attempted to differentiate the two genders, to reassert their individual natures and the virtues with which they were associated. By reconsidering the question of women’s membership in the human race, they actually reaffirmed the one-sex system in a world in which the disposition of souls was surprisingly more secure than scientific knowledge of the body. By participating in the debate, both Tarabotti and the Incogniti demonstrated the increased volatility of such issues at mid-century for those directly and indirectly involved in opera. It is in this context as well that we can understand the extraordinary experimentation with gender roles in Venetian opera, the play with transvestism, same-sex desire, effeminate men, and heroic women. For so many operatic characters—as with their creators—gender was a territory with unclear boundaries, and the stage was the ideal place upon which men and women could variously be differentiated or conflated by the outward trappings of “la moda.”

EROTICISMS AND THE SENSITIVE EAR

Aprosio’s discussion of women’s breasts and Loredano’s discourse on prostitution demonstrate another important facet of Incogniti thought that had repercussions with regard to the representation of sexually potent operatic women: the role of women as a source of erotic pleasure. The concern about female chastity and beauty—even when chastity was praised and beauty condemned—seemed to go hand in hand with a consideration of the benefits and risks of sexual congress with women—its necessity for physical and mental health, its importance as a means of self-expression and escape from ecclesiastical suppression, as well as its negative consequences for man and society. This interest in physical pleasure and erotica, as we have seen, was by no means disassociated from the Incogniti’s literary and philosophical inclinations. Several members of the Accademia degli Incogniti, Loredano, Angelico Aprosio, and Scipione Errico, demonstrated their interest in erotic poetry through their defense of Giambattista Marino; Errico, for example, dramatizes Marino’s superiority to all previous poets in a dialogue in the tradition of Boccacini’s *Ragguagli al Parnaso*.¹²⁰

The belief in the right of man to express his physical urges, as we have already discussed, was also a natural extension of Cremonini’s philosophies and speculations concerning the origin of religion, the mortality of

the soul, and the importance of natural instinct. Man had an inherent right to sexual pleasure and to explore his desires that were gifts from God Himself. It is only religious hypocrisy—a religion whose origins were essentially political—that attempted to squelch that instinct.

Much of this is reflected in the fascination with and condemnation of courtesans that surface in a number of Incogniti publications. In Francesco Pona's *La lucerna*, as we recall, the young student Eureka listens to the lantern's tale of her experiences as a Venetian courtesan with far more rapt attention than to the lessons of his teacher Cremonini, considered "another Aristotle."¹²¹ Ferrante Pallavicino's *La retorica delle puttane*, the courtesan dialogue and parody of a Jesuit rhetorical manual considered earlier, provides one of the most explicit philosophical justifications of man's right to sexual gratification—a basic biological need that can no more be repressed than the desire to eat or to drink.¹²² And while some may have less need for wine or food, complete deprivation is necessarily fatal. At the same time, a striking element of Pallavicino's formulation is the way in which he juxtaposes this praise of sexual gratification with a condemnation of the same prostitutes who provide it. Like Aprosio's *Lo scudo di Rinaldo*, one ostensible purpose of *La retorica delle puttane* was to teach young men about the deceits and tricks of the courtesans. Sexual pleasure came with an inherent danger. That is, the object of this desire—women—could enchain men to their bodies, stupify them with their kisses, and deceive them with luxuries and lies, all of which could take away a man's strength.

It is this apparent dilemma that underlies many of the more salacious writings from Incogniti pens, in which warnings about the sexual dangers of women are deftly combined with prose that is in itself highly erotic. This is the case, for example, in Francesco Pona's *La Messalina*, a travesty of Tacitus's history of Messalina, discussed in chapter 7, and one of the most frequently banned books of the century.¹²³ Pona declares that the purpose of the book is to warn women about the dangers of their own sexuality, a lesson that they are supposed to glean from Messalina's degenerate nature. This didactic purpose, however, is but a thin disguise for a blatant work of pornography, which explores Messalina's many pleasures in lurid detail that is both arousing and chilling.¹²⁴ Indeed, we are left wondering whether the work is truly intended for the women to whom it is ostensibly addressed, or for men who will be both aroused by Messalina and warned by the less than covert message of her sexuality.

In the context of this pervasive anti-female sentiment, desire for male exclusivity, and disdain for conventional moral strictures, Incogniti writers also touched on another avenue for sexual fulfillment: the homoerotic.¹²⁵ In some instances, forbidden desires could be explored more safely in the seemingly innocent realm of the pagan gods. Explorations of the sexual antics of the gods were scarcely new; sixteenth-century writers, engravers, and painters had early on discovered the relative safety of using mythological

figures to represent illicit activities. As we shall see in chapter 5, Ovid's tales provided an ideal opportunity to examine less conventional modes of sexual pleasure. Several poems by the librettist Giovanni Francesco Busenello explore desire between men in a mythological or allegorical setting. The figure Sodomy played a prominent role in a lengthy poem entitled *La fecondità*, as one of the chief defendants against Fertility's charges concerning the displacement of procreative forms of lovemaking. Busenello returns to this subject in such poems as *Il rapimento di Ganimede*, in which Jove's attraction to the young Ganymede inspires intense jealousy in a shrewishly constructed Juno, whose wifely demands were deemed incompatible with Jove's exercise of power and right to pleasure.¹²⁶ (Indeed, the librettist Giovanni Faustini represents Juno in a quite similar way in *La Calisto*, although the primary topic is female same-sex desire.)

The Incogniti dilemma with regard to women and sexuality is, perhaps, expressed most explicitly in Antonio Rocco's notorious book *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*. Rocco, a priest and lecturer in philosophy at San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, had also studied with Cremonini and was associated with Loredano and the Incogniti. His discourses appear in both the *Discorsi accademici de Signori Incogniti* and the *Veglie de Signori Unisoni*. Rocco was well known for his often heretical views and publications, from which he earned a substantial file of denunciations from the Holy Office.¹²⁷ He was denounced not only for his opinions on the mortality of the soul, but also for his controversial views on the necessity of sexual pleasure, whether obtained in a "natural or unnatural" manner.¹²⁸

In *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, Rocco carries to its logical conclusion the apparent dilemma between Incogniti misogyny and the necessity for physical pleasure. A Greek tutor, Filotimo, using his most eloquent rhetorical means, persuades his young and beautiful male student Alcibiade that homosexuality—specifically sodomy—is the most ideal form of sexual congress.¹²⁹ Rocco is particularly resourceful in adapting this pseudo-Platonic version of male love to suit Venetian concerns, exploiting all of Cremonini's questions about the immortality of the soul and the political uses of religion, brilliantly justifying even the practice of sodomy within a Christian context. The condemnation of Sodom and Gomorrah—the strongest biblical admonition against sodomy—as Filotimo argues, was motivated by political expediency rather than any absolute sense of morality. Since men often prefer boys to women, it has been necessary to pass legislation against these acts to ensure the continuation of the species. Consensual sex should never be prohibited; since free will is a gift of God, why would God keep us from enjoying the activities that we desire? Filotimo is also quite clear about the political significance of his instructions for the proper training of the young man. The proposed carnal relationship is an essential part of the way in which the tutor—older, wiser, and with full virile capacities—prepares the young man to assume his adult role as a citizen of the Republic.¹³⁰

One of the most significant differences between Filotimo's arguments and the ancient Greek view of such relationships has to do with the attitudes toward women.¹³¹ More than perhaps any other work, *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola* exemplifies the apparently comfortable marriage between eroticism and misogyny. The tutor Filotimo argues that congress between a man and a boy is not only desirable and pleasurable but superior to that which can be experienced with women. In so doing, he reveals his own horror of the female sex, which is stimulated not only by the emotional and spiritual nature of women, but by their bodies as well. He describes the vastness of the vagina, an ocean to which there is no bottom, and he compares it to the "essence of the female which is so full of the violence of grief and cries that one finds no other substance."¹³² Moreover, women's menstrual fluids are the "most bitter and filthy poison," the cause of numerous diseases and other ills.¹³³ With considerably more virulence than Loredano, the tutor Filotimo accuses women of feigning chastity, pretending to be the most pure virgins, accusing men of sexual violations, while in reality they have allowed their bodies to be used by a variety of low-born men.¹³⁴ Women, Filotimo argues, cause universal ruin, war, disease, and the fall of kingdoms in their desire to gain control over men; boys, however, are rarely guilty of such crimes.¹³⁵ Indeed, this is precisely the source of Filotimo's attraction to Alcibiade. He is drawn to this young boy not simply because he is an attractive youth. Rather, the description is explicit about his androgyny—his "bellezza femminile." Alcibiade's perfection consists in his possession of female beauty in a male body. Boys are thus the ideal objects for male love because they are superior to women both spiritually and physically. And the particular pleasure of boys is that they offer the possibility of enjoying feminine beauty without the necessity of congress with a woman.

But there is another essential point that emerges not only from *Alcibiade fanciullo a scola* but also from the other erotic texts penned by Incogniti writers that is of primary importance in our consideration of opera: the power of the voice and the vulnerability of the ear in any erotic exchange. This is an issue that is particularly apparent in these ostensibly pedagogical texts, such as *La retorica delle puttane* or *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, in which the "seduction" of the student is accomplished by means of the pedagogue's rhetorical power. In Pallavicino's *La retorica delle puttane*, as we recall, sexual arousal is linked intrinsically with eloquence. The instructress persuades the young girl to enter into the profession of prostitution by means of her own rhetorical skills. While the true scandal of the text, as Laura Coci has emphasized, might well be Pallavicino's use of a well-known Jesuit rhetoric textbook (thus, it could be argued that his concern is not women or sexuality but rather the Society of Jesus), the result is nonetheless that the teaching of rhetoric—this most privileged art of persuasion—is transplanted from a sacred male context into an illicit female society to be used as a method for instruction in sexual practices and female deceit. The lesson

about the power of the voice is doubly reinforced. Pallavicino's instructress locates eroticism in the aural rather than the visual realm, and teaches her student to do the same. This is particularly apparent in the fifteenth and final lesson on "pronunziazione"—that is to say, voice and gesture. Singing, as the instructress emphasizes, is one of the most important means of seduction, and knowledge of music is described as an essential part of the courtesan's arsenal. The instructress is quite explicit about the role of music in the rhetoric of the prostitute. Song, and the "sonorous and variable voice" used according to the "dogma of music," is a singular allurements for love, which will make attractive even the most deformed.¹³⁶ She even proposes that music is an enhancement for those who might want to assume another gender temporarily; variety, she reminds her student, is "the mother of tastes." And the instructress goes on to recommend that song is particularly useful for men "languishing in the extremes of love" in order to produce a "marvelous effect." (Of course she warns that the musician must take care not to arouse a contrary affect that might discourage lovemaking, thus using the power of eloquence for the wrong purpose.)¹³⁷

Like the dialogue between the young and the old courtesans, the lesson between Alcibiade and Filotimo also relies on a highly persuasive and erotic rhetorical style, invoking a host of Renaissance associations between rhetoric, effeminacy, and even rape and penetration.¹³⁸ The tutor Filotimo seduces both Alcibiade and the reader by aural means, thus capitalizing on contemporary aesthetic theories and anatomical treatises that described the ear as the most sensitive of organs.¹³⁹ Thus, the seduction in both *La retorica delle puttane* and *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola* operates simultaneously on several levels: Filotimo seduces Alcibiade through his persuasive logic, a temptation that enters the young man's mind through the ear, arousing the reader at the same time. Alcibiade, however, had already captivated Filotimo by the beauty and, in particular, the sweetness of his voice:

But the inestimable joy of this treasure was the angelic nature of the speech. With the sweetest voice he expressed readily the letters of the words, with pauses so well ordered he ended the sentences of each thought, that in the guise of a siren, he enchanted the souls with sweetness, not to deprive them of life but to torment them, alive, with love. At the opening of that heavenly mouth, the foolish and bewitched mouths of those that surrounded him opened, they exhaled their souls in order to give his soul a more agreeable home. The human speech of distinct notes has the unconquerable force to subdue even the beasts and make sensible the rocks, as is said ingeniously of Orpheus and Amphion.¹⁴⁰

Both of these examples of erotica, written during the rise of opera in Venice, demonstrate a new understanding of the power of the voice that goes well beyond what the Florentine inventors of opera seem to have imagined: its ability to arouse not only the emotions of the listeners, but also

their sexual desire. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Pallavicino's instructress teaches her student about the value of a song as an aphrodisiac, when men are physically exhausted by the demands of passion. But Rocco's description of Alcibiade's voice introduces yet another important element. It is by means of his sweet "feminine" voice that Alcibiade takes on the "guise of a siren"; unlike a woman, however, this is a heavenly rather than a dangerous power, one that "enchants souls with sweetness" rather than depriving them of life and love. Rocco, perhaps thinking of the castrato, thus not only privileges high voices—an integral aspect of opera production in much of the Seicento—but reminds us once again of the danger associated with female eloquence and its links to illicit sexuality. Alcibiade, the young and beautiful object of male desire, possesses a female voice in a male body.

THE FORCE OF LOVE: DRAMATIZING THE DEBATES

In the writings considered above, women, bodies, gender, and sexuality are discussed within a context that is largely theoretical. It remains to be seen to what extent and in what way these same ideas were integrated into the opera librettos produced under Incogniti auspices. It is important to emphasize that among the numerous publications by those associated with the Accademia degli Incogniti, discussion of issues concerning women and sexuality was by no means restricted to abstract pseudo-philosophical exercises. Rather, the academicians injected their views about such issues into a wide range of dramatic and fictional works—of which the opera libretto was but one example—and they did so by means of transforming the exceptional women of myth and history. We have already discussed briefly the ways in which Francesco Pona travestied Tacitus in order to present Messalina as an exemplum of excessive female sexuality. Other women from Tacitus were similarly exploited for their value as exemplary women: in Ferrante Pallavicino's *Due Agrippine* (which will be discussed later in the context of the literary background for *L'incoronazione di Poppea*), the author closely examines the activities of these two ruthless Roman empresses, whose power and ambition wreaked havoc in the Roman imperial court.¹⁴¹ Strikingly, Pallavicino not only isolates and expands upon Tacitus's portrayal of these women, but endows the two Agrippinas with extraordinary rhetorical power, creating for them lengthy speeches with which they seduce, manipulate, as well as contrive their own doom and that of the men and women around them.

Such delight in the dramatic representation of significant figures from myth and history is also evident in other works, such as Pietro Michiele's *Epistole heroiche*, which consists of fictional letters from characters in Tasso and Ariosto, modeled after Ovid's *Heroides*. Both Loredano and Pallavicino published sets of *scene retoriche* in which the most pivotal speeches of famous women (and some men) of myth and history are imagined into existence.

Included are a number of characters who were also to attain fame on the operatic stage: Loredano, for example, creates the scene in which Poppaea pleads with Nero to repudiate Octavia, and Pallavicino represents the lascivious Semiramis speaking with her son.¹⁴² Francesco Pona's *Galleria delle donne* (certainly inspired by Marino's *Galleria*) displays women in a gallery of literary portraits as lascivious, sacred, or chaste.¹⁴³ And the poetry of Giovanni Francesco Busenello reflects an apparent preoccupation with female characters, featuring numerous imagined speeches and laments from the mouths of prominent female characters: Agrippina (the elder), Cleopatra, cloistered nuns, etc.¹⁴⁴

Incogniti writers also produced a number of plays—non-operatic dramatic works—that focused on the representation of women characters. Francesco Pona's *Cleopatra tragedia*, for example, demonstrates the consequences of her sensuality and Mark Anthony's apparent weakness.¹⁴⁵ The excesses of power and sexuality of two women familiar from Tacitus, Messalina and Agrippina, were also featured in Incogniti plays, published in 1656–57 by Pietro Zaguri to be performed as private entertainments at the home of Giovanni Sanudo.¹⁴⁶

Loredano's play *La forza d'amore* was published in 1662, a time when opera was a well-established aspect of Venetian life. This is a work that bridges almost perfectly the gap between the Accademia degli Incogniti's more abstract speculations about sexuality and women and the conventions of the opera libretto. Identified as an "opera scenica," *La forza d'amore* is in many respects almost indistinguishable from an opera libretto.¹⁴⁷ It is divided into three acts, and the poetry is largely in *versi sciolti*, sparsely seasoned with strophic canzonetta texts. Although fictional—there is no evidence of any particular mythological or historical source—this play is a sort of distillation of some of the most typical (and revealing) devices for the representation of exceptional women in opera. Furthermore, Loredano introduces into the mouths of these characters not only the Incogniti arguments about the nature of women, but also the sort of pro-female sentiments expressed by Tarabotti. The battle between sensuality and reason, the insatiability of female sexuality and the falseness of chastity, the claims concerning women's right to freedom and a free will, the inherent problems with female rule, the ability of the sexes to transform themselves one into the other—all find expression in this work.

Loredano deals with these issues through his characterization of Queen Ardemia, the fictional ruler of Armenia. Ardemia has been pressured by her counselors to marry for the benefit of the kingdom: a man will help defend the country from attackers and heirs will insure the future. She, however, prefers to remain single and to maintain her freedom. With Ardemia we see many of the same difficulties experienced by Boccaccio's queens: a female ruler is invariably made vulnerable by the inherent contradiction between civic duty and feminine sensibilities. How can a woman safeguard her coun-

try and maintain her power, when she is herself an object of desire and necessarily weakened by her own uncontrollable passions?

Ardemia and her sister Deadora discuss the nature of love as a conflict between instinct and reason. In act 1, scene 1, for example, Princess Deadora notes the dangers of sensuality: "Blind is the man who in prey to vain desires and leaving behind the restraint of reason, becomes the daring and stupid maker of his own evils."¹⁴⁸ Queen Ardemia, however, is well aware of one's natural vulnerability to the pleasures of the senses—luxuries, holidays, music, and song all tempt lips, breasts, eyes, and ears. Reason, she tells her sister, is ruled by the appetite. Since the soul can be immersed in even "a single drop of pleasure," she instead drives from her breast "every minimal feeling as an evil to be feared."¹⁴⁹

Notably, in the midst of this discussion on the danger of pleasure, Ardemia asks her servant to sing a canzonetta, which she then finds disturbingly arousing. Indeed, she appears to be well versed on the controversies regarding Marino's poetry and eroticism. Like Filotimo seduced by Alcibiade's sweet voice, Ardemia notes with considerable trepidation how music enters the heart by way of the ear (*per gli orecchi al core*), sending poisons of love with the pleasure of song. But the most explicit discussion of the male–female debate is presented in act 1, scene 3. The scene opens with Ardemia's monologue on female power, and her right to rule without the tyranny of a husband: of what use, she asks, is the proud title of powerful queen, if her wishes are to be ruled by those of another?¹⁵⁰ People can say what they want, Ardemia insists, but if she takes a husband to satisfy their wishes, the kingdom will lose the benefit of her considerable ability to rule: "I would just as soon wish for death as a husband."¹⁵¹ But in the explanation of her beliefs to her sister Deadora, Ardemia adopts the arguments made famous by Arcangela Tarabotti. Men, she claims, have "lying tongues and evil minds" because they curse that same sex which gave them life, referring to woman as an "imperfect animal." But, she declares, if perfection "contains all," then in men virtue and vice are lodged together (*ne l'uom con la virtute il vizio alberga*). Only in imperfect woman "is vice excluded and virtue enclosed." Like Tarabotti, Deadora, too, sees freedom as an inherent human privilege. If liberty is a "gift of Nature" and Nature is herself a woman, then, Deadora states, she wishes to "follow the one who gives by using her gifts." Both women reject the possibility of marriage: Ardemia would rather "lose her kingdom, than for love of kingdom wish to acquire the company of a man."¹⁵²

Thus, both Ardemia and Deadora draw upon language and arguments that contemporaries would have recognized as belonging to the debate about women. But Loredano does not allow them to hold these positions for long. The narrative goal of the play is one that will be traced in numerous seicento operas: Ardemia cannot possibly remain autonomous since her ability to rule and determine her own destiny is undermined by noth-

ing more or less than the power of love. Upon falling in love, she is thus thrown into a state of confusion: she who in all human appearances had “previously hated nothing more than the virile sex,” who would “rather have chosen death itself as her companion,” now finds heart and soul in a frenzy.¹⁵³ In a lengthy speech to her lover (1.7), Ardemia explains that “the law of love” does not allow women to be disdainful of men for long, because nature “has infused every happiness in the love of men.” It is only “harsh and fatal necessity that makes women inconsistent.” The more they fight against the tyranny of men, the more apt they are to “fall into the net of love and be enveloped by it.”¹⁵⁴

By this argument, a woman’s vulnerability to love is thus innate. Her inability to retain her independence is an immutable law of nature; her inconstancy is something that should be pitied rather than condemned, an immutable fact of nature. Without a man, Ardemia tell us, a woman is only half a human and a “monster, useless to others, dangerous to herself.”¹⁵⁵ But because young girls are ignorant of this “ancient universal law,” they are born with a hatred of men and unwillingness to love. Loredano thus places into her mouth the very words that counteract the anti-male sentiments she expressed earlier. Ardemia repents her hatred of men, recognizing her “long error,” and she realizes that she was “born more to her native land than to herself.”¹⁵⁶ If patriotism requires that she must truly bend her lofty soul to the hated yoke of marriage, then, she reasons, she might as well give herself to her beloved Arescamo, who has transformed her into a woman who loves men. Love has thus caused Ardemia to recognize—rather conveniently—that her duty to her country requires that she marry. Implicit in this is the suggestion that her newfound patriotism and recognition of duty are somewhat falsely motivated by her own passions. Her former reticence and disdain for sexuality have now been transformed into raw desire, of which all women are ultimately guilty. Her former urge to rule, to maintain her autonomy, was part of a more masculine construction of self. Now that she has found love, she has more properly assumed her role as a woman. Indeed, Ardemia herself seems to fear autonomy and even masculinity imposed by love. “I am queen,” she observes, “and I carry in a masculine breast this generous feeling that is love? Vain boy, nude and blind, made lord and god of foolish people. A shadow, a dream, a nothing, you make me afraid?”¹⁵⁷

Ardemia’s initial disdain for love and men, however, has other implications. Like so many contemporary operas, this is a work that delights in the sort of confusion created by unrequited love and inappropriate pairings inspired by transvestism. The man whom Ardemia loves, Arescamo (who is also loved by her sister Deadora), is in love with “Eurinda,” who is none other than Rescuperi, king of Media, who has been disguised as Ardemia’s female servant. The men in the play—Arescamo (in love with a man disguised as a woman) and Rescuperi (dressed and pursued like a woman)—

are overly preoccupied with love, and identified literally or implicitly as feminine.

The drama thus concerns itself with the righting of inappropriate behaviors and gender identifications. Ardemia must give up her position of independence, recognize her incomplete nature as a woman, and submit to love. The male characters, who are in turn feminized by Ardemia's inappropriate usurpation of their position, eventually return to their rightful positions as powerful rulers. The various complications of the plot—which include a titillating pseudo-seduction scene between the two men and other misunderstandings concerning right and wrong gender—lead to a resolution in which all of the characters are appropriately paired off and realigned according to their correct genders. The topsy-turvy carnival world is thus righted, much to the delight of the counselor Tertullo, whose complaints about court life are particularly revealing:

Qui si veggono ancora	Here one still finds
Uomini effeminati,	Effeminate men,
Donne, che fan da maschio;	Women who behave like men,
I savi pazzi, i pazzi savi, i grandi	Wise madmen, mad wisemen, great ones
Schiavi de' servi, i servi onnipotenti,	Slaves of servants, servants omnipotent,
E mille vanità degne di riso,	And a thousand vanities deserving of laughter,
E mille vanità degne di pianto.	A thousand vanities deserving of tears. ¹⁵⁸

With *La forza d'amore*, Loredano demonstrates the ways in which abstract Incogniti philosophies about women could manifest themselves in a dramatic form. Furthermore, he does so in a form that seems to mimic perfectly the operas of his time, providing a blueprint for the appropriate treatment of the exceptional woman. We will see this pattern repeated time and time again: in the chapters that follow Didone, Calisto, and Semiramide will all sacrifice their autonomy and submit to the "power of love." Loredano, who no doubt attended numerous operas, has taken the design, the style, and the subject matter that can be found in any number of librettos and infused them with explicit statements of Incogniti philosophies about women drawn from the debate with Tarabotti. And, as we shall see, in the operas themselves, this construction of femininity, while not always stated so explicitly, lurks somewhere just below the surface.

Chapter 3

Didone and the Voice of Chastity

ARIANNA'S LAMENT

In the central portion of Catullus's poem on the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, *Carmina* 64, the narrative is interrupted by an ekphrasis. The attention of the readers and guests is drawn to the scene embroidered on the wedding couch, depicting the abandonment of Ariadne. In this well-known tale, Ariadne had betrayed her family by helping Theseus conquer the Minotaur and escape from its labyrinth, and Theseus rewarded her by cruelly abandoning her on the island of Dia. Catullus places Ariadne's lament at the center of the poem, fashioning for her a kaleidoscope of shifting, disordered emotions. In this special moment allotted to female speech, Ariadne is a picture of despair and wild distraction. She hardly speaks of love or devotion and calls Theseus by name only once, berating him for broken promises and censuring all men for their acts of deception. She regrets her deeds on his behalf—the murder of her brother, the loss of her family and her royal status. She decries her fate and condemns him for his cruel act of leaving her alone to await certain death. Finally, she asks the dark powers for vengeance:

O Furies, charged with vengeance that punishes evil,
you whose bleak foreheads are girded with writhing serpents
which clearly display the outrage your cold hearts keep hidden,
come here to me quickly, listen to my lamentation,
which I deliver in pain from the depths of my passion,
unwillingly forced to, afire, blinded with madness!
—Since what I say is the truth, since I say it sincerely,
do not allow my lament to fade without issue:
but just as Theseus carelessly left me to die here,
may that same carelessness ruin him and his dearest!

(CATULLUS, *Carmina* 64, 194–202)¹

The consequences of Ariadne's curse are also well known. Theseus, anxious to arrive home, forgets his father's instruction to hoist the white sail that would signal his safe return; his hero's welcome is to a house of sorrow rather than joy.

As in Catullus's poem, Monteverdi and Rinuccini's opera *Arianna* was also linked to a wedding. It was first performed as a part of the elaborate celebration of the marriage between Francesco Gonzaga and Margherita of Savoy at the Mantuan court in 1608, and later revived for the Venetian opera stage for the 1640 carnival season. The operatic reinvention of Arianna's mythic lament reveals much about the fate of operatic women in the Seicento and the metamorphoses of the ancient sources under the influence of opera. Even in this relatively brief opera, the question of sources and influence is complex. As several commentators have pointed out, Rinuccini's text was probably influenced by Giovanni dell'Anguillara's well-known vernacular treatment of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which itself includes an interpolation of Ovid's own version of Ariadne's lament from the *Heroides*, the often eccentric and sometimes ironic letters of lament penned by a series of abandoned heroines, replete with a series of moralizing commentaries penned by sixteenth-century writers.² But Ovid's version of Ariadne's lament—and other such laments—had also no doubt been inspired by Catullus's prototypical lament for the heroine in poem 64. Indeed, Rinuccini's use of this particular myth as part of the marriage celebration is an elegant echo of Catullus's use of the same tale to ornament Thetis's wedding couch, and a recognition of the myth's potential significance in the context of marriage. This was a point explored by no less an authority on women and the ancient world than the indefatigable Lodovico Dolce, who included an Italian translation of Catullus's poem 64 in a peculiar anthology containing a treatise on the taking of wives and the vernacular version of one of the most blatantly misogynist works of the Latin world, Juvenal's sixth satire.³

Thus inspired by this rich body of ancient sources and early modern commentary, Rinuccini's libretto explores the abandonment of Ariadne in this new generic context, adding imagined events and characters that reflect and express a variety of early modern ideologies concerning gender.⁴ For example, the libretto explores both male and female sensibilities, tracing Teseo's emotions and ambivalence about abandoning the beautiful Arianna. The audience witnesses his moment of triumph, hears his marriage pledge to Arianna, and learns as well of his reluctance to depart. Lest the moral be unclear to the Mantuan audience, Teseo's chief counselor reinterprets the abandonment in terms familiar from any number of writings about female vice and male virtue: he persuades Teseo that it is his princely duty to reject the influence of impure women; if he were to bring Arianna with him to Athens, he would surely humiliate himself in the eyes of the great heroes who preceded him.⁵ And Rinuccini also mitigates Arianna's complete abandonment by populating the island first with the handmaiden

Dorilla and the fishermen who listen to her lament and frame her utterances with their responses. The conclusion of the opera draws on the second scene embroidered on the wedding couch: Bacco (Bacchus) arrives to give Arianna immortality and restore her to a new sort of royal status, thus concluding the opera with a well-known image of both sensual pleasure and marriage.⁶

As in Catullus's poem, Arianna's lament, the only surviving fragment of the opera, falls in the center of the work, functioning as a kind of musical ekphrasis that interrupts the flow of the narrative in a similar way.⁷ However, because of the loss of Monteverdi's music for the rest of the opera—and the wide dissemination of the lament as an independent work—the libretto provides only a distant, imagined echo of the entire opera. Instead, Arianna's lament, divorced from its surroundings, was necessarily invested with greater importance and was to become the prototype for the utterances of the abandoned woman in seventeenth-century opera.

In their construction of the lament, Rinuccini and Monteverdi both observe and deviate from the literary conventions established by Catullus and Ovid. They preserve much of Arianna's emotional spontaneity and volatility.⁸ Nonetheless, she is far less distraught, less disordered, and far less threatening than in Catullus's poem. Thoughts of anger and revenge are still present, yet in Rinuccini and Monteverdi's version her "madness" is less evident, tempered by a longing for Teseo and desire for and fear of death, expressed in the refrain "lasciatemi morire" that serves to unify the work both musically and poetically. And, though *we* can only hear Arianna's voice, in Monteverdi and Rinuccini's opera the madness is also tempered by the company of others, in particular the omnipresent fishermen.

What is most striking, however, is Rinuccini's treatment of the famous curse. At the height of her anger, Arianna appears to follow the model in Catullus, calling upon nature for revenge, spewing forth all manner of epithets and curses. Then, with a curious schizophrenia, she regrets her curses as soon as they are uttered. Personifying her pain—it is that anguish that speaks—she differentiates the actions of her tongue from the sentiments of her heart ("Parlò l'affano mio, parlò il dolore / Parlò la lingua sì, ma non già il core"). At Arianna's greatest moment of eloquence, she breaks with her own myth, adhering to the female virtue of silence.

Arianna's negation of her own curse and self-silencing is suggestive on a number of levels. There is something woeful about this abrupt loss of power, an unmistakable acknowledgement of the familiar strictures about female silence and self-censorship that might, as Cusick proposed, rehearse the loss of agency required of all women facing marriage. Eric Chafe, however, sees the resolution of Arianna's various dualities in the lament's conclusion as a representation of the heart of her womanhood: Arianna's control over her emotions in this dire situation compares favorably with Monteverdi's Orfeo, whose fate was sealed by his inability to control his impulses.⁹ But re-

gardless of whether we join Chafe (and perhaps some members of the Mantuan audience) in applauding Arianna's restraint or Cusick (and other contemporary observers) in mourning her loss of autonomy, the influence of opera on these well-known myths was nonetheless the same. Orpheus may have failed to control his emotions, but as a man known for his rhetorical prowess, his eloquence and wisdom, according to such authorities as Petrarch and Boccaccio, he was free to bewail the loss of his beloved Eurydice and ultimately to renounce women altogether; Ariadne may have been wronged, but as a woman she was able to express herself with relative freedom only in isolation on the island of Dia. But in both cases, opera required these two famous mythic figures to moderate their behavior. The operatic Orfeo could no more readily express his homosexual urges than Arianna could seek vengeance for her abandonment.¹⁰ Opera had done its work.

The conflict between silence and eloquence that is negotiated by Arianna's negation of her curse is central to the way in which women were viewed in the early modern period and, in particular, underlies the representation of women in the opera of seventeenth-century Venice. On the one hand, like the writings about women, the opera industry sought to reinforce early modern views of male and female virtue, and especially silence, chastity, and obedience for women. On the other hand, opera gave prominence to those women who often failed to conform to these same values. The heroines drawn from the pages of Ovid, Homer, Tacitus, and Diodorus Siculus were thus adapted to conform to contemporary theatrical practices and standards for behavior. Moreover, the industry itself created a market for real-life exceptional women—female singers. Regarded as both dangerous and appealing, these singers were admired for their skill and eloquence. They were also seen as sexual objects, desired by some, condemned by others, and their roles within society were often as ambivalent and multifaceted as those that they played on the stage.¹¹ But what is perhaps most important here is the transformation that opera enacted on the exceptional women themselves. The voice that cried to Teseo was not confined to the printed page. Arianna does not merely speak: she sings. Enhanced by the visual spectacle of opera, empowered by this new medium that could freeze a woman's voice in time, Arianna added to her own mythology a previously unimagined ability to move, entice, and ultimately seduce audiences. Her suppression of her curse at this critical juncture was a calculated response to her newly acquired power—an inevitable step in her transformation from an exceptional woman into an operatic heroine.

DIDONE AND FEMALE ELOQUENCE

In 1641, Dido, one of Ariadne's most important literary and operatic descendents, made her first operatic appearance on the stage of Teatro San Cassiano in Venice. The libretto was by the poet-lawyer Giovanni Francesco

Busenello, member of Venice's infamous Accademia degli Incogniti, and best known today as the librettist for Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. The music was by Francesco Cavalli, the younger colleague and probable student of Monteverdi, who would become the leading opera composer in Venice for the next two decades. This was the second of four operatic collaborations to be presented by Cavalli and Busenello; Ovid's *Metamorphoses* had provided the mythic substance for their *Gli amori d'Apollo e di Dafne* (1640), also presented at the Teatro San Cassiano, and was followed in 1646 by *La prosperità infelice di Giulio Cesare* (very likely never performed) and *La Statira* (1655).

The choice of Dido as a heroine at this particular moment in operatic history is not surprising. In the early years of the opera industry, producers and their audiences were particularly attracted to the abandoned women of myth and history who had earned considerable fame in both original and contemporary vernacular treatments of ancient sources. With Arianna, we have already considered how the *Heroides*, Ovid's imagined letters from a whole set of forsaken women, established a mode of expression for these heroines, which Ariosto and Tasso later imitated in sixteenth-century epic poems.¹² Madrigal composers, too, had exploited the expressive power of the lament, even when sung with the displaced subjectivity of multiple voices rather than a solo singer.¹³

But in opera, the laments of abandoned women played a very special role. As ancient writers had also recognized, they provided the perfect outlet for unrestrained female eloquence. Isolated, separated from society, the lamenting woman could express herself with a singular freedom: repenting a desperate passion, bemoaning a seemingly unalterable tragic destiny, and even pronouncing a fatal curse on the deserter—without disturbing theatrical norms of speech and syntax.¹⁴ As we have seen with Arianna, opera frequently suppressed the power of its most threatening women by altering inherited myths almost beyond recognition, while at the same time providing composers with the ready opportunity to exploit the dramatic potential of these lamenting women. The passions of the audience were moved; the offending hero could escape feminine influence, free to pursue a noble destiny and affirm male virtues; he might have been wounded momentarily, but was rarely vanquished by female scorn. Indeed, it may well have been this shared theme that inspired the Venetian revival of Monteverdi's *Arianna* during the season before the premiere of *La Didone*.

Nevertheless, the profound differences between Arianna and Didone reveal much about the progress of a genre that, removed from the sanctuary of a court setting, now could accommodate the ideological, economic, and musical requirements of Venetian audiences and producers in the fifth decade of the seventeenth century. As compared with Rinuccini's relatively brief libretto for *Arianna*, organized without divisions by act or scene and set entirely on the island of Dia, Busenello's three-act libretto for *La Didone*

is longer and far more complex. He flouts Aristotelian unities not only by shifting from Troy to Carthage for the final two acts of the opera, but also by presenting an inordinately large cast of secondary characters whose highly varied musical and dramatic representations participate in the construction of Didone's character. The question of generic impurity—or what we might regard as generic inconsistency—evident in the *lieto fine* of the presumably “tragic” tale of *Arianna* is even more apparent in *La Didone*, in which the inconsistent alignment of tragedy and comedy profoundly influences Dido's dubious status as a tragic heroine.

The significance of the Venetian Dido to be considered in this chapter, however, has to do with the complexity of sources and notable ambiguities associated with this particular emblematic woman. Like Ariadne, the lamenting Dido was also given a voice by Ovid in the *Heroides*, but she was also well known to early modern readers and audience members alike from her presentation in book 4 of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Thus, Busenello's libretto for *La Didone* should be understood not only in the context of operatic history and the fortunes of the lamenting heroine, but also as a part of a long tradition of Virgil's reception in Venice.¹⁵ The Venetians who produced, read, and saw *La Didone* brought to this experience their own impressions of Virgil's Dido, formulated from the residue of an elite education, or fed by the expanding market of vernacular treatments of the tale (e.g., translations, commentaries, catalogs of women, non-operatic dramatic representations, and travesties). Moreover, early modern readers had yet another Dido to place next to those of Virgil and Ovid: the so-called historical Dido, an emblem of chastity who died by her own hand rather than marry her enemy Iarbas of Gaetulia, long before Aeneas ever set foot on the shores of Carthage.¹⁶

The Venetians thus viewed Dido through their own uniquely fashioned kaleidoscope, fracturing the heroine into a dozen shifting images that served various Venetian political and social prerogatives. For the members of the Accademia degli Incogniti, eager to promote the glory of Venice and preoccupied with the problem of female speech and sensuality, she is a source of fascination and a object of censure: an emblem of chastity and an emblem of Eros gone awry. She is the cautious Queen Ardemia of Loredano's *La forza d'amore* who refuses love for the sake of her kingdom; but she is the cruel beauty whose false chastity deprives a man of his right to sexual self-expression. She is also too libidinous, driven mad by shameful desires, the unchaste woman, a female who knew more than one lover and whose evil influence inevitably leads other women astray.

Most striking, however, are the consequences of all of this for Didone's musical construction. This chapter will focus on two aspects of Cavalli's setting that have special significance for understanding operatic representations of femininity. The first concerns vocal style, and in particular the relationship between recitative and aria—that is, between “operatic speech” and song. *La Didone* arrives on the operatic stage (conveniently, for our pur-

poses) at a time when aria had yet to claim its full authority as the primary means of expressing a given state of emotion; that is, at a point in operatic history in which “song”—as opposed to heightened speech or recitative—was still a remarkable occurrence. In *La Didone* Cavalli has yet to reveal completely the gifts for lyric expression that will be so evident in his later operas. But in following Busenello’s directives regarding aria placement, he is able to exploit the connections between female song and illicit behavior in order to illustrate a heroine’s chastity or lack thereof that was part of their shared conception of the heroine.

The second area of significance concerns Cavalli’s somewhat idiosyncratic use of tonal language. *La Didone*, it must be remembered, was presented in 1641, after Monteverdi’s *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria* and prior to *L’incoronazione di Poppea*. While his style differs in some respects from that of the older composer, Cavalli nonetheless uses a similar palette of tonal devices, exploiting the vestiges of the modal-hexachordal system that Eric Chafe has identified in the works of Monteverdi.¹⁷ Thus, in the hands of this composer, Didone’s vacillations between chastity and promiscuity, passion and frigidity—her differing Ovidian and Virgilian personae—are given musical representation through subtle manipulations of vocal style and tonal language. As such, *La Didone* provides an ideal vantage point from which to examine the operatic encoding of women’s voice and to view the emergence of a feminine musical rhetoric in the first decades of Venetian opera.

BUSENELLO’S THREE DIDOS

In the *argomento* to his libretto for *La Didone*, the librettist Giovanni Francesco Busenello explains his version of the Dido story as follows:

And because according to good doctrine it is permissible for poets not only to alter stories but even history, Dido takes Iarbas for her husband. And if it was a famous anachronism in Virgil that Dido lost her life not for Sicheus, her husband, but for Aeneas, great minds should be able tolerate that here there occurs a marriage that is different both from the stories and the histories. He who writes satisfies his own fancy, and it is in order to avoid the tragic ending of Dido’s death that the aforementioned marriage to Iarbas has been introduced. It is not necessary here to remind men of understanding how the best poets represented things in their own way; books are open, and learning is not a stranger in this world.¹⁸

Busenello’s disclaimer is revealing on several counts. Like many early modern writers who used classical sources as a point of departure (including fellow librettists), he sought to excuse his deviations from the inherited myths as “poetic license.”¹⁹ His foremost need was to justify the most obvious change in the legend: the apparent grafting of a happy ending onto what was—by most retellings—an essentially tragic tale. In Busenello and

Cavalli's opera, Dido does not actually commit suicide after her abandonment by Aeneas as she does in Virgil's *Aeneid*, but rather finds happiness in the arms of her former suitor, Iarbas, king of Gaetulia. At the same time, there is more than a note of disingenuousness in Busenello's apology. Even by 1641 happy endings were all but required for the genre; moreover, as we shall see, his apology fails to account for his most drastic variations from his sources and variations on Dido herself.

Busenello's adept manipulation of a multiplicity of Didos in this opera bears witness to an elevated concept of poetic license and a deep familiarity with the sorts of representations put forth by the "best poets." The many books that lay upon Busenello's desk—the myriad of vernacular and Latin sources for the Dido legend—were in themselves open to a variety of interpretive manipulations. They provided a fluid and infinitely variable set of narrative and rhetorical models that flowed easily one into the other.²⁰ His libretto thus represented a special kind of poetic fantasy, coded for recognition and appreciation by a learned audience.

Foremost among Busenello's sources is Virgil's *Aeneid*, one of the most influential and contested texts in Western literature. Written during the early years of Augustus's reign (29–19 B.C.), in the aftermath of the defeat and death of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra, the *Aeneid* has been the subject of a broad range of interpretive strategies, many of which focused on the extent of Virgil's endorsement of or challenge to the Augustan imperial program.²¹ The portrait of the Carthaginian queen Dido is no less unambiguous. On the one hand, the construction of Dido owes much to the legacy of the Greek epics, albeit invested with specifically Roman ideals concerning the importance of public duty over private passion.²² In this "recasting" of Homer, the sensuality and pleasure that was identified with Greek culture was realigned to serve Roman ideals of honor and duty—virtues that were to be valued by seventeenth-century Venetians. Thus, unlike Odysseus, who spends years with the seductive Calypso, sobbing by day but enjoying her bed by night, Aeneas, designed by Virgil as a superior model of moral strength, is permitted but a brief stay with Dido, with little in the way of actual pleasure. All of this has a profound impact on the construction of Dido herself: she and her kingdom must be made sufficiently appealing to distract Aeneas from his appointed task (and sufficiently desirable so that his departure appears as a genuine sacrifice and mark of superior virtue), yet Busenello was also compelled to demonstrate Dido's danger and volatility, and ultimately align her with foreign influences that might be damaging to Roman sensibilities. Thus, Calypso was probably the Homeric model for an alluring, distracting, albeit inappropriate object of desire. However, it was also from two other abandoned heroines of myth and history (who also took their turn on the operatic stage)—Catullus's Ariadne and Apollonius's Medea—that Virgil derived Dido's most threatening rhetorical gestures that conclude book 4 of the *Aeneid*: the volatility, black magic, and fatal cursing

in her lament that justified Mercury's warnings and Aeneas's rapid departure and probably reminded contemporary readers of Anthony's dalliance with Cleopatra.²³ On the other hand, for generations of readers, Virgil's Dido remains perhaps the most memorable character in the epic, who, despite obvious liabilities, so often compels the reader, as St. Augustine famously observed, to weep. The result is a complex and richly varied Dido who herself both supports and contradicts imperialist readings, and whose many subtleties and ambiguities prevent her use as a mere political icon.²⁴ As S. Georgia Nugent cogently puts it: "Dido, who seems to present the greatest threat to the founding of Rome . . . also emerges paradoxically as the focus of readerly sympathy . . . and even the most memorable creation of Vergil's epic."²⁵

Yet, while black magic and cursing might have been enough to warn some Roman readers about the dangers of Eastern seductresses, Virgil's choice of Dido as Aeneas's lover in book 4 of the *Aeneid* opened up yet another, more subtle avenue of blame for the Carthaginian queen: the charge of infidelity to her deceased husband Sychaeus. In constructing the *Aeneid*, Virgil borrowed a legend concerning a very different Dido, the so-called historical, pre-Virgilian Dido, widow of Sychaeus and ruler of Carthage who committed suicide rather than stain her widowhood and marry her insistent suitor, Iarbas, warrior king of neighboring Gaetulia—all of which took place long before Aeneas's arrival in Carthage. Virgil's anachronism, first recorded by such writers as Macrobius, was rediscovered by Petrarch and Boccaccio, and is even mentioned by Busenello in the *argomento* cited above.²⁶ While Dante had placed the Virgilian Dido in the second circle of hell (*Inferno*, 5.61–62) with other unchaste women (Semiramis, Cleopatra, and Helen), Petrarch had criticized Virgil's distortion of the Dido tale. Boccaccio, following Petrarch, used *both* Didos: the Virgilian model appears in the secular Italian writings such as *Fiammetta*, *Filocolo*, and *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* as an exemplum of a tragic subjection to love or even excessive sexuality. In his Latin writings, however, he used the pre-Virgilian Dido.²⁷ In *De claris mulieribus*, his catalog of exceptional historical and mythic women (many of whom were to appear on the Venetian opera stage), the pagan Dido is commended for her chastity in widowhood, and put forth as a noble example for Christian women.²⁸ Boccaccio nevertheless recognized the moral implications of Virgil's version of the story, and justified Virgil's apparent "error" as poetic license—a strategy that Busenello would employ several hundred years later:

With his [Virgil's] profound knowledge of such lore, he was well aware that Dido had really been a woman of exceptionally high character, who would rather die by her own hand than subdue the vow of chastity fixed deep in heart to a second marriage. But that he might attain the proper effect of his work under the artifice of poetic disguise, he composed a story in many re-

spects like that of this historic Dido, according to the privilege of poets established by ancient custom.²⁹

The apparent binary opposition between the Virgilian and pre-Virgilian Dido is mitigated by yet another Dido, who plays an important role in most subsequent versions and was particularly beloved by early modern writers: the abandoned Dido presented in Ovid's *Heroides*. Ovid's quibble with Virgil is not with the ahistorical meeting between Dido and Aeneas or the queen's lack of chastity. Rather, his portrayal seems designed to question the Augustan imperial agenda, challenging Virgil's apparent lack of interest in the sentimental, ironic, and erotic potential of book 4 of the *Aeneid*. At the same time, Ovid was well aware that it was his own focus on precisely those elements—particularly the last—that got him into trouble with the authorities. In response to the censorship of his own writings, for example, he writes the following concerning Dido while in exile from Rome:

Envious nature's restriction has held me to narrow boundaries
 And given me limited powers with which to practice my art.
 And yet that fortunate author who wrote the *Aeneid* to please you
 Brought "arms and the man" to Carthage and bedded him down with its
 Queen
 There's no other part of that poem that's read with more relish than this is
 Where he tells how his hero and Dido were joined in illicit love.
 (OVID, *Tristia* 2.531–38)³⁰

This observation betrays much about the difference between Ovid and Virgil as well as their construction of Dido. As Barbara Bono notes, Ovid "virtually defines himself by opposition to Vergil," describing the *Metamorphoses* as a sort of "Anti-*Aeneid*."³¹ In the *Heroides*, we hear Dido's lament not as the ravings of a half-deranged woman, dabbling in the black arts and casting a fatal curse on the fleeing Aeneas. Ovid's Dido pens her fateful letter to Aeneas in some wrinkle in Virgil's time frame, in which she has yet to commit suicide but has already come to a higher understanding of Aeneas's words and deeds.³² Although transformed and informed by Virgil's text, she is nonetheless a different woman: Ovid's Dido is a widow who feels guilt over the betrayal of her dead husband's memory, an erotic being longing for Aeneas's embrace and their unborn child, who wishes his return under any circumstances, and seeks his protection rather than his destruction. Ovid's portrayal of Dido purports to present the one point of view that was, in some sense, antithetical to much of the *Aeneid*—that is Dido's own subjectivity; the letter is nothing less than an "impersonation," as Marilyn Desmond aptly characterizes it, a performance of gender from a state of understanding that necessarily transcends Virgil's text. As she writes the fateful letter, with Aeneas's sword lying across on her lap, Dido is an appealing focus both for our sympathy and our ironic distance. She is also a more credible wit-

ness to Aeneas's cruelty, casting genuine doubt on the validity of his divine mission. As John Watkins observes, "a more intimate cyclical view of history as repeated instances of male treachery replaces Virgil's portrayal of it as a linear progress from Troy to Actium. . . . Ovid undermines the official justification for Dido's abandonment. If Aeneas is a hero according to one account, he is a traitor according to another."³³

Busenello's manipulation of these three Didos was very much a product of the same sort of Venetian political ideologies and myths that had influenced Incogniti writings. If, as Venetian mythology repeatedly claimed, Venice was truly the rightful heir to Rome's great glory—a more perfect political counterpart to the Augustan empire—then the founding of Rome by Aeneas and the seafaring Trojans was nothing less than a symbol of Venice's own birth. The linear view of history expressed in the *Aeneid*, which provides the narrative backbone of Busenello's libretto, was thus a central element of Venice's mythologizing: the line that connected Rome to Actium in the Augustan period could be extended all the way to early modern Venice. In this view, Aeneas is bound by the lofty requirements of Venetian civic virtue in which state service equals or surpasses Christian duty. The *Aeneid*, which had been "at the heart of institutionalized education" throughout the Middle Ages, was also an essential text for the training of young men in Venice as well as elsewhere.³⁴ Virgil was associated with masculine intellectual pursuits, providing young men instruction in rhetoric, grammar, Christian allegory, moral philosophy, and civic duty. The moral messages that emerge from the Latin tradition in Venice were unambiguously adapted to suit the peculiarly Venetian brand of humanism. As Craig Kallendorf has shown, the published commentary, underlining, and marginalia in Latin editions from Venice in the sixteenth century—owned almost exclusively by men—position Aeneas and his divine mission at the center of the known moral universe, even endowing him with a kind of retroactive Christianity.³⁵ For generations of young Venetian men, the Dido episode in book 4 of the *Aeneid* was probably a first schoolboy encounter with the temptations of the Other, whether constructed as a female body or an eastern world. The lessons imparted by Virgil would have been equally meaningful to the individual Venetian citizen or the Republic as a whole. The problematic relationship between Rome and Carthage, played out repeatedly in the Punic Wars and explored in the Dido episode of the *Aeneid*, evoked Venice's unresolved conflicts with the Turks. The *Aeneid* and, in particular, the details of Aeneas's Carthaginian voyage were thus part of a well-established Venetian educational system—essentially masculine—that readily accommodated the Republic's political and social goals.

At the same time, the somewhat monolithic and essentially masculine consumption of the *Aeneid* was mitigated in a variety of ways by vernacular treatments of the *Aeneid*, designated for a broader audience, that could either subvert or reinforce conservative political goals. In *L'Achille e l'Enea*, Lo-

dovico Dolce (whose book on the training of women we have already considered) displays two different versions of heroism by transforming passages from both the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* into *ottave rime*. Lest the message be unclear, he provides the reader with a set of allegories that explain the significance of a given passage, here locating Venetian civic virtue in Aeneas's abandonment of Dido. Aeneas is to be praised for "paying more attention to the words of Jove than the tears of Dido" as a "truly noble soul attends to deeds of honor rather than pleasure."³⁶

The lessons about male and female virtue implicit in Dolce's commentary were made more explicit by those Venetian writers engaged in the polemics about women at the turn of the seventeenth century. We have already seen the way in which Giuseppe Passi used his classical education to catalog the defects of women. In *I donneschi difetti*, he cites Virgil's Dido to illustrate several female vices: he criticizes her for excessive cruelty and as an example of a woman who carries love too far.³⁷ Nonetheless, the multiplicity of Didos—and the flexibility of the vernacular tradition—permitted a space for resistance, as is evident in Lucrezia Marinella's *Nobiltà, et l'eccellenza delle donne*. She cites the chaste, pre-Virgilian Dido, chiding Virgil—and Passi—for their false representations of Dido's honesty and fidelity, commending her for her sense of justice, skill in governance, and accomplishments in the building of Carthage.³⁸ Yet, in a striking demonstration of the persistent contradictions between these two Didos, Marinella cannot resist also citing Virgil's rare praise of Dido in support of her arguments concerning the queen's courteous and generous spirit, a point no doubt bolstered by Dido's own claims in Ovid's epistle. The inconsistency is apparent; Dido, after all, was supposed to have died prior to the Trojan's arrival in Carthage. Nevertheless, Marinella hastens to reassure the reader that Dido's courtesy was not a function of any sort of illicit love, but rather of an innately generous spirit.³⁹

Dido's erotic appeal that so inspired Ovid was also a fertile ground for the carnal fantasies that engaged the fleshier aspects of Venetian humanism and would later intrigue Incogniti members. The *Aeneid*, as Kallendorf has noted, invoked both the Venetian myth and the anti-myth.⁴⁰ Dolce's devoted friend and colleague Pietro Aretino, author of the *Dialogo* (the continuation of the courtesan dialogue considered above), actually places the story of Aeneas's abandonment of Dido into the mouth of the elderly courtesan Nanna, that extraordinary purveyor of pornographic speech. Nanna, the experienced procuress, tells the familiar tale of Dido's abandonment to her student without the benefit of their names, although the story was sufficiently well known as to make identification obvious: Aeneas is referred to variously as "Cain" or a pilgrim. Here, however, the story of Dido and Aeneas presents a very special kind of lesson. Nanna is not concerned with male heroism and civic virtue; instead, she uses the tale to instruct the prospective prostitute about men's "vicious betrayals" and the consequences of

giving “another person too much pleasure.”⁴¹ Dido’s story warns women about the debilitating nature of female desire and the necessity of retaining control when dealing with a client. With a deft paraphrase of Virgil’s text (and a jab at ecclesiastical authority), Nanna (e.g., Aretino) locates Dido’s “problem” in the female voice. She reports that while “Dido” was in a monastery praying for good fortune, she “sang her vespers so effectively that she strangled her vows and respectability.” In this revision of Virgil that foreshadows Dido’s operatic persona, the singing of sacred music arouses Dido to the point where she chokes on her vow of chastity. The link between singing and the broken vow of chastity could not be made more explicit.

DRAMATIC DIDO

Early modern theatrical representations of the Dido tale—including Busenello’s libretto—reveal the tensions among these various versions of the myth. For the Venetians, the moral center and narrative frame were indebted to the mythological link between Troy and Venice, and the retrospective order imposed on the hero’s epic wanderings: Aeneas is always compelled to abandon Dido and continue on his journey and give birth to Venice’s great ancestor, Rome. At the same time, much of the rhetorical substance of the theatrical Dido is nurtured by Ovid’s more subversive version of the Carthaginian queen: the erotic and sympathetic Dido, sister to all betrayed women, whose desirability and overwhelming subjectivity threaten to dislodge the moral sensibilities of the reader and subvert the orderly progress of history.

This conflict is apparent, for example, in an important precursor to Busenello’s libretto, *Didone tragedia* by Lodovico Dolce.⁴² Dolce’s primary source is Virgil; the play opens just as Aeneas is preparing to abandon Dido. Dolce’s play emphasizes those aspects of the Virgilian narrative that were most significant in terms of the Venetian Republican agenda: the inevitable vulnerability of female rule and the conflict between (male) destiny and (female) passion. Lessons concerning the danger of female sexuality abound; Dolce exaggerates many of the criticisms of Dido that are implicit in Virgil’s text.⁴³ Traces of the pre-Virgilian Dido are also apparent in the focus on Dido’s betrayal of her husband Sychaeus, whose ghost condemns the queen for her lack of chastity—an element that Busenello will later borrow. The intermingling of the Virgilian and Ovidian traditions, however, is most evident in Dido’s monologues in which the avenging madness of Virgil’s heroine is tempered by vulnerability, guilt, and repentance. Dido’s control of the stage and rhetorical space, however, only postpones the inevitable destiny prescribed in the Virgilian narrative. Dolce compensates for his Dido’s greater desirability by providing the audience with a tragic ending that is much more devastating to the Carthaginians than what might be surmised from book 4 of the *Aeneid*. Both Dido and her sister Anna commit suicide

and Carthage falls to Iarbas and his armies. Dolce eloquently demonstrates the political and social consequences of female passion, irrationality, and female rule; nonetheless, the catharsis evoked by Dido's tragedy was inevitably mitigated by the knowledge that her self-destruction was but a temporary phase in Aeneas's divinely guided quest.

In Busenello's libretto, the tension between Aeneas's divine destiny and the eloquence of Dido—or what might be described as an incompatibility between the linear and cyclical views of history—is reconfigured in the context of Incogniti gender ideology, and expressed in a conflation of the multiple Didos. Notably, much of this transformation is bound up with the treatment of genre: a collapsing together of tragedy and comedy in a manner that distorts and even parodies Dido's status as a tragically abandoned heroine. The tragedy is provided by what we might regard as the "masculine" Virgilian narrative, including not only Aeneas's abandonment of Dido, but also the tragic events associated with the fall of Troy (act 1) and the moving laments of its women. Superimposed on this, however, is a second plot, essentially comic, inspired by the pre-Virgilian versions of the tale that plays on the conflict between Dido's dual role as an emblem of chaste widowhood and the illicit lover of Aeneas. This, it must be noted, is not merely a grafting of a comic ending onto a tragic story, as Busenello's *argomento* deceptively implies; rather, what he does is to weave comedy into the tragic fabric of book 4 of the *Aeneid*; as a result of Didone's rejection of Iarba and her passion for Enea (made public by the gossip of three lascivious court ladies), Iarba descends into a madness expressed by a parodic lament that reflects Incogniti misogyny. Enea departs and Didone is left in suicidal despair, but before we even hear her final lamentation, Mercurio restores Iarba's senses and promises that he is destined to gain the hand of his beloved Didone. Herein lies the central message. In the context of what is essentially comic plotting—the story of a forlorn lover who triumphs over madness in order to win a reluctant bride—the "tragedy" (if there is one at all) is not Didone's abandonment by Enea but rather her own fatal abandonment of chaste widowhood.

Yet the issue is not only that Busenello adapted the multiple Didos in a manner that resonates with Incogniti ambivalence and female chastity. Didone, unlike her predecessors, becomes an operatic heroine. In giving Dido operatic life, Busenello and Cavalli far outdo Ovid in ventriloquizing a woman's voice, endowing her with power to express a view of femininity that was necessarily more vivid—and potentially more threatening—than that of any of her predecessors. Nor were the implications of this lost on the composer. Sensitive to the structural and semantic implications of Busenello's poetry, Cavalli carefully traces the rhetorical consequences of Didone's shifting personae, granting and denying lyricism as a reward for purity or a punishment for vice: she is the chaste widow of the pre-Virgilian tale, the impassioned lover of Virgil's epic, and Ovid's self-punitive and re-

pentant abandoned woman, only to be reborn at the opera's end as a comic heroine and the compliant wife of Iarba. As a failed emblem of chastity, an object of both sympathy and scorn, Didone is nearly immobilized by her joint allegiance to comic and tragic narratives. Like Aretino's Dido, whose voice was "strangled" in the singing of vespers, this Didone loses her birth-right as an abandoned woman to more worthy candidates, and is all but robbed of the power of lament.

CIVIC VIRTUES AND THE FALL OF TROY

Although Didone never appears or is mentioned in the first act of the opera that bears her name, the "Trojan act" has a profound influence on the construction of our heroine. Breaking with virtually all previous versions of the Dido and Aeneas story, Busenello arranges the material in strict chronological order. Whereas Virgil's epic begins with the storm and Aeneas's arrival on the shores of Carthage, the first act of the opera is devoted entirely to the actions of book 2, which Virgil presents retrospectively: Enea's defense of his family, the tragic deaths of the Trojan women Cassandra and Hecuba, Enea's imperatives from his mother Venere (Venus), the eventual escape from Troy, and the loss and death of his wife Creusa.⁴⁴ Act 2, on the other hand, is drawn from books 1 and 3: the storm at sea, the meeting of Dido and Aeneas, and Cupid's inflaming of Dido's passion. The final act recounts the familiar events of book 4: Didone's decision to give into her passion for Enea despite her nightmares; the two lovers' consummation of their relationship during the hunt while a god-provoked storm rages; Mercurio's order to Enea to leave Carthage and his attempt to do so in secret; Didone's confrontation with him with a series of unhappy speeches that constitutes her lament, culminating in the suicide (which is unsuccessful in the opera).

The consequences of Busenello's linear ordering of the plot cannot be overestimated. In what is essentially a lengthy "prequel" to the tale of Dido's abandonment, Busenello does more than merely flout the Aristotelian unities of time and place. On the one hand, the primary narrative goal of the first act is to describe Enea's flight from Troy and the loss of his wife Creusa, and to confirm his divine destiny, all without blemishing his heroic stature. On the other hand, the Trojan act serves the critical purpose of differentiating Troy and Carthage with regard to genre, gender, and cultural ethics, as well as managing the discourse on racial and religious difference that is implicit in the *Aeneid*. Busenello establishes Troy as both the locus of tragedy and the ethical center of the opera, linking Trojan values to those of the Venetian Republic. The Trojan act defines notions of masculinity and rationality that stand in opposition to the Eastern, feminine, impure, and at times comic world of Didone's Carthage. Indeed, unusual for a dramatic depiction of the Dido story, the Trojan act serves to keep Enea, at least tem-

porarily, on center stage. Male civic virtues are confirmed in his devotion to his country, the nurturing of his son's destiny, the care of his father, and his emotional control in the presence of his wife's ghost. Female virtue—virginity, piety, motherly love, and the recognition of the importance of female sacrifice—is demonstrated by the tragic deaths of the Trojan women.

The link between Venetian civic virtues and Troy is made apparent in the opening scene of the opera. Framed by the male chorus ("All'armi") in which Enea's fellow soldiers call him to arms (and presumably certain death), the conflict between public and private duty is represented by the wife and son of the hero, who beg him not to depart. Enea's wife Creusa is the first voice heard in the opera, as she pleads with Enea to stay with her and protect son, father, and wife. Busenello borrows the vision of Creusa's wailing directly from the *Aeneid* (2.771–77). In Virgil's version, Aeneas wishes to continue fighting in order to avenge the death of his family. He is hardly sympathetic to Creusa's pleas; it is the god's sign placed over the head of his son Ascanius that persuades him to refrain from further fighting. In Busenello's libretto, however, Enea presents a different lesson in civic duty, one that seems designed to secure his reputation as a hero and patriot in the face of his eventual escape from the burning Troy. Cavalli uses contrasting tonal styles to express this. Creusa pleads for her family with an impassioned, breathless recitative that veers toward sharp sonorities or *cantus durus* (see ex. 1). Note, for example, the pair of descending fifths (mm. 5–6), followed by the deliberate stepwise descent as she invokes death for the half-cadence on E. Cavalli establishes Enea's heroism and self-control and emphasizes the primacy of civic duty over the safety of self and family with a far more diatonic and tonally stable mode of expression in flat sonorities or *cantus mollis*. This is the tonal language that Enea uses when he speaks of the burning walls of his city, the bleeding of his countrymen, and the glory that he will attain by dying with them, declaring that death is preferable to slavery.

Enea, of course, will not attain either glory or freedom through a glorious Trojan death; that honor is reserved for Creusa, who must die in order for Enea to fulfill his heroic destiny. The lessons imparted here, however, are not for the wife but rather for he who represents the future generations and Roman civilization: Enea's son Ascanio. As a good father and citizen, Enea's task is to ensure that his son move from the effeminate world of his mother to the heroic circle dominated by his famous father, assimilating appropriate standards for male behavior. Thus, it is no surprise that Ascanio—not Creusa or Enea—sings the first two arias in *La Didone*. In the first scene he enacts the transition from maternal to paternal influence, declaring that his mother's breast may have nourished him, but that the milk is "disarmed," and that only his father can offer him true protection. Enea, deaf as he will always be to eloquent pleas, indoctrinates his son with Stoic precepts: virtue is born with the destruction of one's homeland; constancy

Creusa:

5

sca-nio, e tua con-sor-te Dal fer-ro, dal-l'in-cen-dio, e

Enea:

7

dal-la mor - te. Cre - u - sa, ar-don le mu-ra,

13

13

L'al - ta cit - tà, ch'in A - sia fu re - gi - na Ha vo - ta - to di

4

Creusa: I beg you do not leave, but with these arms / defend Anchises, Ascanius, and your wife / from the sword, fire, and from death.

Enea: Creusa, the walls of the city are burning, / the high city that was the Queen of Asia / has emptied its blood . . .

EXAMPLE 1. Francesco Cavalli, *La Didone* (1641), ACT 1, SCENE 1: Creusa and Enea: “Ti prego non partir” (I-Vnm, It. IV, 355 [= 9879], fol. 7r-v).

is tested by the cruelties imparted from heaven. Notably, Ascanio learns his lesson well; in an otherwise inexplicable episode in the next scene (1.2), he emulates Enea’s civic-inspired bravado as he runs into the street brandishing an oversize sword while singing of his destiny, courage, and patriotic duty: as the son of Enea, he must show courage or “his country will call him a bastard.”

This vision of masculine virtue and civic duty contrasts with a rather different image for females: suffering and death. The remainder of the Trojan act focuses on female virtue—as embodied in the noble suffering of Creusa’s virginal sister Cassandra and their mother Hecuba, the widow of King Priam of Troy. The musical and dramatic characterizations of these three women reflect the various life stages of women—maiden, wife, mother, and widow—while at the same time taking account of their varied mythic histories.

Of the three, Enea’s expendable wife Creusa is the least carefully drawn. In some respects, she presents the same sort of problem as Didone herself; Busenello and Cavalli were constrained to construct her in a manner that is both sympathetic and heroic, yet to make her sufficiently disposable to preserve Enea’s heroic stature.⁴⁵ Indeed, lest we should criticize Enea for his carelessness in losing his wife (after all, he carries his father on his shoulders and holds the hand of his young son, leaving his wife to follow behind), Busenello’s libretto tells us that Creusa is killed as she returns to her house to get the jewels that she had left behind.⁴⁶

The centrality of self-sacrifice both as female virtue and an appropriate locus for lyric expression is demonstrated in the representation of the other two Trojan women. Cassandra and Hecuba carry much of the lyric weight of act 1. Busenello awarded both women strophic texts to lament their fate, which Cavalli set with *ostinatos* based on descending chromatic patterns. This, of course, is a particularly valuable compositional device for both Monteverdi and Cavalli. Associated variously with lament, obsession, passion, eroticism, or spirituality, arias constructed over such patterns were particularly useful for the expression of the extreme emotional states often associated with the feminine.⁴⁷ The rhythmic regularity of the *ostinato* creates a hypnotic sensation that stands out from other forms of musical expression, and Cavalli used it to powerful effect in a variety of ways. The chromatic descending basses, moreover, present a unique juxtaposition of stasis and motion, chromaticism and diatonicism: movement away from a tonal center, with a series of unresolved chromatic pitches, is contrasted with regular return to same.

Nonetheless, these two arias are quite stylistically disparate, demonstrating the profound differences in the mythic histories and circumstances of mother and daughter. Cassandra, known for her purity and piety, was given the power of prophecy by Apollo; however, after she spurned his advances, Apollo deprived her of the power of persuading men that she told the truth. Cassandra, Virgil tells us, chants of “what will come with lips the gods had doomed to disbelief” (*Aeneid*, 2.246–47), and thus Troy falls because her warnings about the horse were ignored. Busenello’s portrayal of Cassandra was inspired by a relatively brief passage in book 2 of the *Aeneid* in which Coroebus dies while attempting to rescue Cassandra, dragged out of Minerva’s temple, her eyes “raised in vain to heaven” (*Aeneid*, 2.402–30).

Cassandra:

L'al - ma fiac - ca sva-ni, La vi-ta, ohi - mé, spi-ró.

5 Co-re-bo, oh Di - o, mo-rì, E so - la mi la-sciò.

9 Per spo-sa ei mi vo-le-va, e io qui pian-go, E prima che spo-sa ve-do-va ri -

13 man - go. La vi - ta

6 6

Cassandra: The weary soul passed away, / alas, he breathed his last. / Coroebus died, oh God, / and left me alone. / He wanted me as his bride, and here I cry, / and before a bride, I am a widow.

EXAMPLE 2. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 1, SCENE 4: Cassandra: “L’alma fiacca” (fol. 23r).

Act 1, scene 4 of the opera dramatizes Corebo’s fatal battle to defend Cassandra’s honor and his final declarations of love, concluding with Cassandra’s lament at his death.⁴⁸

Cavalli and Busenello give Cassandra an entire scene—six strophes (only four of which are set by Cavalli)—in which to lament the death of her beloved Corebo and to bewail her virginity (see ex. 2). The first strophe establishes an antithesis between the passing of Corebo’s spirit in death and

Cassandra's earthbound, virginal existence. This is played out in Cavalli's musical setting on several levels. The ground bass itself operates at two different rates of speed, emphasizing two different tonal centers, and supporting two different kinds of vocal expression: in measures 1–8 a chromatic scale descends from *d'* through two full octaves mostly in quarter notes (with half notes to articulate the pitches *a* and *A*). The descending motion is abruptly halted in measure 9, as the pitch *A* is sustained for two measures, supporting an unexpected intrusion of recitative. The chromatic descent then resumes, now augmented to half notes, finally cadencing on *A* at the end of the strophe. Cassandra's vocal line above this is likewise fractured—an odd combination of severity and lyricism. Of note is the sense of breathlessness engendered by the oddly placed rests, the stilted moans that scrupulously avoid the impression of conventional sighs, the narrow melodic range disturbed only for the ascent to the upper *g''* in measure 5, and the modal ambiguity created by the intrusion of the *B♯* in measure 3. Even this mild gesture toward lyricism comes to a stop along with the ground bass in measure 9, with the shift to a diatonic declamatory recitative. Moreover, over the course of four strophic variations, the impression of shifting realities and wavering states of time and being is intensified. Cassandra's music oscillates with regular irregularity between motion and stasis, lyricism and speech, chromaticism and diatonicism, *durus* and *mollis* tonalities, invoking the broken hypnotic trance of the virginal prophetess, whose curse had been the failure of her rhetoric to persuade.

Cassandra's restrained despair contrasts strikingly with the emotional outbursts of her mother Hecuba, described by Boccaccio as an exemplum of misery driven to insanity, who "howled like a dog through the Thracian fields."⁴⁹ In act 1, scene 7, Hecuba not only mourns the death of her husband and the destruction of her kingdom, but also envisions the violent death awaiting both herself and her daughter at the hands of the Greeks (see ex. 3). Despite the surface similarity engendered by the use of a descending chromatic ground bass, Hecuba's aria has none of the rhythmic, tonal, or stylistic fluctuations that characterize Cassandra's catatonic sorrow over the loss of her lover. The dignified widow of King Priam laments in the form of an invocation: a supplication to the gods for strength, a plea for her soul to leave her body in the face of unbearable agony. The chromatic ostinato, the incessant dotted rhythms resulting from the *sdrucchioli* or antepenultimate word stresses, and the wide vocal range all evoke a sense of the supernatural and the other-worldliness of Hecuba's strength.⁵⁰

Hecuba's lament, however, is but a prelude of what is not only the tragic climax of the act, but the entire opera. Finding her daughter amid the carnage, Hecuba urges Cassandra to join in lamentation: "Cassandra, ohimè, Cassandra, Piango, piangi, piangiamo il caso estremo, L'alba non rivedremo" (Cassandra, oh woe, Cassandra, I cry, you cry, let us cry for our tragic fate. We will not see the dawn again). Bidding farewell to life, she

Hecuba:

Tre - mu-lo spi - ri-to, Fle - bi-le e lan - gui-do, E - sci-mi

6

su - bi-to. Va - da-si l'a - ni-ma, Ch'E - re-bo tor - bi-do

12

Cu - pi-do a - spet - ta-la. Po - ve-ro Pri - a-mo

Hecuba: Trembling spirit, / languid and weak, / quickly leave me. / Let my soul depart, / gloomy Erebus awaits it. / Poor Priam . . .

EXAMPLE 3. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 1, SCENE 7: Hecuba: "Tremulo spirito" (fol. 32r).

looks forward to their embrace in death when mother and daughter will go to the tomb together, their blood intermingled as in the womb. Cavalli paints this cataclysmic moment by using the most extreme tonal movement in the opera (see ex. 4). Following the conclusion of the first strophe of her lament cited above, Hecuba begins in G minor, cadences on D major, and shifts abruptly to B major (m. 11), eventually cadencing in the highly unusual—and quite special—F-sharp major sonority for the "caso estremo" (m. 21). Cavalli (or his scribe) gave this moment visual emphasis by using the quadro signs for the raised E $\sharp$ s.⁵¹

Hecuba's vision of their death elicits flatward motion. She returns to G minor and the descending chromatic bass, moving still further flatward to A-flat major and C minor as she describes their ultimate reunion in death. In this moment of unrelenting pathos, Hecuba has traveled through the tonal spectrum of the entire opera, moving a tritone from F-sharp major

Recita:

Ahi tra tan - ti ne - mi - ci Pro-va il mio pet - to so - lo Pe -

5

nu - ria di fe - ri - te, Nè ca-de an - cor la mia tra tan-te

The image shows a musical score for a vocal part. The melody is written on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: "nu - ria di fe - ri - te, Nè ca-de an - cor la mia tra tan-te". The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with a sharp sign indicating a key change or a specific note. The bass line is written on a bass clef staff, featuring whole notes and a sharp sign. The number "5" is written above the first measure of the melody.

9

vi - te. Cas-san-dra, ohi - mè, Cas - san-dra, Pian -

The musical score is for a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4 with a sharp sign, then a half note G4. After a double bar line, it continues with a quarter rest, a quarter note A4 with a sharp sign, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note E4, a half note D4, a quarter note C4, a quarter note B3, a quarter note A3, and a half note G3. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat. It starts with a half note G3, followed by a half note A3 with a sharp sign. After a double bar line, it continues with a half note G3, a half note F3, a half note E3, a half note D3, and a half note C3. The lyrics are: 'vi - te. Cas-san-dra, ohi - mè, Cas - san-dra, Pian -'.

14

go, pian - gi, pian - gia-mo il ca-so e -

7
#6

18

stre - mo, L'al - ba non ri - ve - dre - mo.

5 3 # 4 3 5 3

EXAMPLE 4. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 1, SCENE 7: Hecuba: "Ahi tra tanti nemici" (fol. 32r-v).

flatward to C minor. To complete this tragic climax, Cavalli endows her with further lyrical power by adding a second strophe of the G-minor lament not called for in Busenello's libretto.

Cassandra and Hecuba share a highly unusual fate for a Venetian heroine: they die. Yet, because Busenello and Cavalli illuminate the afflictions suffered by the Trojan women in act 1, Aeneas's presumably fatal abandonment of Dido is not experienced as an isolated event. The sense of tragedy associated with the abandonment is thus diminished—or perhaps made more acceptable—as compared with that of the heroic Trojan women. Moreover, Cassandra and Hecuba are not made memorable solely because of dramatic events, but also through their musical impact. The lyric weight and the most extreme tonal events of the opera are given to these two living emblems of tragedy, whose sorrowful fate cannot help but diminish Dido's own claims for sympathy.

In *La Didone*, however, even this seemingly unambiguous representation of feminine despair is not allowed to stand unblemished. In a juxtaposition of opposites so typical of the Incogniti and seventeenth-century theater, Busenello directly follows Hecuba's moving death monologue with the boisterous aria of Sinon the Greek, whose expression of glee over the prospect of killing Trojans provides a lesson about the false nature of women: he sings of the men who (like Meneleus) are cuckolded by their greedy wives. The playful quality of his concluding ritornello only calls attention to the disjunction between his monologue and the scenes with which it is surrounded.

By highlighting the genuinely tragic fate of Troy and its inhabitants—many of whom are never seen nor referred to in the rest of the opera—Cavalli and Busenello profoundly change the ways in which we will understand Dido and Aeneas, their behavior, motivations, and eventual fate. Through the sorrows of Hecuba and Cassandra, we are provided with a vision of profound tragedy by means of women who are genuine representatives of female virtue. At the same time, Sinon's joy at the death of the Trojans—and his cynicism about honor—placed immediately after Hecuba's moving invocation and before the appearance of Creusa's ghost, reminds us that virtue is only relative.⁵² By the time Enea flees Troy, loses Creusa, and is comforted by her ghost, the most tragic events of the opera have already transpired, and we are curiously numbed as we anticipate Enea's fateful meeting with Didone.

THE COMIC DISCOURSE

The Trojan act emphasizes two issues that were important for Venetians in general and the Incogniti in particular: the difference between male and female virtues, and the importance of civic duty over private passion. At the same time it demonstrates one mode of female suffering. Despite the fact

that Enea survives, the lens through which the Trojans are viewed is essentially tragic. In the Trojan act, Cavalli and Busenello establish an uncompromising standard for human suffering and righteous behavior. Busenello, however, locates Carthage in the comic realm and fills it with characters whose primary function is to oppose or criticize Didone. This is essentially a strategy of containment: Didone's innately tragic and melodramatic tendencies as established in the ancient sources are modified and mollified by the characters who surround her. Busenello presents the unrequited lover driven mad with desire and frustration who himself recites a satirical lament, a bevy of unsympathetic gods and goddesses, the scolding ghost of the dead husband Sicheo, and a trio of badly behaved Carthaginian women who point out Didone's flaws with penetrating acuity and with florid vocalism that contrasts strikingly with the tragic mode of expression employed by Hecuba and Cassandra.

This shift to a comic mode of expression is apparent at the outset of act 2, in which we are first introduced to Iarba, king of Gaetulia, Didone's unsuccessful suitor, and, arguably, the chief protagonist of the final two acts of the opera. Iarba is also our first major character who would have been played by a castrato, and he provides a model for a certain kind of "effeminate" and frustrated male suitor who—at the outset of an opera—is juxtaposed with a stronger female. Iarba's prominence in the opera is, in fact, further evidence of Busenello's comfort with the sources—a result of the conflation of the three versions of the Dido tale. In Virgil's epic, Iarbas is mentioned briefly as a devout worshipper (and possible descendent) of Jove; his anguished prayers about Dido's love for Aeneas reach Jove's ears, thus instigating Mercury's infamous visit to the dallying hero.⁵³ Iarbas plays a central role in the pre-Virgilian legend: his desire for the chaste widow Dido—and the resulting threat to Carthage—compels the queen to ritual suicide. Finally, Dido's letter to Aeneas in Ovid's *Heroides* also contains a significant mention of Iarbas that might well have inspired Busenello: "I have a thousand suitors, each one eyeing me with fondness and all complaining because I prefer a foreigner. Tie me, give me to Iarbas of Gaetulia; I would permit it" (Ovid, *Heroides*, 9).

In Busenello's libretto, however, Iarba is the hero of what is essentially a comedy, based on the well-established formula inherited from Greek New Comedy, described so cogently by Northrop Frye. The young man who desires a young woman encounters opposition that is overcome by the end of the play. But, as Frye notes, this usually involves a movement "from one kind of society to another": the authority in charge at the play's outset is substituted by the new one created by the hero and heroine.⁵⁴

In acts 2 and 3 of *La Didone*, parental disapproval does not prevent Iarba from gaining the hand of Didone; rather, the obstruction is a result of Didone's power, her vow of chastity, and, by extension, women's ambivalent nature. In this curious commingling of comedy, tragedy, and epic, the

"comic" complications are a result of Enea's arrival, which drives Didone to the brink of suicide and Iarba to madness. Thus, Enea's departure, which in Virgil's epic leads Dido to melodramatic sorcery and suicide, is actually the device that *allows* the two lovers to come together at the work's conclusion. Of greatest importance, however, is Busenello's treatment of the societal transformation. The "usurper"—recognized by the audience—is nothing less than Didone herself. The celebratory joy of hero and heroine in the conclusion of the work thus acknowledges a new social order, in which female power is replaced by patriarchal rule and its associated values.

Cavalli prefigures much of this power shift through motivic connections between Iarba's and Didone's initial arias. Driven by his passion to court Didone in secret, Iarba is first shown in the opening of act 2 mourning his "eccesso d'affetto," which prevents him from fulfilling his royal responsibilities. Against tyrannical love, he mourns, his "scepter is impotent," and he expresses his hope that Didone will be moved to satisfy his desires. Iarba's words are optimistic, but the downward inflection of the aria is more reflective of his complaint of impotence. The descending diatonic tetrachord in the bass supports a melodic line that lies in a distinctly plagal ambitus (see ex. 5). The opening phrase is based on a descending triad that descends from and returns to the fifth before dropping a fourth, with the second and third phrases each moving progressively lower. It is only in the final phrase—the extended setting of the final hendasyllabic verse (mm. 15–19)—that Iarba manages to reach above the fifth degree of the scale to the upper neighbor B_♭, albeit in the context of a descending melisma. It is this same stepwise descent that forms the motivic basis of the ritornello that frames each strophe.

Iarba's pleas are as impotent as his scepter. In the scene that follows, Didone will reject him with her own aria. In the first strophe she informs him that her affections are firmly buried with her husband; in the second she adds that his hunger for her beauty will only lead to starvation; and finally, in the third strophe, she tells him that he should return to his kingdom, for she will be his wife only in his fantasies. She is, of course, mistaken in the last statement. She *will* be his wife by the end of the opera, for it is Iarba's fantasies—not Didone's "reality"—that will eventually be realized.

Didone's momentary control, notably, is apparent in her reinterpretation of Iarba's music: her aria of rejection is a mirror image of his unhappy plea: the bass line uses the same descending tetrachord, and the melody echoes the opening motive of his aria: the descending triad that returns to the fifth and then drops a fourth (mm. 1–2) (see ex. 6). Yet, Didone's aria is set firmly in the authentic range, with much of its melody lying in the upper fourth of the octave between *d''* and *g''*. Unlike Iarba, she returns easily to the fifth (*d''*) after the initial fourth descent, and, following a rest (m. 3) of a full beat that interrupts the progress of the phrase, she ascends abruptly to the high *g''*, stretching the cadence for the delayed arrival

Iarba:

Che ti dis - s'i - o, Las - so cor mi - o, Ec - co sen

6

vie - ne Il no - stro be - ne. M'al - le - gro te - co, De -

11

sir mio cie - co, Poi-ché il de - sti - no T'ha del - le glo - rie

16

tue fat - to in - do - vi - no.

[Rit. + 1 more strophe]

Iarba: What did I tell you / my unhappy heart? / Here arrives / our beloved. / I rejoice with you, / my blind desire, / because destiny / has made you foresee this bliss.

EXAMPLE 5. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 2, SCENE 1: Iarba: "Che ti diss'io" (fol. 49v).

on the downbeat of measure 9. Moreover, unlike Iarba, who adheres to regular four-bar phrases, Didone contradicts expectations, besting him at his own game by interrupting, eliding, or extending her phrases. And this same sort of battle of wits is played out in the subsequent recitative dialogue—a passage of veritable *stichomythia* in which Didone has a sharp-witted response for each of Iarba's pleas.

The temporary disparity in their power is apparent in Iarba's reply. In a passage of recitative, he resolves to withdraw his body, if not his heart, con-

Didone:

Il mio ma - ri - to Già se - po - li - to Se-co in se - pol-cro

7 6 #

7

tien gli af - fet - ti mie - i. Se a-mar - ti an-co vo - les - si, io

4 3

12

non po - tre - i, Io, io non po - tre - i, se a -

18

mar-ti an-co vo - les - si, io non po - tre - i.

Didone: My husband / now buried / keeps my affections with him in his grave. / I could not love you even if I wanted to.

EXAMPLE 6. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 2, SCENE 2: Didone: "Il mio marito" (fol. 51r).

demning Didone for her cruelty with an abrupt shift to an E-major sonority that foreshadows her own response to emotional anguish. Iarba responds to Didone with his aria, adopting her key and the descending tetrachord; however, in this instance the triadic motive that opened the previous two arias is replaced by a straightforward melodic descent of an octave that spans the entire course of the aria. The somewhat more pronounced chromatic coloring in this aria—including the flatted third—and the recitative complete

Iarba's transformation from optimistic suitor to an anguished lover who is defeated by Didone's power and loyalty to her deceased husband.⁵⁵

Iarba's two arias profoundly influence our perception of Didone and her apparent autonomy. Her power over him may be manifest in her reworking of his music: her melodic, rhythmic, and tonal control, as well as her preference for ascending melodic lines and an authentic ambitus. But Iarba's narrative and emotive power surrounds Didone's own voice in these scenes. It is *his* voice that is heard first and last, he who dares to oppose the queen line for line in their brief dispute, and he who provides the context for our view of Didone's capriciousness. Thus enclosed by Iarba's utterances, Didone's power, like her chastity, is rendered false. This would seem to be just what Cavalli and Busenello intended: Didone will not be permitted to sing an aria again until the final scene of the opera.

THE FALL FROM CHASTITY

With the arrival of Enea, and the interjection of those elements of the plot drawn from Virgil, the equilibrium between queen and suitor begins to erode. It is here that the secondary characters wreak havoc with Didone's reputation as a pure widow, emulating Incogniti cynicism with regard to female chastity and participating in the comic discourse. Among them are Didone's vigilant attendants, the three ladies of Carthage. Although essentially minor characters within the central drama, these ancestors of the ladies of *Die Zauberflöte* play an important role in defining the problematic nature of Didone (and all women). There is no model for the ladies in the historical sources; they are entirely Busenello's invention, functioning at various times as members of a Greek-like chorus, court gossips, or palace whores, silently observing Didone's rejection of Iarba and attraction to Enea. Once Didone is stricken by love for Enea, however, the ladies are silent no longer, and performing the task assigned "rumor" in Virgil's text (*Aeneid*, 4.173–77), they inform Iarba of Didone's wandering eye. With enthusiastic abandon (act 2, scene 11), they each sing a strophe of an aria, commenting on Didone's fall from grace with a lyricism that the queen herself is not permitted to enjoy. However, it is in their concluding trio that the ladies clarify their true motivations. Since Didone has fallen in love with the Trojan, they sing, it is time for them also to find new lovers: "The rigor of mortality falls to the ground and the queen leads the way in love."

Didone's desire for Enea reflects poorly not only on her own morals; like all fallen women, she will necessarily lead other women astray, encouraging them to follow her example and take lovers. (Indeed, there is more than a note of Incognito cynicism in Busenello's construction of the Carthaginian ladies: Didone has yet to take Enea as her lover; they are a bit ahead of things in their eagerness to discard their own chastity.) In Cavalli's setting, the three ladies approach this enterprise with ironic enthusiasm; choosing

a mimetic rather than an emotive mode of expression, they “perform” Didone’s fall from chastity with quite literal word painting, contrasting the homophonic austerity of morality with the “fall of virtue” (stacked descending triads), slipping in and out of triple meter to show their apparent pleasure at the prospect of sensuality.

For the siren-like ladies of the Carthaginian court, Didone’s apparent interest in the Trojan stranger provides a license for immoral activities, worthy of madrigalistic celebration; it is also evidence of Didone’s bond with women such as themselves, for whom chastity is less than natural. (Indeed, somewhat later in the opera, the ladies will demonstrate their own propensity for illicit activities as they playfully try to seduce the crazed Iarba.) Their gossip inspires the disgruntled Iarba (act 2, scene 12) to a lengthy monologue condemning Didone’s “lying chastity” (*castità bugiarda*), and condemning not only her but also the entire female sex.

Busenello thus transforms Iarba—the rejected suitor of the pre-Virgilian version of the legend—into a spokesman for Incogniti misogyny. As in Lorredano’s discourses on chastity cited above, the purity for which Didone has been renowned is false, disguised by lies and deception that are characteristic of all women. Yet, the function of Iarba’s monologue is not merely to criticize Didone’s hypocritical fall from virtue; rather, it is a bold parodic attack on the Carthaginian queen’s most famous utterance. This is Iarba’s own version of an Ovidian letter from an abandoned heroine. Like Didone, who will express her agony at Enea’s departure in a series of recitative monologues, the distraught Iarba laments his own abandonment in a lengthy speech that is suspiciously similar to the laments of the classical abandoned heroines. His monologue explores a series of passionate emotional states: first he is angered at Didone’s deceptions, the “*castità bugiarda*” that is merely a cover or ornament for hidden vices. Her excuses—the dust and bones of her husband—are pretexts to refuse his advances. Iarba is outraged at her preference for Enea, and feels jealousy of such extremity that his tears can scarcely fall. Moreover, like Ariadne, who had abandoned her kingdom to assist Theseus in his quest for the Minotaur, or Medea, who similarly sacrificed her royal status for the sake of Jason, Iarba complains that love has deprived him of his power and his kingdom, and even his ability to command his subjects. Yet, melded in all of this is a satirical element evident in the refrain that Iarba returns to three times in the course of the monologue: “*Son gemelle le donne e le bugie*” (Women and lies are twins).

Satire was clearly an important element in Cavalli’s setting of Iarba’s monologue. In the opening, for example, the idea of lament is evoked by the use of the emblematic descending tetrachord in measures 1–2 and 4–5 (see ex. 7). Yet, it is contradicted by the almost jovial rhythms in the vocal part that become increasingly clumsy with the brief burst of *stile concitato* in measures 4–5. Later in the monologue, Iarba’s claims that jealousy has stopped his tears and suppressed his ability to command and even speak are

Iarba:

O ca-sti-tà bu-giar-da, Quan-ti di-fet-ti co-[#]pri, Quan-ti vi-zi na-scon-di

descending tetrachord

4

Con tuoi fal-la-ci e sce-le-ra-ti mo-di. Ab-bel-lis-ci le col-pe, or-ni-le

6

fro - di.

Refrain:

Son ge-mel-le le don-ne, e le bu-gi-e

Iarba: Oh lying chastity, / how many defects you cover, / how many vices you hide / with your deceitful and evil ways. / You embellish faults, ornament frauds.

Refrain: Women and lies are twins.

EXAMPLE 7. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 2, SCENE 12: Iarba: “O castità bugiarda,” excerpts (fols. 85r–85v).

manifest in the low growls of jealousy and cries of anguish that descend impotently to a monotone growl on a low G. But despair over unrequited love contrasts with the unmistakable joyful affect that Iarba embraces for all of his condemnations of the female sex. The curious mixture between lament and satire is apparent in the refrain, where the cheerful C major at the opening turns unexpectedly to A minor with a cruel twist.

Strikingly, Iarba's anti-female tirade does not end with this condemnation of womankind. Like Catullus's Ariadne or Virgil's Dido, Iarba is also driven to madness.⁵⁶ And while mad scenes were not unknown for female characters of the period, the man driven to insanity by love presents a rather different lesson. Iarba's madness is presented as a legitimate outcome of an intolerable situation: inappropriate rejection by a woman in power, demonstrating the innate ability of women to emasculate and destroy. Didone refuses Iarba's advances and takes away his authority and strength; rejection leads to anger, a condemnation of all womankind, and finally insanity. As in Loredano's discourse in censure of women cited earlier, Iarba reminds us that Didone "robs the intellect and reason, and changes men into beasts." She denies him his manhood, power, and sanity—all of which will necessarily be reversed in the opera's comic conclusion. At the same time, Iarba's madness seems to gain him access—albeit temporarily—to a set of truths that may have been particularly significant to seventeenth-century Venetians. It is Iarba, not Enea, who is a caricature of the Venetian misogynist and whose insanity manifests itself in gaming and erotic play with the Carthaginian ladies. Most importantly, Busenello endows Iarba with the voice of contemporary poets, who "cannot represent stories as they wish" (act 2, scene 9), who raves anachronistically about the interference of the censors and critics—"the great melon-sniffer from Modena" who censors everyone's business and does not himself know how to write poetry (act 2, scene 10). Indeed, it is curious that while Enea himself embodies one version of male heroism integral to the Venetian myth, it is Iarba—the comic hero whose triumph is manifest in the work's conclusion—whose behaviors and libertine leanings most resemble those of Busenello and his colleagues in the Accademia degli Incogniti.

DIDONE'S LAMENT

In representing the love between Didone and Enea—and the hero's subsequent departure from Carthage—Busenello and Cavalli move closer to the events depicted in book 4 of the *Aeneid*. Strikingly, as in Virgil's epic, they never actually show Didone and Enea enjoying their passion or even expressing their love for each other, despite the ideal opportunity for lyrical expansion such scenes would have provided. The most poignant moment of love-inspired lyricism involving the two lovers occurs only *after* Enea has been ordered by Mercurio to leave Carthage: the hero expresses his sorrow

and love in an aria to the sleeping Didone, who is thus tragically deprived of even the small consolation his parting words might have provided. In both the opera and Virgil's epic the story is far more concerned with representing the consequences of passion than its apparent pleasures.

In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dido does not lament in a single monologue; rather, the essence of lament is expressed in the series of speeches that begins with the discovery of Aeneas's impending departure and ends with her suicide. Virgil's Dido follows the lamenting pattern familiar from such abandoned women as Ariadne or Medea. First, the deserted woman accuses the deserter of faithlessness and lists her many deeds on his behalf; second, she becomes alienated; finally, she curses him.⁵⁷ A detailed breakdown of the stages of lament experienced by Virgil's Dido is shown in table 1. In the first stage, her outrage at Aeneas's faithlessness (1) leads to (2) reminders of her services and pleading for him to remain. Her (3) anger at his indifference inspires (4) fury and the desire for revenge, leading to (5) sorcery, (6) increasing disintegration, and the resolution to die. This is followed by (7) madness, cursing, and, ultimately, suicide.

In the *Aeneid*, excessive love and burning desire drive Dido not only to despair and suicide but also to black magic. As the lament progresses she becomes increasingly disordered, even incoherent, losing not only her control over Carthage but also her ability to speak.⁵⁸ In her desire for vengeance against both Aeneas and his descendents, she is transformed, as Robert Ketterer describes, from the classical abandoned woman into a "melodramatic villainess," whose "ancient curse ritual" not only results in the "disastrous events which will be fulfilled in Italy in the second half of the poem," but also brings forth the "Carthaginian avenger who every Roman would know came in the historical person of Hannibal."⁵⁹ For Aeneas, sailing safely away from Carthage with the future of Rome and the power of narrative safely in hand, there is little doubt that he would be better off without this hysterical and lustful woman of foreign descent and evil practices. And while Virgil may linger with Dido long enough to invoke our sympathy and capture the imaginations of so many readers, she is all but written out of the story after book 4, having provided more than adequate corroboration for Mercury's famous dictum on the volatile and changing nature of women (*Aeneid*, 4.560–70).

The consequences of love are given rather different representations in *La Didone*, demonstrating once again the intertextuality of Virgil's sources. Like Virgil, Busenello did not give Didone a single monologue with which to express the conventional lament themes, but rather shaped her lament into three monologues whose basic narrative is owed to the *Aeneid*. The first two monologues (act 3, scene 7) have a direct parallel with the scene in book 4 of the *Aeneid*: a confrontation with Enea interrupted by his response. The third monologue is directly before her attempted suicide in act 3, scene 10.

TABLE 1 The Stages of Dido's Lament—Busenello and Virgil

<i>Busenello</i>	<i>Virgil</i>
1. Outrage 3.7 (1–26) Bitter anger, accusations of treachery, wickedness; claims of interference from powers of darkness; brief memory of embraces and sacrifices. No mention of pledge. 2. Pleading 3.7 (27–56) Complete submission: Didone offers Enea all of Carthage, her treasures, loyalty of subjects, and her soul, begging prostrate at his feet. No mention of marriage or child. 3. Anger at indifference 3.7 (114–75) Disbelief and shock at his indifference to her pleas; regret for hospitality provided; self-blame; accuses Enea of religious hypocrisy by assigning blame to gods; concludes that he must lie, as ultimately man alone is responsible for evil. 4. Fury and revenge 3.7 (176–95) Tells him to depart, asking the gods for cruelty and that his name be remembered for evil in subsequent generations. Insinuates that he should experience disaster at sea. 5. Inward lamentation/resolution to die 3.7 (196–207) Resolves to die (with <i>sdrucchioli</i> rather than the <i>versi sciolti</i> used for the rest of the lament). 6. Disintegration and guilt 3.10 (1–25) Takes Enea's knife and dismisses servants, preparing for suicide; crisis of identity: determines that she is "neither queen, nor Didone but portent of desperate fate and torment." Dwells on betrayal of husband; recognizes that the people will view her as Enea's concubine. No black magic.	1. Outrage (4.305–14) Accusations of treachery, heartlessness; dismay at the betrayal of pledges. 2. Pleading (4.315–30) Reminds Aeneas of their "marriage"; describes her sacrifices and political vulnerability to Iarbas and others; bemoans lack of a child. 3. Anger at indifference 4.365–75 Disbelief and shock at his indifference to her pleas; regret for hospitality provided; refuses to believe Aeneas's explanations concerning Jove and Mercury's orders; disbelief in his claim of divine birth. 4. Fury and revenge (4.376–86) Threatens to pursue him even after her death with black magic and haunting. (<i>Dido departs in anger</i>) 5. Sorcery (4.478–95) Plans the magic spells and funeral pyre, ostensibly to bring Aeneas back or rid herself of desire. 6. Disintegration/resolution to die (4.522–33) Sleepless night; considers paucity of options, resolves to die; guilt over betrayal of husband.

TABLE 1 *continued*

<i>Busenello</i>	<i>Virgil</i>
7. Self-punishment and suicide (attempt only) 3.10 (26–55) Resolves that even without the gossip of others, her conscience alone is enough to condemn her and she must take revenge upon herself. Asks the knife to pierce her heart, gush forth her blood, etc. but leave untouched the “beautiful name of Enea” who shall go “unpunished for his crimes.”	7. Madness, curse, and suicide (4.590–662) Increasing madness and disorientation, beating of breasts, regret for not destroying Aeneas and his son; cursing, declares enmity between their peoples (4.590–630); preparation for suicide with Sychaeus’s nurse (4.634–64); prepares to go to the underworld, dying unavenged; asks that the omen of her death pursue Aeneas (4.651–62).

As shown in table 1, Busenello’s Didone follows a similar narrative pattern to Virgil’s heroine for the first sections of the lament: outrage (1) is followed by her plea (2) for him to remain. Nonetheless, there are important differences that betray in part Busenello’s familiarity with Ovid’s more submissive Dido. Whereas Virgil’s Dido pleads with Aeneas with her royal dignity firmly intact, reminding him of her political vulnerability, their marriage pledge, and even her desire for a child, Didone attempts to dissuade Enea from leaving by offering him her kingdom, her subjects, her possessions, and in a manner inconceivable for Virgil’s Dido, even her very soul. Her anger at his apparent indifference (3) similarly leads to her thoughts of revenge (4), expressed during the confrontation scene between the two lovers. Yet, whereas in Virgil’s epic the confrontation ends abruptly as the queen departs in the fury that inspires her sorcery, for Didone the urge for vengeance quickly fades, and is followed by an introspective lamentation on her own intended suicide (5). However, her break from the Virgilian model is most apparent in the final stages of the lament. Didone is no sorceress; nor is she concerned primarily with vengeance. While there are elements of disintegration in her final monologue, the focus is on her own guilt (6) and the desire for suicide as self-punishment for her sexual crimes (7). For Didone, a failed emblem of chastity, it is self-castigation and submission that replace vengeance; as with Ovid’s Dido, the most pressing concern is to save Enea rather than punish him for his crimes.

The conflation of Virgil’s heroine with the remorseful Ovidian Dido—as well as the Incogniti-style interest in Didone’s false chastity—plays a critical role in the musical substance of Didone’s lament. First of all, the shape of the lament is determined in large part by Busenello’s poetry. With only one brief exception, the introspective lamentation in section (5), the entire la-

Didone:

Per-fi-do, dis-le - a - le, Co - sì la fu-ga ten - ti, E or - di-sci tra - di-men-ti?

7 6

Didone: Disloyal, traitor, / Thus you try to flee / and prepare treason?

EXAMPLE 8. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 3, SCENE 7: Didone: “Perfido, disleale” (fol. 116v).

ment is constructed almost exclusively of the *versi sciolti* of recitative. Cavalli not only followed Busenello’s cues in this regard, but also set Didone’s music in a manner that is remarkably devoid of arioso or song-like displays. The decision to allow Didone to express herself exclusively in recitative rather than aria at the dramatic climax of the opera is a fundamental part of their shared conception of this heroine, for whom the fall from chastity was all-important. Thus, while Busenello may well have been indebted to Virgil for the narrative shape of the lament, it is Ovid’s more passive Dido that underlies much of Cavalli’s musical realization of Didone’s lamentation. The conflict between guilt and passion places the heroine in a frozen state that sustains neither Virgil’s imposing fury nor the sympathetic lyrical lamenting enjoyed by her Trojan counterparts. Typically, Cavalli also represents Didone’s vacillations between anger and repentance by appropriate shifts between *cantus durus* and *cantus mollis*.

Much of this conflict can be seen in the opening of the confrontation scene in which the outrage expressed in the text is given minimal musical support: the initial force of the descending sixth in measure 1 seems to dissipate with the half-cadence in measure 3 in a manner that is surprisingly non-threatening (see ex. 8). Didone’s anger becomes more pronounced as she invokes the name of hell with a striking dissonance (ex. 9, m. 13) and accosts Enea with a series of rhetorical questions that propel her into the *durus* realm with a succession of sharpward ascending Phrygian cadences, concluding with the F# sonority in measure 18. Amid these *durus* sonorities Didone allows herself a single moment of remembered bliss, which then triggers her only true outburst of anger. Exploding into a genuine passage of *stile concitato*, outlining a diminished triad, she condemns the heavens for giving human form to this evil serpent (mm. 22–23).

This is not, however, an unambiguous expression of anger of the sort invoked by Virgil’s heroine. Unable to sustain her fury, the *stile concitato* dissipates. Didone turns from anger to self-blame, faulting herself for nurturing this evil. After this most compelling outburst, we begin to hear the

11 Didone:

Sai tu chi me l'ha det-to? Me l'ha det-to l'in - fer-no, Che per em -

7 #6 #

14

pir - ti di per - fi - dia il pet - to Ha pri - va - to se

16

stes-so Del-le fu - rie e de' mo - stri: Trat - ti co - sì gl'ab-brac-cia-men - ti

6 #

18

no - stri? Ab-brac-cia-men-ti, oh _____ Di - o, Co-me vo -

21

le - sti, oh _____ cie - lo Di pe - sti - len-ze in-flu - i - tor ma -

#6

Didone: Do you know who told me? / Hell told me / that to fill your breast with perfidy / it has deprived itself / of its furies and monsters: / Thus you treat our embraces? / Embraces, oh God, / how could you wish, oh heaven, / wicked perpetrator of pestilence, / to humanize the face of a viper / only so that I would hatch it in my breast? / I gave my life as spoil, / I handed over my honor / to the assassin of my fortunes.

EXAMPLE 9. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 3, SCENE 7: Didone: "Perfido, disleale" (fol. 116v).

(continued)

23

li - gno U - ma - na - re l'as - pet - to ad u - na ser - pe,

24

So - lo per - ch'io me la co - vas - si in se - no?

27

Die - di la vi - ta in pre - da, Die - di l'o - nor in ma - no Al - l'as - sas -

31

sin del - le for - tu - ne mi - e.

EXAMPLE 9. (*continued*)

intervention of Ovid's Dido. As the bass finally descends to A for yet another half-cadence, Didone avoids the appropriate upward resolution of the leading tone $g\sharp'$, descending instead somewhat awkwardly to e' (mm. 25–27). It is at this point that she acknowledges not only Enea's culpability but also the limitations of her own options, having given away her life and honor. This moment of despair, however, is not met with vocal gestures that reflect the heroine's anger. Here, the rhetorical mode is one of submission and resignation. Cavalli gives her a pair of short, gasping, declamatory phrases, composed of repeated notes and a lower neighbor, establishing for the heroine a *parlando* style that will recur when she replies to Enea later in the scene, and to which she will adhere almost obsessively when contemplating suicide (mm. 27–32).

In the second section of the monologue, Didone retreats from this more static recitation to plead with Enea, offering him her possessions, her kingdom, and even her soul. Strikingly, it is for this submissive pleading—unknown to Virgil's heroine—that Cavalli chooses to endow his heroine with a more eloquent rhetorical strategy: tonal stability, more lyrical, symmetrical phrases clarified by strong authentic cadences, and a more expressive use of dissonance. As Didone describes the movement of her soul drawn close to his divine face like a "servile magnet," bass and soprano are drawn into close counterpoint (mm. 59–64), the descending vocal line depicting her utter submission at his feet (see ex. 10). And it is with this pleading tone that the first monologue ends, as Didone begs Enea not to depart. This change is likewise mirrored by a shift to *cantus mollis*, a fitting tonal reflection of Didone's submission, implicit in Ovid's, rather than Virgil's, text.

Enea's reply is, not surprisingly, unsatisfactory. He is somewhat more conciliatory and complimentary to his hostess than Virgil's hero, but nevertheless his response—attributing the blame to the gods and his heroic destiny—only incites Didone to greater anger. Like Virgil's Dido, she is infuriated at Enea's unresponsiveness to her predicament, regretting her legendary hospitality. Yet, this is done entirely within the context of self-blame. I was foolish, she claims, for providing him generosity; I was cruel to the "innocent bones" of my dead husband—remorse scarcely exhibited by Virgil's Dido. Still another difference between Dido and Didone concerns their attitudes toward the gods whose actions have determined so much of the drama. Whereas Virgil's Dido accuses Aeneas of lying about his divine birth, Busenello's Didone goes much further, charging him with hypocrisy and thereby adopting the familiar *Incogniti* stance of religious skepticism. Why, she asks, would the gods have brought him to Carthage only to order him later to betray her? She cannot conceive of a world order whereby the gods would sanction lying and faithlessness, whereby Enea's destiny and duty would be considered more important than her own honor and life. This, for her, is the ultimate lie, for it leads her to conclude—erroneously in this instance—that men, not the gods, are ultimately responsible for evil. It is this realization that causes her to unleash another burst of anger. While she refrains from the black fury and curses hurled by Virgil's Dido, she nonetheless sends him away imploring the gods for cruelty, willing him disaster at sea, and condemning his name and memory for generations to come.

In the conclusion of the confrontation scene, however, the chasm between Didone and her literary model becomes irreparable. As noted earlier, in Virgil's epic, the confrontation ends with Dido's infuriated departure that precedes her descent into madness and sorcery. Busenello and Cavalli alter Didone's character irrevocably by transforming this highly volatile moment into an inwardly directed lamentation in which she resolves to die. Busenello separated this passage from the rest of the scene by switching from the constant *versi sciolti* of standard recitative to a group of 7-syllable

58 Didone:

car - ro e fi - nal - men - te Sa - rà l'a - ni - ma mi - a Al - la

61

bel - la, di - vi - na tra - mon - ta - na Del tuo vi - so gen - ti - le Ca - la - mi - ta ser -

64

vi - le. Ec - co ab - bas - so a' tuoi pie - di Il

68

no - me di re - gi - na: U - mi - lio al tuo co - spet - to

72

Que - sta co - ro - na mi - a.

Didone: And finally / my soul will be drawn / to the beautiful, divine setting / of your gentle face / like a slavish magnet. / Behold, I lay at your feet / the name of Queen: / I humble my crown to your presence.

EXAMPLE 10. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 3, SCENE 7: Didone: "Perfido, disleale," continued (fol. 118v).

lines of *sdrucchioli* or antepenultimate accent, used in Hecuba's G-minor aria, and associated with both lament and invocation (see ex. 11).

Cavalli's setting takes account of the exceptional nature of the moment, while at the same time clarifying the profound difference between Didone's lamenting and the sort practiced by the less ambiguously tragic Trojan women. This is neither an angry supplication to the gods for revenge nor an unabashed lyrical expression of grief. Three statements of a descending diatonic tetrachord between *e* and *B* (mm. 116–19; mm. 120–22; mm. 123–25) support the pseudo-recitative, which likewise descends depressively by means of awkward skips and monotonal recitation. That this is a lament is unmistakable, but it is one that avoids seductive lyricism in favor of an almost catatonic lethargy. With the E-minor cadence in m. 128 the hypnotic motion of the descending tetrachord ceases, and as Didone speaks of shutting her miserable eyes, she returns to the static, less goal-oriented monotonal gestures noted earlier. Her final condemnation of Enea as an "ingrato," repeated to an ascending sequence, provides her with a last burst of energy with which to climb the scale for a final farewell; her strength suddenly leaves her, as she plunges an octave to the cadence.

At the end of this scene, Didone falls into a faint. Her punishment, however, is not over; once again the subsidiary characters take up their chronic condemnation of her adulterous behavior, further intensifying her self-blame. Indeed, this is an essential part of the way in which the comic discourse operates in the midst of the seemingly tragic circumstances of her abandonment. Didone's tragic voice is contained and suppressed by the insistent condemnations of those who surround her. First, the ghost of her dead husband Sicheo appears, brutally condemning his wife's infidelity and disproving Anna's claims for the silence of a dead husband: "Take a mirror," he sings, noting the favorite icon of female vanity, "and look at your own image"; "tremble with fear at the horrible appearance of your infamous guilt."⁶⁰ Then the three court ladies reappear and sing satirically about Enea's departure, the faithlessness of men, and the necessity for women to opt for variety rather than fidelity. In so doing, they present an alternative view of femininity, opposing Didone's example by preaching feminine promiscuity in a highly lyric and ornamental vein. In setting the three strophic texts that Busenello provided for the ladies, Cavalli used his most seductively melodious vocal writing. Finally, the anti-tragic tone is continued by the jovial Iarba, comforted by Mercurio with the promise of a happy ending.

For Didone, however, it would seem that the nearly constant criticism and skepticism about her lack of chastity have finally achieved the desired effect. In the final part of the lament, the lengthy monologue in which she contemplates suicide, she confronts a genuine crisis of conscience and identity. This is the tragic climax of the opera, the point at which the loss of love, reputation, and chastity becomes unbearable for the heroine. Nonetheless, Cavalli and Busenello manage to dislodge her from her role as a

116 Didone:

Van - ne, ch'io qui de - li - be - ro Chiu - der le lu - ci

118

lan - gui - de, Fi - nir l'an - go - scie e i ge - mi - ti.

120

Ven - ga la mor - te squal - li - da, Se - gni il pun - to al pe - ri - o - do Di

122

mie - gior - na - te fle - bi - li. E la Par - ca ter - ri - bi - le Con

124

la fa - tal sua for - bi - ce Re - ci da il fi - lo te - nu - e

Didone: Go, for now I decide / to close my languid eyes, / to cease the agony and the wailing. / Come, squalid death / to mark the period to the sentence / of my feeble days. / And let terrible Fate / with her fatal scissors / cut the thin thread / of my weak life. / Here I close my miserable eyes / to the sweet rays of vital light. / Ungrateful Enea, I will never open them again.

EXAMPLE 11. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 3, SCENE 7: Didone: “Dunque sordo a miei preghi,” conclusion (fol. 124r-v).

126

Del - la mia vi - ta de - bo - le.

129

Qui chiu-do gli oc-chi mi - se - ri, qui chiu-do gli oc-chi

133

mi - se - ri Del-la lu - ce vi - ta - le ai dol - ci ra - i;

137

In - gra - to E - ne - a, in - gra - to E - ne - a,

141

nè gl'a - pri - rò più, più ma - i.

EXAMPLE 11. (*continued*)

tragic heroine. This is accomplished by the continued interference of Iarba and the comic plot: in the immediate aftermath of Mercurio's restoration of Iarba's sanity and promise of the *lieto fine*, how can genuine catharsis be achieved? Second, there is the musical and dramatic representation of the lament itself. Here, as suggested above, the insinuation of Ovid's more passive, guilt-ridden model is most apparent. Didone is not torn between the widely disparate emotions of the earlier monologues; in this scene she essentially maintains a single affect—that of self-blame and guilt. The entire text reads as follows:

Porgetemi la spada
 Del semideo troiano;
 Ritiratevi tutte, o fide ancelle;
 Appartatevi, o servi;
 Io regina, io Didone?
 Nè Didon, nè regina
 Io son più, ma un portento
 Di sorte disperata, e di tormento;
 Vilipesa dai vivi,
 Minacciata dai morti,
 In scherno⁶¹ uguale a gl'uomini,
 e all'ombre.

Purtroppo io t'ho tradito,
 O infelice marito;
 Purtroppo dai miei falli
 La dignità real resta macchiata.
 Disonorata adunque,
 Come respiro, come
 Movo il piè, movo il capo?
 Anima mia sei dunque un'alma
 indegna,⁶²
 Se presti il tuo vigore
 A chi non ha più onore;
 M'additeranno i sudditi per vile
 Concubina d'Enea;
 Mormoreran le genti
 La mia dissolutezza.

Ma se fosser pur anco
 Le genti senza lingua,
 Le penne senza inchiostri,
 Muta la fama, ei secoli venturi,
 Senza notizia degli obbrobri miei,
 Basta la mia coscienza,
 Che sempre alza i patiboli al
 mio fallo.

Give me the knife
 Of the Trojan demigod;
 Leave me, o faithful handmaids;
 Withdraw, o servants;
 I queen, I Dido?
 Neither Dido, nor queen,
 I am nothing more than a portent
 Of desperate fate and of torment;
 Vilified by the living,
 Threatened by the dead,
 Equally scorned by men and ghosts.

Too much I have betrayed you,
 O unhappy husband;
 On account of my faults
 The royal dignity remains soiled.
 Thus dishonored,
 How can I breathe, how
 Can I move my feet or head?
 My soul, you are thus an infamous
 spirit,

If you ascribe your vigor
 To one who has honor no longer;
 The citizens point to me as a vile
 Concubine of Aeneas;
 The people murmur
 Of my dissoluteness.

But even if it were thus
 That the people had no tongues,
 Pens were without ink,
 Fame mute, and the coming centuries
 Were without notice of my disgraces,
 My conscience would be enough
 That it would always raise the gallows of
 my fault.

Ho soddisfatto al senso,
 Alla ragione si sodisfi ancora;
 E se me stessa offesi,
 Or vendico me stessa.
 Ferro, passami il core,
 E se trovi nel mezzo al core istesso

Del tuo padrone il nome
 No 'l punger, no 'l offender,
 ma ferisci
 Il mio cor solo, e nella strage mia
 Esca il sangue, e lo spirito,⁶³

Resti ogni membro lacerato, e offeso,
 Ma il bel nome d'Enea,
 Per cui finir convengo i giorni afflitti,

Vada impunito pur de' suoi delitti.

Cartagine, ti lascio.
 Spada, vanne coll'elsa, e 'l pomo
 in terra,
 E nel giudizio della morte mia
 Chiama ogn'ombra infernal fuor
 degli abissi.

E tu, punta cortese,
 Svena l'angoscie mie,
 Finisci i miei tormenti,
 Manda il mio spirito al tenebroso rio.
 Empio Enea, cara luce, io moro,
 a Dio.

I satisfied the senses,
 Reason now is to be satisfied;
 And if myself I once offended,
 Now I will avenge myself.
 Knife, penetrate my heart,
 And if you find in the middle of the
 heart itself

The name of your master
 Do not pierce it, do not offend it,
 but wound
 My heart alone, and in my slaughter
 Let blood gush forth, and the spirit
 depart,

Leave every member torn and broken,
 Except the beautiful name of Aeneas,
 For whom I go to finish my afflicted
 days.

Let him go yet unpunished for his
 crimes.

Carthage, I leave you.
 Sword go with the hilt, and the
 pummel to the depth,
 And in judgment of my death
 Call every infernal spirit out of the
 depths.

And you, courteous point,
 Kill my anguish,
 Finish my torments,
 Send my soul to the gloomy river.
 Wicked Aeneas, dear light, I die,
 farewell.

The first section depicts Didone's utter disintegration: her unworthiness as both a woman and a queen, her lack of position, the betrayal of her husband, and her dishonor among her own people. She recognizes that her unworthiness is not merely a result of the sully of her reputation; it is her own conscience that damns her. This leads her to the critical realization that her condition is the result of a fundamental conflict between sense and reason. Didone rejects the passion that led the well-controlled and powerful queen of Carthage to ignore both public duty and private morality. Like Virgil's Dido, Didone also acknowledges the need for vengeance. However, this vengeance is directed not at Enea, but at herself. Taking up Enea's knife, without the spectacle of the funeral pyre or the accompanying black magic, Didone asks that it penetrate her heart, gush forth blood, "leave every member torn"; yet, she asks that the name of "Enea remain untouched"

within her heart. Finally, in words that would have been inconceivable for Virgil's Dido, she asks that he remain "unpunished for his crimes."

From a musical standpoint, she reverts to the monotonal, repeated-note style of expression that had characterized many of her earlier moments of despair (see ex. 12). With the departure of the servants, the apparent calm and order of the opening phrases quickly dissipates. Yet, the heightening of emotion—the recognition of her loss of honor as queen and woman—does not inspire lyricism, but fragmentation. In a rare instance of text repetition Didone repeats the words "Io regina?" "Io Didone?" Short, gasping bursts form a sequence that utilizes the same neighbor-note figure broken off from the opening phrase. This disintegration of her identity is also reflected in the non-functional progressions and surprising tonal juxtapositions. The 6/5 sonority on $c\sharp'$ in measure 10 contrasts abruptly with the C minor of the previous measure, and the intensity is increased with the stepwise sequential statements on a' , $b\flat'$, c'' , and d'' , placed over an ascending series of sixth chords. The abrupt descent of the seventh in the voice in measure 14—colored by an unstable 6/4 sonority—would seem to indicate a negative answer to her rhetorical questions. The bass, which had begun a stepwise ascent with the $c\sharp$ in measure 8, now drops from G to $F\sharp$, only to be propelled back upwards to the $G\sharp$ for yet another sixth chord. With this striking flat-sharp contrast, Didone redefines herself as a "portent of desperate fate," her torment leading her to A minor, before falling back to D minor by means of a stepwise descending bass line (mm. 20–23).

It is this static mode of expression that Cavalli uses for Didone's most critical moment in the opera and the one most suggestive of her Ovidian persona: the decision to take vengeance not on Enea but on herself. Here, however, the vacillations between sharp and flat sonorities take on a more explicit meaning. In measures 65–66, as Didone acknowledges the fatal conflict between her sense of duty and urge for passion, Cavalli returns to the $c-c\sharp$ bass movement and static recitation that had marked her disintegration in the opening of this monologue. The satisfying of her sensual desires contrasts with reason, marked by the skip of a diminished fifth. Didone's recognition of the necessity of self-punishment is marked with a cadence on G minor (m. 72). However, the fundamental discord between this spiritual repentance and the physical passion that possesses her is manifested by Cavalli in tonal terms as, with another unexpected E-major sonority in measures 73–74, she prepares to pierce her body with Enea's sword, thus ending her own life. Moreover, it is this same *mollis-durus* juxtaposition that marks her own self-destructive urge and the desire to protect the beloved name of Enea that dwells in her heart from further harm (mm. 84–86). After a brief excursion to F and C, Didone bids farewell to her subjects and calls for the judgment of the underworld; the E major/G minor contrast is used again to express her agony (m. 109): the G in the bass ascends to $g\sharp$ (m. 110) as she contemplates the end to her torments.

Didone:

Por-ge-te-mi la spa-da Del se-mi - deo troi-a - no; Ri - ti -

5
ra - te-vi tut-te, o fi-de an-cel-le; Ap-par-ta - te-vi, o ser-vi;

9
Io re-gi-na, io Di-do-ne? Io re-gi-na, io Di-do-ne?

14
Nè Di-don, nè re - gi-na Io son più, ma un por - ten-to Di sor-te di-spe -

18
ra - ta, e di tor - men - to; Vi - li - pe - sa dai vi - vi,

6

EXAMPLE 12. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 3, SCENE 11: Didone: "Porgetemi la spada" (fols. 131r–135v).

(continued)

21

Mi-nac-cia - ta dai mor - ti, In scher-no u-gua-le a-gl'uo - mi-ni,

23

e al-l'om-bre. Pur-trop-po io t'ho tra - di - to,

27

pur-trop-po io t'ho tra - di-to, O in-fe - li-ce, o in-fe - li-ce ma-ri -

31

to. Pur-trop-po dai miei fal - li La di-gni-tà re - al re - sta mac -

35

chia-ta. — Dis - o - no-ra-ta a - dun-que, Co-me re - spi-ro, co-me Mo-vo il

EXAMPLE 12. (*continued*)

39

piè, mo-vo il ca-po? A - ni-ma mia sei dun-que un' al-ma in-de-gna,

43

Se pre-sti il tuo vi - go - re A chi non ha più o - no - re;

47

M'ad-di - te-ran-no i sud-di-ti per vi - le Con-cu - bi - na d'E-ne - a;

51

Mor-mo-re-ran le gen-ti La mia dis-so - lu - tez - za. Ma se fos-ser pur

55

an-co Le gen-ti sen - za lin-gua, Le pen-ne sen-z'in-chio-stri, Mu-ta la fa-ma,

EXAMPLE 12. (*continued*)

59

e i se - co - li ven - tu - ri, Sen - za no - ti - zia de - gl'ob - bro - bri

62

mie - i, Ba - sta la mia co - scien - za, Che sem - pre al - za i pa - ti - bo - li al mio fal -

65

lo. Ho sod - dis - fat - to al sen - so, Al - la ra - gio - ne si sod - dis - fi an - co - ra;

70

E se me stes - sa of - fe - si, Or ven - di - co me stes - sa. Fer - ro,

74

fer - ro, pas - sa - mi il co - re, E se tro - vi nel mez - zo al co - re i -

EXAMPLE 12. (*continued*)

77

stes-so Del tuo pa-dro-ne il no-me No 'l pun-ger, non l'of - fen-der, ma fe -

81

ri-sci Il mio cor so-lo, e nel-la stra-ge mi-a E-sca il san-gue, e lo

85

spir-to, Re-sti o-gni mem-bro la-ce - ra-to e of-fe-so, Ma il bel no-me,

89

ma il bel no-me d'E - ne - a, Per cui fi-nir con - ven-go i gior-ni af - flit - ti,

93

Va - da im-pu - ni - to pur de' suoi de - lit - ti.

EXAMPLE 12. (*continued*)

97

Car - ta - gi-ne, ti las - cio, Spa - da

101

van-ne col-l'el-sa e il po-mo in ter-ra, e nel giu - di-zio del-la mor-te

104

mi - a Chia-ma o-gn'om-bra in-fer - nal fuor de - gl'a - bis - si.

107

E tu, pun-ta cor - te - se, Sve - na l'an - go - scie mi - e,

110

Fi - ni-sci i miei tor - men - ti, Man-da il mio spir-to al te - ne -

EXAMPLE 12. (*continued*)

113

bro - so ri - o. Em - pio E - nea, ca - ra lu - ce,

116

io mo - ro, ad - di - o.

EXAMPLE 12. (*continued*)

A gasping, fragmented sequence then leads to the final cadence. Tracing a half-step ascent and octave displacement reminiscent of Arianna's lament, Didone sings her final phrase and—rather than actually piercing her heart with the knife—she faints.

Thus, in her hour of intended suicide, Didone does not adopt a heroically sympathetic lyric voice or any distinctive melodic ideas that would merit transformation into a refrain. With this retreat from sensuality—a kind of musical chastity—she offers her remorsefulness in a manner that highlights both her disintegration and her impotence: *parlando recitativo* colored with localized flat-sharp vacillations. She avoids the seductive chromaticism or broad tonal shifts awarded Hecuba and Cassandra in their vivid hours of tragedy. Nor does her lament allow her to wield the vengeful cursing, flames, and black magic that marked the death of her literary model. As Didone falls into a swoon, only to be rescued from death and endless recitative by Iarba, she repents her sins through the rehabilitating medium of lament.

A LIETO FINE

The opera, however, has yet to reach its conclusion. With the unconscious Didone at hand, it is now Iarba who takes up the sword, contemplating with exaggerated pathos his suicide in an unmistakable parody of Didone's despairing mode of expression. This time, it is Didone who interrupts Iarba's grand suicidal gestures. After his expression of joy and disbelief, she responds with a strophic text—accompanied by "*tutti gli istrumenti*"—the first "song-like" expression that she has enjoyed since the opening of act 2. She acknowledges Iarba as the preserver of her life, her king, lover,

Didone:

Qual-or on-deg-gia, e fre-me, Di pian-ti il ma-re in-sa-no.

4
L'an-co-ra del-la spe-me Non mai si get-ta in va-no,

7
Ch'a-mor nel mez-zo ai ca-si di-spe-ra-ti

13
I por-ti più fe-li-ci ha fab-bri-ca-ti.

[Rit.]

Didone: Whenever the tempestuous sea / of tears is shaken by storms, / the anchor of hope / is never cast in vain, / as love in the most desperate cases / has created more joyful harbors.

EXAMPLE 13. Cavalli, *La Didone*, ACT 3, SCENE 12: Didone: “Qualor ondeggia” (fol. 141r).

and faithful friend, and repents her “deafness to his laments,” banishing the hardness of her heart and giving herself to him as handmaiden (*ancella*) and bride. Busenello and Cavalli transform Virgil’s melodramatic sorceress intent on vengeance into a repentant sinner and happy wife. Newly chaste, having atoned for her crimes and accepted Iarba as both husband and king, Didone once again enjoys her lyrical voice and a triple meter for a brief solo aria (ex. 13) praising love as the cure for all ills, before the two lovers go on to consummate their relationship in the love duet that concludes the opera.

As Busenello had noted in his *argomento*, the tragic ending of Virgil's tale is successfully circumvented. Yet, regardless of his claims, *Didone* is scarcely a tragedy onto which a happy ending has been grafted. The height of tragedy in this opera is already completed by the end of the first act, a fact that Cavalli clearly indicates in his use of extreme tonalities for the deaths of Hecuba and Cassandra. Moreover, despite (or perhaps because of) Didone's reputation as an abandoned woman, her most heroic and desperate gestures—sorrow, fury, madness, self-punishment—are mimicked and parodied at nearly every juncture by the Carthaginian ladies, the ghost of the husband, and ubiquitous Iarba, thus placing the heroine's moral dilemma in a highly satirical light. This curious mesh of comedy and tragedy, epic and satire, situates Didone squarely in the center of the familiar controversy regarding the nature of female virtue that had so preoccupied the Accademia degli Incogniti and was so essential to her mythic history.

Yet, while the issue of genre may elude definition, the ultimate message with regard to Didone's chastity is hardly obscure. When Didone most "unrealistically" relinquishes her suicidal passion for Enea to marry Iarba, she is—according to Venetian standards—behaving in a manner that is entirely realistic. Didone could scarcely marry Enea, who must be free to continue on to Italy to establish a great Republic. Nor—given her slippery moral status—could her abandonment by Enea be allowed to assume tragic proportions. Moreover, the comic ending was a necessity: Didone's political power and protestations about chastity must necessarily be overthrown. Comedy was the most ready device with which to accomplish that feat.

Paralleling Didone's move from chastity to sin to repentance and finally marriage are similar shifts in her manner of vocal expression. Indeed, it is not merely that she laments almost exclusively in recitative, but that her moments of greatest emotion are marked by lyric restraint, a monotonal, almost hypnotic style of declamation, stripped of any overt sensual appeal. As an emblem of chastity that stumbles into an illicit, passionate relationship, for her the acceptable modes of expression were limited. Love brings her no pleasure of the sort expressed in the triple-meter songs and virtuosic displays of the promiscuous Carthaginian ladies. Nor does she gain the sympathy engendered by the lush vocalism and single-minded persistence of a chromatic ostinato as in the laments by Hecuba and Cassandra. It is only after she has properly repented and admitted her wrongs, abdicating the throne, that composer and librettist permit her to sing in aria once again. Like Aretino's parodic Dido who strangles on her vows of chastity, love deprives the operatic Didone of her ability to sing. The duet with the castrato-hero that concludes this and so many other Venetian operas provides more than a satisfying musical conclusion; it is a confirmation of the appropriate order. And it is within this unthreatening, more socially acceptable role that she can finally present an undisguised demonstration of her femininity and beauty through the luxury of song.

Chapter 4

“Disprezzata regina”

Woman and Empire

In the *argomento* to the libretto of *La Didone*, Busenello defends his revision of history by reminding the reader of Virgil's own poetic license in the fashioning of the *Aeneid*. His explanation, as is now evident, fails to account for many of his most blatant changes to history and myth. The happy ending—the primary focus of the apology—may have needed some mention, although it was all but required in *drammi per musiche*, even by 1641. But he does not even mention the more obtrusive distortions of his sources, such as Iarba's madness and Didone's self-punishment. Busenello's *argomento* provides the reader with a minimal (and seemingly inadequate) sketch of the plot, an allusion to his sources, and a sprinkling of apologies and disclaimers. As we have seen with *La Didone*, it may be that the omissions are in fact more revealing than the inclusions.

Busenello is even less specific in his description of his third libretto, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*:

Nero, in love with Poppaea, wife of Otho, as a pretext sent Otho as ambassador to Lusitania so that he could take his pleasure with her—this according to Cornelius Tacitus. But here facts are represented differently. Otho, deprived of Poppaea, gives himself over to delirium and exclamations. Octavia, wife of Nero, orders Otho to kill Poppaea. Otho promises to do it; but lacking the spirit to deprive his adored Poppaea of life, he dresses in the clothes of Drusilla, who was in love with him. Thus disguised, he enters the garden of Poppaea. Cupid awakens her, and prevents her death. Nero repudiates Octavia, in spite of the counsel of Seneca, and takes Poppaea to wife. Seneca dies and Octavia is banished from Rome.¹

Busenello's brevity makes a peculiar reduction of this well-known plot. A literal reading of the *argomento* suggests that the impetus for the entire libretto is a single sentence, derived from the first-century Roman historian

Cornelius Tacitus, reporting Nero's decision to send Otho away so that he can enjoy Poppaea. The rest of the alterations are presumably subsumed under the umbrella of "facts represented differently." Strikingly, the most detailed description of these actions concerns neither Nero nor Poppaea, but rather Otho. In this regard, Busenello does indeed represent things "differently," not so much in terms of the basic outline of the story, but in the construction of Otho's (Ottone) character and reactions. In Tacitus's *Annals* Marcus Salvius Otho was an "extravagant youth" who was a close associate of Nero. His liaison with Poppaea turns into marriage; Otho's undoing, however, was in singing Poppaea's praises to Nero, who quickly insinuated himself into their relationship, sending the unfortunate Otho as ambassador to Lusitania, where he presumably "lived moderately and respectably—enjoying himself in his spare time, officially blameless" (*Annals*, 13.46)—that is, until he himself became emperor.² Here, Busenello's reshaping of Otho's character follows patterns familiar from *La Didone*. As in the opening of act 2, in which we first view the Carthaginian queen in the context of Iarba's complaints, *Poppea* also unfolds from a masculine perspective: Ottone's despair over finding Poppea with Nerone. Busenello's *argomento* reminds us that Ottone was indeed "desperate" over losing Poppea, that it drove him to a kind of insanity—"delirium and exclamations," also similar to Iarba—and the unfortunate lovers described in Loredano's *Bizzarie accademiche*. Moreover, this madness manifests itself in a loss of courage and masculinity: Ottone attempts to murder Poppea only after Ottavia threatens him, and then only in female garb.³ The feminization of Ottone, who is continually battling to "return to himself," is an important aspect of this libretto and is reminiscent of the Incogniti writings about the damaging effect of beautiful women, and the ability of men and women to transform themselves one into the other.⁴

Busenello's *argomento* for *L'incoronazione di Poppea* emphasizes yet another well-known trope for the management of female sexuality. By entering this historical moment through Ottone's eyes, he establishes an erotic triangle as the impetus for the entire opera. In his description, Poppea is a pleasurable sexual object who is "shared" by Nerone and Ottone in a manner typical of homosocial communities: physical pleasure may be experienced through women, but erotica—pictures, speech, and writings—are the property of men. The exchange of women, exemplified in the Nero–Poppaea–Otho triangle, is a means of establishing male bonds and controlling female sexuality, and culminates in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* in the duet between Nerone and Lucano in act 2, scene 6.⁵

Additionally, this play with homosocial desire and erotic triangles underlines the differences between Busenello's sources for *L'incoronazione di Poppea* and *La Didone* that are of fundamental importance for understanding the operas that they subsequently inspired. Virgil's *Aeneid*, we recall, is essentially a foundation myth, celebrating the birth of a republic in a manner

that could serve a variety of propagandistic purposes. In the Augustan Age, the *Aeneid* reinforced Roman virtues over Eastern values while at the same time consolidating the imperial ambitions; in early modern Venice, as we have seen, the *Aeneid*'s evocation of Rome and emphasis on civic duty provided an important model for republican virtues. Tacitus's *Annals*, while no less important in the affirmation of republican ideology, had an entirely different relationship to the myth of Venice. Tacitus did not mythologize about founding dynasties and heroic beginnings; rather, he provided a detailed chronicle about *maintaining* an empire in the midst of corruption and decay; he describes the death, rather than the birth, of a republic. Whereas the *Aeneid* existed primarily in a prepolitical realm, in which destiny is controlled by the capricious whims of the gods, in Tacitus's history of Rome destiny is determined by the political will of man.

This has important consequences for the treatment of women. The trafficking in women and the other imperial prerogatives explored in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* are part of a discourse on empire, politics, and morality that is apparent in other literary treatments of Rome by members of the Accademia degli Incogniti. Unlike *La Didone*, in which Didone's abandonment signifies her exclusion from Western political involvement, according to procedures codified by Catullus and Apollonius, in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* the women are an integral part of the political discourse, playing active roles in the public sphere. The women in *Poppea* are, in some respects, signifiers of empire itself, ultimately contributing to the decay of a society whose failings only further underscore the glories of the Venetian Republic.

This chapter considers the relationship between woman and empire as manifest in the musical and dramatic representation of Ottavia, the abandoned wife of Nerone, and the next lamenting woman to be featured in an opera libretto by Busenello. Ottavia provides a particularly illuminating view of the uses of Tacitus by the Accademia degli Incogniti, and the ways in which the politicization of women's sexuality influenced female vocality in opera. With Ottavia, Busenello and Monteverdi transgress historical sources and operatic conventions, while at the same time diverging sharply from normative models for the lamenting woman. Abandoned, unquestionably wronged by Nerone, Ottavia neither accepts her fate with virtuous perseverance nor enjoys a happy ending by achieving absolution through lament, as did her operatic predecessor Didone. Rather, she seeks vengeance by plotting Poppea's murder through the cruel manipulation of Ottone, an addition to the plot for which there is no support in the historical sources. The treatment of the plot resolution with regard to Ottavia is atypical not merely because Busenello changes history by omitting Ottavia's murder, but because he chooses to transgress the sources still further by providing a happy ending for the abandoned queen: the pairing with an appropriate man that was the birthright of every Venetian operatic heroine. In addition, there is also her unique manner of lamentation. Unlike the laments of Ari-

anna and Didone, based primarily on Ovidian models, Ottavia's laments are not characterized by erotic allure, cries of love, or the requisite physical isolation that limits vengeance to cursing and supernatural forces. Instead, she is an active political force in Nerone's Rome, who chooses vengeance and manipulation over more quintessentially feminine behaviors such as stoic suffering or promiscuity. Indeed, her political awareness is apparent in yet another transgressive gesture. Among all the heroines in the Venetian repertoire, it is only the abandoned Ottavia who with the cry "O delle donne miserabil sesso" violates the unwritten code of behavior for lamenting heroines by bemoaning not only her own fate but also that of the entire female sex. In so doing, she adopts a familiar voice in mid-seventeenth-century Venice: that of Busenello's colleague and acquaintance Arcangela Tarabotti.⁶

Yet what is perhaps most intriguing is the disjunction between the operatic Ottavia and her historical model. Innocent, chaste, and silent, beloved by the Roman people, the historical Octavia seems to have little in common with the character that emerges from the words and notes of Monteverdi and Busenello's opera. Described by Nerone as "infrigidita ed infecunda," Ottavia is transformed in a manner that encompasses the most basic elements of her womanhood. Most importantly, this lack of desirability is highlighted by a chaste and austere musical representation—an assiduous avoidance of sonorous singing—that contrasts strikingly with Poppea's languid chromaticism or the florid melodiousness that characterizes the exuberant Drusilla. In this operatic transformation of Tacitus's Rome, Venetian gender politics collide with imperial politics, and the result is embodied in Ottavia's unusual voice.

DRAMA, HISTORY, AND POLITICS

Busenello and Monteverdi's representation of Ottavia—her curiously ahistorical behavior and rhetorical restraint—is largely a result of the friction between two types of sources, historical and dramatic, that differ not only with respect to genre but also in terms of their political goals and ideologies.⁷ Ottavia's character was determined first of all by her position in the historical tradition presented in Tacitus's *Annals of the Roman Empire*—and a specifically Venetian reception of Tacitus that emphasized the link between female power and imperial excess. At the same time, as we shall see, the dramatic framework of Busenello's libretto was certainly influenced by the tragic play *Octavia*, misattributed to Seneca.

Tacitus, the only author specifically named in Busenello's *argomento*, produced the earliest surviving and most detailed historical exposition of the Poppaea–Nero–Octavia triangle.⁸ *The Annals of the Roman Empire* deals with the reigns of the Roman emperors Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, albeit with some gaps.⁹ Busenello was probably familiar with other historical accounts of this episode: Dio Cassius's *Roman History* and Suetonius's *Life*

TABLE 2 Chronology of Significant Roman Events (A.D. 41–65) of Incogniti Treatments of Tacitus (1627–57)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Novelle</i>	<i>Plays</i>	<i>Opera</i>
41	Exile of Seneca			
47	Nero and Agrippina arrive in Rome			
48	Messalina, wife of Emperor Claudius, celebrates public marriage with Gaius Silius and is put to death	Pona, <i>La Messalina</i> (1628)	Zaguri, <i>La Messalina</i> (1656)	
49	Claudius marries Agrippina the Younger; Seneca is recalled from exile to tutor Nero			
50	Agrippina named “Augusta”; Nero adopted by Claudius	Events (A.D. 49–59) depicted in		
53	Nero marries Octavia, daughter of Messalina and Claudius	Ferrante Pallavicino, <i>Le due Agrippine</i> (1642); Federico Malpiero, <i>L'imperatrice ambiziosa</i> (1642)	Zaguri, <i>Le gelosie politiche e amorose</i> (1657)	
54	Death of Claudius (possibly poisoned by Agrippina); Nero ascends to the throne			
58	Poppaea becomes mistress of Nero; birth of Tacitus			Events (A.D. 58–65) associated with
59	Death of Agrippina, possibly after attempted incest with Nero			Monteverdi and Busenello's <i>L'incoronazione di Poppea</i> (1643)
60	Lucan begins <i>Pharsalia</i>			
62	Seneca retires; Octavia exiled, killed; Nero marries Poppaea			
63	Lucan banned from speaking publicly or publishing his works			
64	Lucan completes <i>Pharsalia</i>			
65	Pisonian conspiracy; death of Seneca and Lucan			

of the *Caesars*, which are sufficiently similar to Tacitus to suggest that all three authors drew on a common set of sources.¹⁰ The opera compresses, rearranges, and eliminates a series of historical events from the years A.D. 59, 62, and 65: Nero's affair with the highborn Poppaea, wife of Otho (beginning in A.D. 59), and his repudiation, banishment (and eventual murder) of the empress Octavia (A.D. 62). The opera omits any mention of his mother Agrippina the Younger, who had contrived the marriage between Octavia and Nero to satisfy her imperial ambitions, and was later murdered by Nero after she objected to his relationship with Poppaea (A.D. 59). In the center of the opera Busenello inserts the suicide of the philosopher and imperial tutor Seneca, which actually happened in the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy in the year A.D. 65. Other historically derived characters include Seneca's nephew, the poet Marcus Annaeus Lucan, presented here as a companion to Nero. The chronology of these events and their various treatments in seventeenth-century sources (including *Poppea*) are summarized in tables 2 and 3.

In their varied expositions of this episode in Roman history, none of the Roman sources presents Nero's wife Octavia as anything but entirely innocent, a guileless victim of evil machinations in Rome's imperial court. Tacitus provides the most detailed treatment of Octavia, consistently describing her as an innocent and relatively silent pawn of a myriad of imperial schemes exercised by the more dangerous imperial women, Messalina (Octavia's mother) and Agrippina the Younger, her stepmother. In book 11, for example, the adulterous Messalina uses her children to ward off Claudius's anger and regain his sympathy. After Messalina's death, Octavia is victimized by Agrippina, who attempts to secure her son Nero's position as the future emperor by contriving a marriage between him and Octavia (*Annals*, 12.3). This was done by discrediting Octavia's intended husband on a trumped-up charge of incest with his sister, leading to his eventual suicide (*Annals*, 12.8); Octavia is likewise a witness to her father's murder by Agrippina (*Annals*, 12.64) as well as Nero's murder of her brother Britannicus. Tacitus's construction of Octavia emphasizes a kind of colorlessness: she suffers in silence, expressing little outward emotion, having learned "to hide sorrow, affection, every feeling" (*Annals*, 13.16). He makes much of Nero's sexual disinterest in Octavia and his preference for others, in particular the freed slave Acte. This was a liaison of which his friends approved and even his mother could not oppose, as it kept him away from potentially more dangerous relationships with higher-born women, such as Poppaea (*Annals*, 13.12).

Tacitus describes in detail Poppaea's method of persuading Nero to repudiate Octavia:

While Agrippina lived, Poppaea saw no hope of his [Nero] divorcing Octavia and marrying her. So she nagged and mocked him incessantly. He was under his guardian's thumb, she said—master neither of the empire nor of himself.

TABLE 3 Rearrangement of Chronology in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Event</i>
58	Beginning of Nero's affair with Poppaea
59	[Death of Agrippina eliminated]
65	Death of Seneca
62	Exile (and death) of Octavia
58	Transfer of Otho to Lusitania

"Otherwise," she said, "why these postponements of our marriage? I suppose my looks and victorious ancestors are not good enough. Or do you distrust my capacity to bear children? Or the sincerity of my love? No I think you are afraid that, if we were married, I might tell you frankly how the senate is down-trodden and the public enraged by your mother's arrogance and greed. If Agrippina can only tolerate daughters-in-law who hate her son, let me be Otho's wife again! I will go anywhere in the world where I only need hear of the emperor's humiliations rather than see them and see you in danger, like myself." This appeal was reinforced by tears and all a lover's tricks. Nero was won. Nor was there any opposition. Everyone longed for the mother's domination to end.¹¹ (*Annals*, 14.1)

Once Agrippina is eliminated, Nero begins the process of removing Octavia as his wife in order to replace her with Poppaea. Again, Tacitus's description of Octavia is one that emphasizes her virtue, her restraint. She is "unassuming," he tells us, but Nero "hated her because she was popular and an Emperor's daughter." It is Poppaea who contrives an accusation of adultery with a slave: the false accusation obtained through the torture of Octavia's maids, which resulted first in an "ordinary divorce" and finally banishment to Campania, under military surveillance. Octavia's apparent popularity—another aspect scarcely mentioned by Busenello—placed a certain degree of pressure on Nero. He brings her back from exile, only to be persuaded by Poppaea's eloquence once again to turn against his wife.¹² Nero then contrives another adultery charge, accusing Octavia not only of seducing a fleet commander, but also of procuring an abortion to hide the infidelity. (As Tacitus himself notes, this charge was particularly ironic, given that Nero had previously accused her of sterility [*Annals*, 14.63]). He then sends her into exile once again to await death on his orders.

Tacitus's description of Octavia's existence as Nero's wife emphasizes the utter sympathy with which she was regarded by all who knew her. Unlike other banished women, who enjoyed happy memories, Octavia, Tacitus tells us, "had virtually died on her wedding day" (*Annals*, 14.63): her father and brother died of poison, she had been put aside for a mistress, and finally she had been falsely accused of adultery.

The other sources likewise give a sympathetic depiction of Octavia. Suetonius, for example, focuses on the more lurid details of Nero's dissolute

life, in particular his lust for his mother and his homosexual adventures, while at the same time providing a vivid description of his musical and theatrical efforts. Like Tacitus, he emphasizes Nero's sexual disinterest in Octavia, her popularity with the people, and her absolute innocence of the charges against her (*Lives*, 6.35). Dio Cassius places Octavia in a still more subsidiary role. He first mentions her in a discussion of Nero's affair with the freed slave Acte, noting his apparent preference for the lower-born woman over his own wife (*Dio's Roman History*, 61.7.2).¹³ Strikingly, Dio's lengthiest description of the affair with Poppaea makes no mention of Octavia; he focuses instead on the unlikely and incestuous triangle between Poppaea, Nero, and Agrippina. The mention of Octavia's murder is somewhat after the fact, as a footnote to what Dio might have regarded as the more compelling drama (*Dio's Roman History*, 62.13.1–3).

If Octavia may have been somewhat of a bit player in the historical sources, Busenello had available to him another source that presented her as a protagonist: the *Octavia*, the tragedy formerly attributed to Seneca. Along with the historical sources cited above, the play certainly would have been known to Busenello, probably both in the original Latin and in the Italian translation published by Lodovico Dolce in the sixteenth century.¹⁴ Like much of the libretto, the play focuses on the final stages of the Nero–Poppaea–Octavia drama, specifically dealing with Nero's impediments with regard to the marriage with Poppaea, albeit with none of the chronological manipulation in Busenello's libretto: the events are limited solely to those that are securely associated with the year A.D. 62. The most frequently cited similarities between opera and play are the dialogue between Nero and Seneca and the use of two nurses—one for Octavia and another for Poppaea. There are also features of the play that Busenello did not choose to adopt. Foremost among these is the characterization of Poppaea, who in Busenello's libretto is modeled quite closely on Tacitus and the other historical sources. In the *Octavia*, however, Poppaea is presented as a potential victim, haunted by dreams of Agrippina's eventual revenge. Her anxieties, as any reader of history would have known, are justified; she will, in fact, be killed by Nero—a punishment, perhaps, for her sins. At the same time, by claiming some audience sympathy, she leaves Nero as the sole unambiguous representative of evil.¹⁵

Octavia's transformation into the heroine of a tragic play has both political and rhetorical implications that in turn have important consequences for our understanding of Busenello's libretto. Written in the aftermath of Nero's death, probably by some close member of Nero's circle with opposing political views, the *Octavia* is primarily a "diatribe against Nero," as J. P. Sullivan has noted, "a political document" whose primary goal is to vilify the emperor in far more brutal terms than in the Tacitean tradition.¹⁶ The suffering of Octavia—her elevation to the status of martyred heroine—is thus an integral part of the way in which the unknown author pursues an anti-

Neronian program. The characterizations of Octavia, Poppaea, and even the ghostly Agrippina (who eloquently catalogs Nero's many crimes) reveal little of Tacitus's anti-female discourse that was to be so readily adopted by early modern commentators. For the unknown author, women—Poppaea or Octavia—were not a source of imperial corruption (as implicit in Tacitus) but rather the unfortunate victims of Neronian crimes. Moreover, that the anonymous author chose Senecan tragedies as his literary model might be seen to close the gap between Seneca's role as playwright and participant in the political life of Nero's court—a covert vote for Stoicism or else recognition of Seneca's failure to tutor his charge properly.

Nonetheless, the political necessity of using Octavia to vilify Nero presented the unknown author with a curious dramatic and rhetorical dilemma. Regardless of how the historical Octavia might have behaved, this heroine contrasts considerably with the reputedly silent young woman whom Tacitus portrayed a generation later. Here, rather than hiding her emotions, she must command the stage and rhetorical space as the chief tragic protagonist—as she must also do in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.¹⁷ She does so with a moving monologue, condemning the torments that she can scarcely bear:

Nothing but death could end my misery.
My mother and my father vilely slain,
My brother lost—now bowed beneath this weight
Of grief and bitterness and woe, I live
Under my husband's hate, my servant's scorn.
No day is joy to me, no hour not filled
With terror—not the fear of death alone,
But violent death, O Gods, let me not suffer
A criminal's death, and I would gladly die.¹⁸

Indeed, despite her sympathetic position and impassioned speech, her condemnation of Jove—so similar to that of Busenello's Ottavia—adopts the rhetorical stance usually associated with villainy:

Would that the ruler of the gods in heaven
Might send his fire to strike the sinful head
Of that foul emperor—if he can shake
The earth with horrid thunder and affright
Our mortal senses with his sacred fires
And portent strange. . .
O father of mankind!
How can your royal hand so heedlessly,
So indiscriminately, hurl your weapons
Wide of their mark, yet spare a man so guilty?¹⁹

This contradiction is described by Joe Parker Poe, who notes the "unsuitability" of this austere, taciturn woman who might "arouse our pity" but would scarcely sustain interest as the heroine of a tragic play: "Since he had

no other literary precedent for a strong-minded articulate victim, he adopted Octavia for the model of the Senecan villain," thus compromising the historical record.²⁰ Poe's analysis is provocative, and tells us much about the problem faced by Busenello, Monteverdi, and even the singer Anna Renzi when they brought Octavia to the operatic stage. In the play, Octavia is caught between her role as victim and villain. She is unambiguously sympathetic; abandoned and undesired by her husband, she will go to a certain death, albeit one that the author of the play never describes explicitly.²¹ Yet, she is not the silent, unemotional Octavia described in the historical sources. Implicit in Poe's evaluation is the idea that such a woman is, in fact, insufficiently interesting to command our attention for the entire play, at least as compared with the "evil" villainesses of the authentic Senecan dramas, such as Medea or Phaedra. Silent virtue, after all, is only marginally viable dramatically. Once Octavia is transformed from a minor historical personage into a dramatic heroine, she necessarily substitutes speech for silence, which contradicts her characterization as presented by Tacitus. As such, she becomes yet another embodiment of the essential operatic dilemma described earlier.

This conflict between the historical and dramatic sources also has a political component. For, as noted earlier, the Tacitist and Pseudo-Senecan traditions express somewhat different political agendas. While the dramatic framework of the *Octavia* may have offered one solution for a dramatic representation of this particular historical moment, its anti-Neronian focus—and the heightened recognition of female suffering—necessarily ignored another element that would prove critical for Octavia's operatic reconfiguration: the link between female power and imperial excess associated with Tacitus by seventeenth-century Venetians. In order to understand this we must briefly turn to the reception of Tacitus in Republican Venice and accompanying modes of representing empire.

TACITUS IN VENICE

Tacitus's version of this episode in history is of critical importance for understanding the reception of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, not only because of its primacy in terms of chronology and detail, but for its style and historiographical approach. Tacitus presents a peculiar combination of history as criticism, literature, politics, and poetry, providing a vivid image of the ways in which private life affects the flow of public history.²² Moral influence—the desire to improve the minds and morals of the reader—is an important aspect of his historiographical approach. Certain common themes emerge in his narratives: the evils of the tyrannical rule of the emperors, the inevitable cowardice of the senators, the treachery of presumed loyalists, and the resulting vice and moral decline. In Tacitus's view of history, as Ronald Mellor has observed, "individual disaster may be attributed to chance," but

it "was the Romans' own greed and ambition that brought . . . the 'anger of the gods' upon them."²³ And with regard to the women of Tacitus, excess, greed, and ambition often manifest themselves in rampant sexual license or political machinations, both of which he clearly disapproved of.

The reception of Tacitus in seventeenth-century Venice must be understood in the context of his pan-European popularity in early modern Europe, and the varying political, moral, and social implications of his writings for a variety of populations. He was praised as a stylist for his brevity and apparent disdain for the rhetorical excess favored by the Ciceronians.²⁴ He was admired and criticized for his unique historical vision—his ability to discern the truth behind appearances, his "interests in causes and motives," for reporting not only the events themselves but their underlying explanations, exploring (as Girolamo Canini noted) "not only the outward actions . . . but also the most secret of thoughts."²⁵ Yet, for our purposes what is most important is his reputation as both a moral and a political philosopher. The Tacitean link with moral philosophy was primarily a result of his association with one of his most articulate historical subjects, the Stoic philosopher and imperial tutor Seneca, who plays such a central role in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. The moral teachings of Stoicism—the pursuit of virtue, the power of reason over the body and passions, and the necessity of accepting those things beyond one's control with constancy and patience—offered guidance in times of distress, and was a welcome balm for those experiencing the religious and civil strife north of the Alps. Reconciling Senecan Stoicism with Christian precepts, Justus Lipsius, and later Montaigne, codified "Neostoicism," and in so doing elevated the importance of both Tacitus and Seneca for their political and ethical writings, respectively.²⁶ Lipsius utilized both Seneca and Tacitus to create a coherent system for the management of public and private life in war-torn northern Europe. Seneca provided the moral substance of Neostoicism, emphasizing the necessity for fortitude, virtue, withdrawal, the sublimation of bodily needs, and inner peace in the face of all strife. Tacitus, on the other hand, as Lipsius himself noted in his final years, was an invaluable guide for anyone in the business of government, and had much to teach the private citizen about ways of coping with political upheaval. This was particularly true on the Italian peninsula, where Tacitus was a persistent figure in the political discourse, whose inherent ambivalence proved useful to a variety of political causes and positions. His anti-monarchical observations attracted such figures as Leonardo Bruni or Machiavelli, the ultimate advisor for those compelled to live under monarchy, regardless of their claims to virtue or vice, encouraging deception by both ruler and subject. This ambivalent position was neatly summarized in the sixteenth century by Francesco Guicciardini, who noted, "Cornelius Tacitus is very good at teaching subjects how to live and act prudently, just as he teaches tyrants how to establish tyranny."²⁷ Tacitus could thus be viewed as threatening the status quo—papal authority or Spanish rule—at

the same time as he was condemned by those who opposed these regimes for providing instructions to despots.²⁸

In early modern Venice, the Tacitean link to Senecan philosophies was certainly not unknown; in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Ottavia will reject Seneca's Stoic approach to personal disaster in favor of a more pragmatic approach involving political action and surreptitious maneuvers. Moreover, this attitude is symptomatic of the Venetian consumption of Tacitus as a political rather than a moral advisor and a witness for republican causes. At the turn of the sixteenth century, for example, Giovanni Botero sought to defend both Tacitus and *ragione di stato* from their detractors, arguing that a virtuous prince can indeed use politics to further virtuous ends. Tacitus's historiographical method—his insight into the workings of the Roman court—provided an important model for Paolo Sarpi's analysis of papal corruption. And for Traiano Boccalini, yet another papal enemy, Tacitus was worthy of both praise and satire, but above all useful for demonstrating unequivocally the superiority of Venice's unique form of government.²⁹

In the seventeenth century, the members of the Accademia degli Incogniti readily adapted Boccalini's cynical view of the political Tacitus to accommodate the peculiar mix of libertinism, conservatism, and self-interest that characterized Venetian public policy at mid-century. In some respects, this was a natural alliance. Tacitus's association with serious political theorizing and conflicting points of view lent any appropriation of his writings an air of respectability and a certain elusiveness that was consistent with Venice's reputation both for political wisdom and chameleon-like pragmatism. Empire, as a number of Incogniti writers seemed to discover nearly simultaneously (see table 2), provided an ideal means of commenting on the virtues of the Republic while engaging the ever popular issues concerning female power and sexuality: Tacitus's often negative pronouncements on the most notorious imperial women—Livia, Messalina, Agrippina the Younger—had strong resonances with the Incogniti treatment of other women of myth and history who could be called upon to testify eloquently in support of one or another anti-female position. (We will see later the operative consequences of the uncontrollable sexuality of Messalina, Octavia's mother and the first wife of the emperor Claudius, in the period somewhat earlier than the actions depicted in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.) In 1642, just prior to the premiere of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Ferrante Pallavicino and Federico Malipiero each published a *novella* on the exploits of Claudius's subsequent wife, Agrippina the Younger (Nero's mother), the character whose absence from Busenello's libretto, as noted above, is most conspicuous. And following neatly upon (or perhaps coinciding with) Busenello's publication of a complete edition of his own librettos in 1656, the playwright Pietro Angelo Zaguri published the first two of a proposed trilogy of prose plays that also dealt with Agrippina's ascent to power and the background of the Nero-Poppaea-Octavia triangle (see table 2).³⁰

These varied treatments of Tacitus provide important clues to the treatment of female rule, empire, and politics in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, all of which are manifest in the characterization of Ottavia in the opera. In their *novelle*, for example, Malipiero and Pallavicino closely paraphrase Tacitus, exaggerating Agrippina's sins and culpability through adroit interpolations, but at the same time minimizing and even omitting mention of the nefarious actions committed by other members of the court.³¹ Notably, both Octavia and Poppaea remain quite close to their Tacitean originals. In particular, Poppaea's dubious virtue, clever conversation, and manipulative abilities resonated very well with the Accademia degli Incogniti's conventional condemnations of women. Pallavicino expands on Tacitus's description of Poppaea (13.45) as follows:

She was lascivious but with such art that by presenting in her appearance the luster of purity she made her wantonness less abominable. She lived in a retiring way; and if sometimes she went out in public, by keeping her face half-covered, she canceled the dissoluteness from those who saw her with apparent modesty. In this way, by not permitting the lovers' glances to satisfy themselves, she furthered their appetite to search her out, where they could enjoy seeing her more freely. The lovely image of that face, greatly enhanced by that curtain, and tormenting the curiosity of the spectators, gave them the hope of having the beginning of that delightful comedy when it was permitted to them to look at the stage.³²

Pallavicino's description of Poppaea's face as a stage is particularly suggestive with regard to her operatic representation. He emphasizes her clever speech and in particular her ability to manipulate her lovers—especially Nero—with her beauty, gestures, and words. Both Pallavicino and Malipiero see a clear analogy between Poppaea and the self-fashioning of the courtesan we have considered earlier. Pallavicino, who we recall had made quite a study of Venetian prostitutes, notes Poppaea's greed and self-interest: "according to the most fundamental laws of prostitutes" Poppaea never loved unless it could be of some use, or would satisfy her greed. Malipiero emphasizes her power over Nero: love, he tells us, "instills itself in the heart of lovers like an incantation," causing them to distance themselves from reason to "adhere to the senses."³³

As might be expected, the innocent and abused Octavia—the only admirable female in the tale—commanded somewhat less attention from the two writers. While Malipiero notes that Nero had difficulty repudiating Octavia as she was "without a true defect,"³⁴ he focuses on Agrippina as the true obstacle to the marriage. Pallavicino and Malipiero both emphasize Octavia's purity, nobility, and emotional restraint. Pallavicino describes her as reluctant to shame herself with emotional outbursts, as she feared her husband's anger, and he also notes that she was far too virtuous to consider similar infidelities, an avenue explored in the opera.³⁵ Both writers specifically

cite Octavia's lack of instinct for revenge. Malipiero tells us that Agrippina tried to incite Octavia to vengeance after the death of her brother, but that "the simple woman with so beautiful a face did not wish, like those of a vile heart [i.e., Agrippina], to try anything against her husband."³⁶ And Pallavicino tells us that she was a "woman of singular nobility, merit, and not negligible beauty," nonetheless rejected by her husband, tolerating his evils with patience, "as she did not have the impure instincts to avenge herself with equal offense."³⁷

The primary focus in all of these writings, however, was Agrippina, whose male virtues—strength, political acumen, and courage—were conveniently reconstructed as female vices. Her most fundamental sin, both authors point out, was her ambition and lust for power—qualities as dangerous in women as they are admirable in men. They describe an emasculated Claudius with a "cuore tutto effeminato," little suited to governance, the victim of a powerful sensual appetite that left him utterly vulnerable to the "thundering rays of her feminine beauty."³⁸ Yet, once married to Claudius, Malipiero tells us, she "left off her feminine weakness, and dressed her soul with masculine and virile thoughts."³⁹ In this charge, their guide was none other than Tacitus, who himself had constructed Agrippina as masculine, thus distinguishing her from the more sexually voracious Messalina.⁴⁰ Most important, however, was Agrippina's extraordinary political skill, which elicits both admiration and anxiety:

But in the end things done illicitly serve no purpose except to ruin equity and to corrupt the best habits of the Republic, because one who has used an indirect road to the throne cannot rule justly. Thus, with the mantle of marriage covering every one of Agrippina's libidinous acts, she made herself an Iole to Claudius, depositing him (one could say) among the maidservants with the distaff; and, taking the scepter away from him, with the first wielding, she made Rome experience a new form of governing. She regulated all things, all matters of state, but not with the goal of lasciviousness, as with Messalina (who disdained the Roman Empire in order to live in decadence), but transformed feminine habits into masculine ones with an ambitious severity, holding dominion not only over public concerns, but rigidly ruling the servants [freedmen] of the home, and frequently proudly allowed herself to be seen in the *Fora*, being in all other areas of her life an example of chastity, not ever making use of truly lascivious actions unless she found it necessary in order to dominate.⁴¹

The unexpected and (perhaps) unconscious reference to the Republic in this passage ostensibly concerned with empire reveals something of Malipiero's real agenda. In Venice, where individual power was carefully guarded and regulated through the structure of the Republic, any appropriation of power by an individual was perceived as a threat to the proper workings of government.⁴² Yet, in a society so accustomed to the complete exclusion

of women from political life, what was most outrageous about Agrippina's *novella forma di governo* was the mutation of "feminine customs into masculine ones." Agrippina ruled *both* in public and in the home; Malipiero claims that she even dressed herself in the clothes of the emperor;⁴³ she sat next to Claudius in public, and in "all things imperial, mind, clothing, and domination" presented herself as the equal of the emperor.⁴⁴ At the same time, it was Agrippina's superior political acumen—regardless of her gender—that placed her in the midst of the same contentious Venetian discourse on Tacitus and *ragione di stato* that had so engaged Boccalini's wit. Malipiero, for example, praises her as "the most exquisite politician of her age";⁴⁵ yet he also claims that her fame was won "in the guise of a siren."⁴⁶ That she should also have been blamed for an incestuous relationship with Nero—probably intended to distract Nero from other women—only magnified her political and sexual danger. Malipiero is far more specific than Tacitus regarding Agrippina's presumed attempt to seduce Nero, imagining for her this suggestive speech:⁴⁷

O Nero, you would like to give free play to your appetite on other women rather than Octavia your wife? Since I knew how to bring you forth to this great throne, I am also of a substance capable of taking care of your desires. Perhaps it would be better, my son, for you to possess my room, my imperial bed, than that filthy one of a loathsome servant [Acte]. Thus the affections and the appetites of your youth will be hidden.⁴⁸

Again, it is ambition that is to blame for this most dreadful sin: "Cursed ambition to reign induces this most dishonest mother to offer herself to her son as a concubine."⁴⁹ It is this act, Malipiero suggests, that finally leads Nero to recognize his mother's true character: "I have a mother who is terrible in every action, false in every deed, for whom the object of every action is only her own interest, and who in order to dominate would destroy her own son."⁵⁰ Furthermore, Malipiero goes on to compliment Nero for his good sense in finally condemning the evil of this woman. That this realization led Nero to the equally—or more—dreadful act of matricide seems to escape Malipiero's critical eye. By this formulation, Nero's sins are the result of Agrippina's evil, and his recognition of that is worthy of praise. Agrippina's death on Nero's orders—by a blow to the womb—was a particularly vivid means of wrenching empire out from under female control, and an acknowledgment that Agrippina bore full responsibility for Nero's sins as well as her own.

Agrippina's politics are also the primary focus of Zaguri's two plays, *La Messalina* and *Le gelosie politiche e amorose*, published in 1656 and 1657 respectively. The first play deals with Messalina's adultery and death, and the second dramatizes an episode in Tacitus slightly earlier than the one depicted in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*: Agrippina's efforts to marry Nero to Octavia and thus gain him the throne. In the preface, Zaguri also advertises a

third play dealing with Nero and Poppaea that was never published and perhaps never written.

What is most notable about these plays for our purpose is their use of explicit political philosophizing in a pseudo-operatic context. Zaguri's plays are, in effect, hybrids between a prose play and an operatic entertainment, employing many already conventional operatic devices (sleep scenes, laments, mistaken identities, and canzonettas), and even plot twists familiar from *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. At the same time, his characters—who speak rather than sing—articulate their political philosophies with considerably greater precision than their operatic counterparts. Thus, when Agrippina behaves in a manner quite similar to Ottavia in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*—using others to commit murders that will further her goals—she does so in a context in which the political motivations are stated explicitly. In these plays, the focus is thus on the mechanisms of *ragione di stato*: Agrippina is the chief political philosopher, who adopts various Tacitean and Machiavellian commonplaces in order to justify her murders and deceptions as political necessities within the context of monarchical rule. Her first speech in act 1, scene 1 of *La Messalina*, for example, makes explicit the link between the female voice and monarchical rule:

Be bold, my heart, since the security of a government will waver if it fears the laws of conscience. The Prince recognizes no one but himself. His authority would be mutilated if his force did not break the bonds that restrain his own satisfactions.⁵¹

In *Le gelosie politiche e amorose* Agrippina goes on to redefine the volatile nature of justice for the absolute ruler. The oft-cited Tacitean "suspicion of appearances" is acknowledged here as a weapon to deceive guileless courtiers—a stunning defeat for Republican government:

The actions of princes do not succumb to the judgment of subjects who, for the most part, remain fooled by appearances. Justice holds the scales in her left hand, easy to waver; in her right hand she brandishes the sword. She holds force in greater esteem than the consideration of equity. . . . The prince knows no superior except caprice, and his desire is law.⁵²

Prior to ordering another murder, Agrippina argues for punishment rather than compassion; once again, politics are called upon as a means of creating illusions for courtiers, and even "reason" itself is placed in opposition to "reason of state":

Unpunished sins stir up new errors. The greater crime is often committed through absolution rather than punishment. And even when the sentence appears unjust, one calls upon politics in order not to appear overly compassionate and thus inexperienced. The art of ruling should not be trapped in the punctiliousness of reason. All of the lines of a well-stabilized empire can be reduced to this sole point.⁵³

The Zaguri plays are pervaded by the overwhelming sense of the inevitability of historical destiny. Driven by political machinery and guided by fate, Agrippina will succeed and Nero will become emperor. Even here, however, the reflection of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* is apparent in the glaring dissonance between the *lieto fine* and the historical record. Zaguri concludes the second play in his proposed trilogy with a happy marriage between Nero and Octavia that will eventually be destroyed by Nero's relationship with Poppaea and his own murderous impulses. As in the Poppea–Nerone love duet with which Busenello and Monteverdi conclude their opera, *Le gelosie* ends with a disquieting *lieto fine*, permissible in the world of drama, but doomed in "real life" to end with the murder of both Octavia and Agrippina. Indeed, Zaguri could scarcely have found a more explicit way—after the fact—to explain the Tacitean politics that underlie Monteverdi's and Busenello's opera.

DISPREZZATA REGINA

Ottavia's first appearance in act 1, scene 5 of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* marks a disconcerting intersection between history, opera, and politics. History tells us of her silence, her taciturnity, her acceptance of her fate, and her lack of instinct for revenge. Politics, as expressed in the treatments of Tacitus discussed above, require another set of behaviors from a Roman empress: the exercise of imperial prerogatives—the use and misuse of reason of state—to attain her goals. Finally, opera demands something else of Octavia: a rhetorical response appropriate to the genre and the heritage of lamenting women.

The tensions between these various aspects of Ottavia's character play themselves out on both a musical and a dramatic plane throughout the opera, but are particularly apparent in the act 1, scene 5 monologue. Like Dido or Ariadne, Ottavia has been abandoned, left in a pitiable state, banished from any normal position within society. She performs many of the acts associated with a lamenting operatic woman: vacillating emotions, self-doubt, and curses followed by repentance. Yet, the interference of politics and history—her Roman legacy—differentiates Ottavia from her lamenting sisters of Greek origin. Unlike Medea, Dido, Ariadne, or even Penelope, Ottavia is constructed neither as a sensual usurper nor a desirable spouse. She is guilty of no sexual crimes; she did not abandon her country or family for a foreigner, nor did she unwillingly or willingly sacrifice a family member for love; she is not a forbidden object of desire. Instead, she is the legitimate, faithful, and *undesirable* wife of Nerone. But herein lies the moral twist on which her character turns. By abandoning Ottavia, Nerone does not protect his country from Eastern influence or save himself for a more "legitimate" marriage. Instead, this action leads him *away* from virtue to embrace sensuality and lawlessness.

Ironically, in Busenello's and Monteverdi's hands, this apparent inversion of the moral axis serves not to engage our sympathies, but rather to distance us from the heroine, separating her from the Ovidian lament tradition associated with an Ariadne or Dido. Appearing for the first time directly after Poppea's powerful demonstration of sensual and persuasive powers, Ottavia was ideally positioned to garner audience compassion, to claim her position as the work's tragic heroine, to seduce the listener from the vantage point of moral superiority. Instead, we are presented with a woman who expresses a narrower range of emotions with a limited vocabulary of musical expressive devices. Endowed with self-awareness, political astuteness, and moral righteousness not shared by her Ovidian colleagues, Ottavia is nonetheless unable to change her destiny: she *will* die at the hands of Nerone; cursing, politics, and moral certitude will not save her. Despite Busenello's liberties, history ultimately wins.

Monteverdi responds to Busenello's text with a musical representation that ingeniously captures the idiosyncratic elements of her character. The rejection of the conventional lament trope is signaled in this instance by a continual retreat from the pleasure of the song and the physicality of sonorous singing, identified throughout this work with artistic self-expression, sensuality, and republican freedoms. Rebellion and insubordination invariably collapse into ineffectual silence and frozen despair. Initial forays into the *durus* realm fall back into *mollis* sonorities; bass patterns are static or trace lengthy descents. What makes Ottavia so unusual is not solely a result of her insistence on speaking rather than singing—that is to say, her preference for recitative instead of aria. (Didone, we recall, resisted song after her meeting with Enea. Penelope also shows a reluctance to indulge in song, refraining from melismatic singing until the reunion with her spouse in the final moments of *Il ritorno d'Ulisse*.⁵⁴) Ottavia's unique manner of expression is apparent in the nature of that recitative: a terse, angular, often colorless recitative, sometimes dissonant, other times forbiddingly consonant, but devoid of sensual chromaticism. Her preferred melodic gestures seem almost designed to negate any sense of lyricism; her singing is characterized by a parlando style of expression, punctuated by fourths and fifths, interrupted by oddly placed rests, obsessively avoiding consecutive stepwise motion. A gasping, disjointed, and even depressed quality emerges from the short phrases, most often arranged in two-bar units and frequently set over descending bass patterns. This bland style of expression is pervaded by the persistent use of what is unquestionably a generic recitative figure, one that can be found throughout the opera: a melodic lower neighbor, usually enclosed by a series of monotonal repeated notes or preceded by a descending fourth or fifth. For any other character, this figure would seem too conventional, too ordinary to merit discussion. However, in Ottavia's case, the absence of other, more arresting melodic ideas endows this particular figure with almost motivic significance. This not only provides her music with a

surprisingly consistent musical surface, but its inherently static shape serves to contain her affects within a narrowly prescribed range that can distance the listener from overly sympathetic involvement: Ottavia's halting utterances invariably return her to precisely where she began. At the same time, through the alteration of the dissonance treatment, the varying of the contrapuntal context, the heightening of the rhythmic intensity, and the acceleration of harmonic rhythm, and even the omission or substitution of the initial repeated notes, this figure lends itself to countless subtle variations. The result is a highly nuanced reading of Busenello's text that easily accommodates Ottavia's alternation between outspoken rebellion and stilted depression. It also recalls the Incogniti ideal of chastity as a "melancholy devil" that most compromises beauty. Ottavia is a woman whose vocal beauty is marred by musical chastity. Some of the permutations of this figure are shown in example 14.

The monologue itself is organized into three defiant speech-acts, each of which begins with an outburst of emotion and collapses into ineffectuality, silence, and resignation. The first wave focuses on Ottavia's political position as woman and empress:

Disprezzata regina, Del monarca romano afflitta moglie, Che fo, ove son, che penso?	Scorned empress, Afflicted wife of the Roman king, What am I doing? Where am I? Of what am I thinking?
O delle donne miserabil sesso Se la natura e 'l cielo Libere ci produsse, Il matrimonio c'incatena serve. Se concepiamo l'uomo Al nostro empio tiran formiam le membra, Allattiamo il carnefice crudele Che ci scarna e ci svena, E siam costrette per indegna sorte A noi medesme partorir la morte.	O miserable female sex, If nature and the heavens Produced us free, Matrimony enchains us like servants. If we conceive men We form the limbs of our own wicked tyrants. We nourish the cruel executioner Who tears our flesh and severs our veins, And we are forced by an unworthy fate to Give birth to our own death.

Second, she denounces Nerone and imagines him in Poppea's arms:

Nerone, empio Nerone, Marito, O Dio, marito Bestemiato pur sempre E maledetto da' cordogli miei, Dove ohimè, dove sei? In braccio di Poppea Tu dimori felice, e godi intanto Il frequente cader de' pianti miei	Nero, evil Nero, Husband—O God—husband Cursed forever And damned by my sorrows, Where, alas, are you? In the arms of Poppaea You remain happy and take pleasure In the repeated fall of my tears
--	---

(a) Act 1, scene 5. Ottavia: "Disprezzata regina," mm. 1 – 6.

Di-sprez-za - ta re - gi - na, re - gi - na, re -

4
gi - na, di-sprez - za - ta, di-sprez - za - ta re - gi - na, Del mo -

(b) Mm. 52 – 56.

52
(Pop)-pea Tu di - mo - ri fe - li - ce, e go - di, -

55
fe - li - ce e go - di

EXAMPLE 14. Claudio Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1643): Ottavia's repeated note with lower-neighbor figures (I-Vnm, It. IV, 439 [= 9963], fols. 22r–24v).

(continued)

Che van quasi formando
Un diluvio di specchi in cui tu miri,
Dentr'alle tue delizie, i miei martiri.

Which all but create
A deluge of mirrors in which you see,
Amid your delights, my sorrows.

Finally, she condemns Giove for his impotence:

Destin se stai lassù.
Giove ascoltami tu,
Se per punir Nerone
Fulmini tu non hai
D'impotenza t'accuso,

O fate, if you exist above,
O Jove, listen to me,
If to punish Nero
You have no thunderbolts,
I accuse you of impotence,

(c) Mm. 78 – 82.

78

(Ahi,) tra - pas - so trop - po ol - tre e me ne pen - to

81

Sop - pri - mo e sep - pel - li - sco

(d) Act 3, scene 6. Ottavia: "Addio Roma," mm. 1 – 8 (fol. 97v).

A - a - a - ad - dio Ro - ma

5

A - a - ad - dio pa - tria a - a - mi - ci, a - mi - ci

EXAMPLE 14. (*continued*)

D'ingiustizia t'incolpo.
 Ahi, trapasso tropp'oltre e me ne
 pento.
 Sopprimo e seppelisco
 In taciturne angosce il mio
 tormento.

I charge you with injustice.
 Ah, but I go too far, and I repent.
 I shall suppress and bury
 My torment in silent anguish.

In the first wave of the lament, Busenello signals Ottavia's essentially political nature, aligning her with imperial rather than republican forces. Establishing her link with *durus* sonorities (in particular A minor), Monteverdi sets this all-important phrase with the neighbor motive discussed

above (see ex. 14a).⁵⁵ The repetitions of the word "regina" and the dissonant repetition of the opening phrase in the upper register focus attention on Ottavia's public role as empress rather than her private status as an abandoned wife. The mention of Nerone, not by name but as the "monarca romano," intensifies her pain; the twofold repetition of the word "afflitta" initiates the process of suppressing her lyric impulse and destabilizing her rhythmic balance. The mournful descent is accomplished with halting, breathless phrases, interrupted by rests, spun out over a series of 7–6 suspensions, which come to rest with a sob-like gesture on monotonal repeated notes that oddly break off before the Phrygian cadence is completed in the continuo (see ex. 15). This lack of coordination with the continuo is symptomatic of Ottavia's internal confusion and inability to control her situation, subsequently expressed through the rhythmic asymmetry and harmonic disorientation of the three rhetorical questions: "che fo, ove son, che penso?"

Strikingly, composer and librettist provide an answer to Ottavia's questions: the female condition. This, of course, recalls the polemics with Arcangela Tarabotti that had so preoccupied Venice for much of the middle of the seventeenth century, telling us much about the peculiar chastity that is essential to her representation: Ottavia's lack of adherence to conventional feminine precepts, her separation from the world of sensuality, and the parodic frame in which she might well have been regarded by Busenello and his contemporaries. Indeed, by engaging this contemporary debate, Busenello separates Ottavia from her mythic ancestors and propels her into the early modern world of seventeenth-century Venice, linking Tarabottian feminist ideology with imperial politics and the resulting friction with republican ideology. Moreover, Ottavia's complaints about the nature of femininity and the fate of women leads her to an evocation of none other than Agrippina herself: a woman who most famously "conceived the limbs of the tyrant" that later destroyed her. In a single stroke, Busenello has linked the seemingly unfortunate fate of women—and proto-feminist ideology—to the one figure in imperial Roman history most closely identified by the members of the Accademia degli Incogniti with the use and misuse of imperial power.

Monteverdi, too, seems to have been aware of the significance of this passage. As in both Penelope's and Arianna's monologues, a single phrase is carved out for repetition as a pseudo-refrain that provides a sense of structural and tonal stability within the shifting emotional plane of the recitative monologue, while at the same time highlighting the textual fragment that best summarizes the emotional crisis. For Arianna, it is "Lasciatemi morire" and the cries "O Teseo mio"; for Penelope it is the movingly lyrical plea for Ulisse to return home: "Torna, torna, deh torna, Ulisse." For Ottavia, however, it is the politically volatile Tarabottian cry "O delle donne miserabil sesso," the politically charged complaint about marriage, women's right to freedom, and the woes of childbearing that frames this section of the mono-

8

af - flit - ta, af-flit - ta, af - flit - ta mo - glie.

11

Che fo', o - ve son, che pen-so, che pen-so?

EXAMPLE 15. Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, ACT 1, SCENE 5: Ottavia, "Disprezzata regina," mm. 8–14.

logue. This refrain receives registral, durational, and metrical emphasis; yet, like so much of Ottavia's music, it is at once tragic but not tragic. Set over a descending tetrachord, the vocal line is angular and curiously passionless, descending through the octave with the abrupt skip of a fifth followed by the ubiquitous monotonal repeated notes (see ex. 16). Strikingly, with blatant disregard for contrapuntal correctness and insisting on her own motive, Ottavia awkwardly avoids the appropriate resolution of $f^\sharp$ to g' , and the vocal line sinks unexpectedly to d' for the word "sesso."⁵⁶ The bass descent is interrupted, as the familiar static, angular motives mark the declarations concerning female liberty and the characterization of marriage as slavery. Ottavia then repeats her condemnation of female existence, now from the upper register, descending jaggedly from the high f'' through the diminished octave, once again willfully avoiding the appropriate upward resolution of the seventh. The Agrippina-like invocations of the cruel executioners invoke a more dissonant use of the neighbor figure. With the repetition and flatward inflection for the words "siam forzate" (we are forced), still with the same motive, Ottavia, collapsing into *mollis* sonorities, acknowledges women's inevitable passivity and even collusion with regard to male power and abuse; the bass finally ceases its stepwise descent that had begun with the repeat of the refrain. The dissonance all but disappears as the vocal line descends in its customarily halting and monotonal fashion.

In the remainder of the monologue, Ottavia's emotional palette is somewhat enriched, yet, she is nonetheless condemned to ineffectuality. Jagged, disjointed outbursts and ineffectual cries in the upper range invariably fall back into descent; strong rhythmic gestures nearly always revert to sputtering, irregular dissonance, *mollis* sonorities, and regret. With the com-

(a)
15

O del - le don - ne mi - se - ra - bil ses - so,

(b)
24

o del - le don - ne mi - se - ra - bil ses - so

EXAMPLE 16. Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, ACT 1, SCENE 5: Ottavia's refrain in "Disprezzata regina."

plaint against Nerone, she finally moves from the political to the personal. Yet, even here her condemnation of Nerone arises only with difficulty from the despairing "oh dio, oh dio," set in an almost dismissive fashion as it descends through the octave by fourths, recalling the "disprezzata regina" at the opening of the monologue. Unlike Arianna or Didone, Ottavia does not recall her love for the man who abandoned her or their pleasure together. Instead, banished from the sensual, it is her image of Nerone's pleasure with Poppea that provides her only sojourn in the tuneful oblivion of triple meter, punctuated with a dotted version of her signature motive. Indeed, it is as if her only access to the forbidden realm of song is through the mirror of her tears, which reveals to her the lovemaking of others (see above, ex. 14b).

If this brief foray into song ultimately fails—this, after all, is Poppea's realm—so does the attempt at *guerriero*-style rebellion for the curse of Giove. With increasing intensity, beginning again with the neighbor-note motive, she explodes into her only melismatic singing in the opera (see ex. 17). Set over a descending bass, the half-scale runs, depicting the invoked bolts of thunder, sequence downward and collapse into the sputtering repetitions of the word "fulmini." The impact of Ottavia's anger dissipates as the vocal line likewise disintegrates into the descending sixteenth-note scale through a ninth, set over a descending bass.

This apparent appropriation of Giove's inadequacy leads Ottavia to the ultimate sacrilege: the accusation of impotence and injustice against this most authoritative patriarch, using yet another variation of the signature motive. Again, however, this show of strength quickly evaporates; the impo-

70

Se per pu-nir Ne-ro-ne ful-mi-ni, ful-

bass descent

72

tu mi-ni, ful-mi-ni, ful-mi-ni, ful-mi-ni tu non ha-i

EXAMPLE 17. Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, ACT 1, SCENE 5: Ottavia, "Disprezzata regina," mm. 70–73.

tence, it would seem, is not Giove's but rather Ottavia's own, necessitated in this construction by the inevitable failure of this particular brand of female rhetoric. She again adopts the monotonal figure in its characteristic brief gasps, repenting her curse, and, once again, falling into flat sonorities, she backs away from her most compelling outburst in the opera. Even the entrance of the Nutrice—which overlaps with Ottavia's impassioned plea for forgiveness—scarcely penetrates the self-absorbed misery. Imitating the internal dilemma expressed by Arianna, Ottavia separates her outward rebellion from her inner purity—the blasphemy of her tongue from the devotion of her heart. In so doing, she not only acknowledges the superior power of the heavens that she had so recently disputed, but also points to the futility of her protest and her utter impotence. She is thus left with only a vestige of the imperial prerogative with which to wield power.

THE FIRST LESSON: PROMISCUITY

Ottavia will return to this same stark, emotionless despair in her final scene in the opera. Before then, however, she hears and rejects two possible solutions to her dilemma—one offered by her nurse and the other by the philosopher Seneca. The difference in the rhetorical strategies employed by these two very different characters—and Ottavia's reaction to them—exemplifies the conflicts among sensual pleasure, ambition, and restraint that paralyze her and underlie so much of this opera. It is here that Busenello and Monteverdi juxtapose two different styles of rhetoric: that of the whore,

the "retorica della puttana," the instructress of Pallavicino's rhetoric manual discussed in chapter 2, and the presumably more eloquent speech of the famous Seneca.

It is, in fact, easy to discount the importance of the nurse's advice, particularly as compared with the sort of guidance that would presumably have been offered to Ottavia by the real Seneca. Seneca brings to the opera a complex reputation both as a historical figure and an author in his own right. He is the imperial tutor of dubious success whose political machinations in Nero's court were not above criticism; he was presumed to have written the play about Octavia that certainly influenced this libretto, and he was also the foremost representative of Stoic philosophy. Indeed, his presence has always lent the opera a certain degree of seriousness and respectability. For some commentators, he has been seen to embody the opera's moral core and absolute sense of ethics against which the crimes of the other characters might be understood.⁵⁷

The Nutrice, on the other hand, has none of Seneca's intellectual or historical pedigree. She is an invented character within the historical narrative, a stock figure both in classical and Renaissance theater, associated more with comedy than any school of philosophy. In *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, the two nurses—Ottavia's Nutrice and Poppea's Arnalta (so named, perhaps, as she is destined to attain greater heights)—are foils to their respective charges in a seemingly conventional manner: Arnalta advises caution and restraint while Ottavia's nurse recommends promiscuity. As such, she embodies a unique brand of femininity that lends her advice a special significance. The Nutrice, after all, is an older woman, no longer fertile or sexually viable. Sometimes even cast as tenors (a voice type used infrequently in the opera of this period) and played *en travesti*, the nurses are in fact the true representatives of what Paula Findlen has described as a third sex.⁵⁸ Neither male nor female, Ottavia's Nutrice has access to a secret knowledge about sexuality and thus has command over a special rhetorical style uniquely suited to imparting that sort of knowledge. Notably, she does not offer her charge the conventional advice to "enjoy love while young," as she does to Drusilla later in the opera. Rather, using logic that is reminiscent of Loredano's discourses, the Nutrice argues that promiscuity in this instance is a means of achieving revenge: Ottavia should follow Nerone's example and take a lover. The Nutrice also seems to be well aware of the Tarabottian debate on the nature of women that inspired Ottavia's outcry in the previous scene. From her unique perspective, she sees the world very differently from Ottavia, arguing that men and women can demand equal rights and equal pleasure—assuming that they are of the same social rank. The double standard is no less apparent; it is, however, based on class rather than gender. If Nerone is enjoying himself with Poppea, the Nutrice argues, Ottavia might just as well find the same pleasure. She need not fear dishonor, the Nutrice argues, because to tolerate such an offense is a *greater* sin

than to commit it. Pleasure and vengeance are thus the two most important elements in the Nutrice's program.

The power of the Nutrice's utterances, however, is primarily a result of the highly explicit mode of female rhetoric that Monteverdi employs for this ostensibly stock character. On the surface, her music reminds us of the familiar juxtaposition of speech and song.⁵⁹ The sensuality of lyric expression is placed in opposition to speech: the Nutrice sings in a triple-meter aria style that contrasts markedly with the austerity of Ottavia's recitative. The Nutrice's rhetorical control in this scene, however, is far more subtly contrived. Like the instructress in *La retorica delle puttane*, she uses a highly developed and intricately organized "lesson" to teach about sensuality and pleasure in a manner that will both inform and arouse the listener.

The rhetorical skill of the Nutrice is apparent in Monteverdi's elaborate setting of this scene. Certainly she conveys her message in the various surface details of the recitative and arioso sections, such as the suggestive repetitions of the phrase "abbi piacer tu ancor" (take pleasure yourself) followed by the emphasis on the word *vendetta* (vengeance), or the reciting tone in the concluding strophe, in which the Nutrice's recommendation for violence to avenge violence takes on an almost ritualistic significance.

But it is in Monteverdi's large-scale organization of Busenello's text—and the setting—that we understand the power of the Nutrice's eloquence. Busenello assigns her two stanzas, each containing four lines of *ottonari* (lines with eight syllables each), concluding with a pair of *endecasillabi* (eleven syllables), which would suggest an aria setting. After this, Ottavia and the Nutrice continue their discussion in *versi sciolti*, intended by Busenello to be set as recitative. Unlike Cavalli, who is more apt to accept the librettist's cues, Monteverdi alters the organization drastically (see table 4).

Where we might have expected a conventional strophic variation aria, we instead find a strikingly original mode of organizing the Nutrice's lyric expression—and a dramatically compelling way of conveying her important lessons. First, Monteverdi rearranges the Nutrice's initial couplet so it will overlap with the conclusion of Ottavia's monologue, redistributing the rest of her speech so that it surrounds Ottavia's protestations with repeats of the refrain "fa riflesso al mio discorso," drawn from the end of the Nutrice's second strophe (see ex. 18). Monteverdi sets the first four lines of *ottonari* of strophe 1 as aria (A+B') and the concluding pair of *versi sciolti* as recitative, followed by a ritornello. This is followed by a second strophe (A+B) and a refrain based on the B material (B"). A third pseudo-strophe composed of *versi sciolti* is set in a mixed fashion, variously as arioso and recitative. Ottavia's next interjection is followed by another abbreviated strophic variation and a final repetition of the refrain.

But it is in the setting of the Nutrice's aria that Monteverdi is most ingenious. The brief aria exploits two basic motivic ideas: the first couplet (ex. 18a), in which she describes the problem (Nerone's infidelity), opens

TABLE 4 The Nurse's Lessons, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*,
Act 1, Scene 5

<i>Strophe 1</i>		<i>Form</i>
<i>Nutrice:</i>	<i>Nurse:</i>	A
Se Neron perso ha l'ingegno	If Nero has lost his brains	
Di Poppea nei godimenti,	In his enjoyment of Poppea,	
<i>Scegl'alcun che, di te degno</i>	<i>Choose another, one worthy of you</i>	B ¹
<i>D'abbracciarti si contenti.</i>	<i>Who is happy to embrace you.</i>	
Se l'ingiuria a Neron tanto	If Nero finds pleasure in injury,	recit.
diletta,		
Abbi piacer tu ancor nel far	Take pleasure yourself in revenge.	
vendetta.		
<i>Strophe 2</i>		
E se pur aspro rimorso	And if the bitter remorse	A
Dell'onor ti arreca noia,	of honor should bother you,	
<i>Fa riflesso al mio discorso</i>	<i>Reflect on my discourse</i>	B
<i>Ogni duol ti sarà gioia.</i>	<i>And every sorrow will turn to joy.</i>	
<i>[Ottavia:</i>	<i>[Octavia:</i>	
Così sozzi argomenti	Such despicable arguments,	recit.
non intesi più mai da te,	I have never heard from you,	
nutrice!]	nurse!]	
<i>Nutrice:</i>	<i>Nurse:</i>	
<i>Fa riflesso al mio discorso</i>	<i>Reflect on my discourse</i>	B ²
<i>Ogni duol ti sarà gioia.</i>	<i>and every sorrow will turn to joy.</i>	
<i>Pseudo-strophe 3</i>		
L'infamia sta gl'affronti in	Shame consists of putting up	recit.
sopportarsi,	with insults,	
E consiste l'honor nel	Honor consists in vengeance.	arioso
vendicarsi.		
Anno poi questo vantaggio	Besides, amorous adventures	recit.
	have	
Della regina gli amorosi errori.	An advantage for queens.	
Se li sa l'idiota, non gli crede,	If told by an idiot, no one	
	believes him,	
Se l'astuto li penetra, li tace;	If a wise man learns, he is quiet,	arioso
E 'l peccato taciuto e non	And the sin that is not talked	recit.
creduto	about or believed	
Sta segreto e sicuro in ogni	Stays secret and secure	arioso
parte,	everywhere,	
Com'un che parli in mezzo	Like speaking among the deaf	recit.
un sordo e un muto.	and blind.	

(continued)

TABLE 4 *continued*

<i>[Ottavia:</i>	<i>[Octavia:</i>	
La donna assassinata dal marito	The woman killed by her husband	
Per adultere brame	For adulterous desires	
resta oltraggiata sì, ma non infame.	Remains abused but not defamed.	
Per il contrario resta	On the contrary,	
Lo sposo inonorato	The husband is dishonored,	
Si 'l letto marital gli vien macchiato.]	If the marital bed is desecrated.]	
<i>Strophe 4</i>		
<i>Nutrice:</i>	<i>Nurse:</i>	
Figlia e signora mia, tu non l'intendi,	My child, mistress, you don't understand,	A
no, non l'intendi della vendetta il principal arcano.	No, you don't understand the secret principle of vengeance.	
L'offesa sopra il volto d'un solo guanciata	The offense of one blow on the face	recit.
Si vendica col ferro	One avenges with the knife	
E con la morte.	And with death.	
Ch ti punge nel senso,	And if someone hurts your feelings,	
Pungilo nell'onore,	Wound his honor;	
Sebbene, a dirti il vero,	Indeed, I tell you the truth,	
Nel senso vivo te punge Nerone;	Nero has wounded your life;	
E in lui sol pungerai l'opinione	You can only harm his reputation.	
<i>Fa riflesso . . .</i>	<i>Reflect on my discourse . . .</i>	B ²

with two sequential statements of a descending fourth followed by an ascending step, which is in turn followed by an ascending scalar passage that retraces the fourth descent. In the second couplet (ex. 18b), she presents the solution: Ottavia should take vengeance by finding her own pleasure. Here, Monteverdi elaborates upon and explores the imitative properties of particular words and phrases, creating a mode of female speech that graphically demonstrates the means of giving and receiving pleasure: this is expressed in the sequencing of "scegl'alcun" on a three-note stepwise descending pattern, imitated in the continuo, which depicts the search for new lovers; the reversal of this motion, with the graphic syncopated, ascending gasps for "ch'abbracciarti," dramatizes the actual cries of love.

What is particularly intriguing, however, is Monteverdi's subsequent treatment of this material. After this introductory strophe, a ritornello signals a

(a) Strophe 1: A

108

Se Ne - ron per - so ha l'in - ge - gno,

112

Di Pop - pea ne' go - di - men - ti

(b) Strophe 1: Varied B'

116

Sce-gli al - cun, sce-gli al - cun, sce-gli al -

121

cun che di te de - gno D'ab - d'ab -

125

brac - ciar, d'ab-brac - ciar - ti si con - ten - ti

EXAMPLE 18. Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, ACT 1, SCENE 5: Ottavia and Nutrice: Nutrice strophes with refrain "Fa riflesso" (fol. 25r).

(continued)

(c) Strophe 2: Normalized B

136 03

ia, Fa ri - fles - so al mio di - scor - so Ch'o-gni

141

duol, o - gni duol ti sa - rà gio - ia.

(d) Strophe 3: Ornamented version of B''

145

Fa fa fa fa ri - fles - so al mio di - scor - so

EXAMPLE 18. (*continued*)

formal change—as if the aria were only now beginning—and the Nutrice proceeds to the second strophe. Here we have a more explicit presentation of the lesson: revenge can also give pleasure—follow my advice and sorrow will turn to joy. The Nutrice is transformed from performer to instructress: rather than mimicking the sexual act with sighs and moans, she reinforces the lesson, teaching Ottavia about the ways to find pleasure. This second, more didactic strophe is, in effect, a recomposition of strophe 1, albeit in an abbreviated form. Thus, the explicit imagery and more intricate design of the first strophe are heard, in retrospect, as a variation of the “plain” lesson presented in the second strophe, with the new refrain “fa riflesso al mio discorso” (ex. 18c). Monteverdi’s setting of this refrain, however, recalls the three-note descending pattern (“scegl’alcun”) from the B section of the first strophe (ex. 18b). There can be little doubt as to the nature of that lesson. Moreover, the nurse’s complete rhetorical control is evident in the transformation of the rhythmic context from triple to duple.

Ottavia's rejection of the lesson ("così sozzi argomenti / Non intesi più mai da te, nutrice!") inspires the Nutrice to still more artful rhetorical strategies. Strophe 3 (ex. 18d) includes a more playful—and complex—version of the refrain. The threefold repetition of "fa" traces the familiar stepwise descending-third pattern, separated by rests that are reminiscent of the lover's gasps from the first strophe (ex. 18b). Meanwhile, the continuo takes over the descending-fourth and ascending-step pattern from the aria's A section (ex. 18a), as if the intertwining of these two prominent motives might demonstrate for Ottavia the musical consequences of sexual union. This is made explicit in the final repetition of the refrain (not shown here), in which the nurse suggestively repeats the phrase "ogni duol" and accelerates into a mock climax in rhythmic unison with the bass.

Meanwhile, Ottavia's frequent interruptions uselessly cling to the austere, parlando style of expression, unaffected by the Nutrice's extravagant rhetoric. Paraphrasing Loredano's discourse on the fidelity of men versus that of women, she notes the perennial double standard: a man is dishonored less by murdering his wife than by tolerating her infidelity. As if anticipating her own end, Ottavia sings the words "donna assassinata" (woman murdered) with a striking G# dissonance against the A. But none of this is sufficient to silence the Nutrice, who drives home the lesson with a fourth varied strophe that has been imposed by Monteverdi on Busenello's *versi sciolti* in which the detailed lessons about seeking vengeance for even the slightest offense are enclosed within an abbreviated A section and a full repetition of the erotically charged more elaborate B" section. Like Pallavicino's instructress, Ottavia's Nutrice expresses erotic images through speech, demonstrating why song was regarded as one of women's most valuable weapons.

Ottavia, however, does not learn the lesson precisely as intended; Poppea, it would seem, would be a better student for such an instructor. Ottavia's adoption of the Nutrice's key (D) would seem to indicate that she briefly considers her advice. Yet, as suggested earlier, she is somewhat more astute about the realities of male and female relationships. Earlier, Ottavia recognized that her limited options were tied irrevocably to her womanhood. But, ironically, it is her innocence—and religion—that leaves her without options. "If there were neither honor nor God, I would be fate to myself and my sins," she declares. Instead, she decides, "I divide my heart between innocence and tears."⁶⁰ With language strikingly reminiscent of Didone's suicide attempt, Ottavia acknowledges the necessity of self-punishment for a woman's sins. The sense of morality expressed here is absolute. Divine retribution and dishonor are appropriate punishments for sexual transgressions. If guilty, Ottavia would willingly accept these, or, if necessary, inflict the punishment on herself. Yet, unlike Didone, whose infidelity to her husband necessitated self-punishment, the tearful Ottavia insists upon maintaining both her chastity and her sorrow. Rejecting this

castigation of self—and the brief expansion in range that this thought inspires—she reiterates her own innocence and purity, “lunge, lunge da gli errori.” Returning to her usual stilted, hesitating phrases, she once again descends the scale in a state of despair. Nevertheless, Ottavia may well have learned something from the Nutrice’s advice. As we shall see, while she rejects the Nutrice’s teachings on sexual pleasure, the lesson on revenge may well have found its mark.

THE SECOND LESSON: STOICISM

In the immediate aftermath of the Nutrice’s explicit instruction, the grieving empress is presented with a rather different point of view from Seneca (1.6). As noted earlier, the question as to Seneca’s moral authority is of critical importance in understanding the characterization of Ottavia and the potential meanings of *L’incoronazione di Poppea*. For Fenlon and Miller, who view the opera as an endorsement of Stoicism or even Neostoicism, Ottavia’s rejection of Seneca’s advice is a moral error, one that they later describe as evidence of her “philosophical immaturity.”⁶¹ In a sense, this is a comfortable hypothesis: Ottavia’s unfortunate plight can be understood as a result of her refusal to accept her suffering with the appropriate Stoic forbearance; this weakness is further demonstrated by her ruthless search for vengeance. Her banishment at the end is thus not undeserved, but rather appropriate for one who is morally deficient and unenlightened. That Nerone and Poppea are also corrupt seems to be beside the point.

The potential value of Seneca’s advice for Ottavia—and perhaps an indication of how he might have been regarded by composer and librettist—is a result not only of what he says but of his manner of expression. Indeed, it is in this regard that the comparison with the Nutrice is so revealing. In contrast with the Nutrice’s pragmatic dual program of pleasure and vengeance, Seneca prescribes inaction and, most notably in an operatic context, silence, famously urging her to be grateful to the blows of fortune, which only increase her ornaments: the wounds of destiny will produce the “highest virtues of strength, vigor, glories more prized than beauty.” This, it must be emphasized, is Seneca’s only opportunity in the opera to demonstrate the efficacy of Stoicism for the alleviation of suffering, and—as the Valetto (the pageboy) trenchantly remarks—he fails utterly. Ottavia is to embrace her misfortune and, in a near parody of Stoic thought, to thank heaven for the blows that will only serve to increase her purity, nobility, and virtue. This seems particularly ironic when read against the backdrop of history: the historical Octavia, after all, did precisely what Seneca advised; and it led to the cruel murder in which her head was cut off and presented to Poppea.⁶²

Monteverdi’s representation of the philosopher’s advice to Ottavia seems pregnant with satire. Seneca fails to persuade or comfort Ottavia not only

because of the apparent futility of his arguments, but also by his utter inability to muster his famed rhetorical powers in the service of a coherent oration. The passage is marked, as has often been noted, by a series of blatant madrigalisms: a melisma on the word "favilla," the syncopations on "colpita," the ascent illustrating "fortezza." This catalog of musical devices dissuades rather than persuades, distracting the listener from the intention of the speech as a whole, raising suspicions not only about Seneca's oratory but also about the validity of his philosophical stance.⁶³ The meaninglessness and inappropriateness of such gestures are particularly apparent in the absurdly long melisma placed on the article "la" rather than on the noun "bellezza."⁶⁴ Seneca is oblivious to the nature of beauty, an incompetent rhetorician and musician. He is unable to coordinate word and sound, and is thus an unlikely hero for an opera by Monteverdi. His manner of speech serves as a demonstration of the truth of Ottavia's response—that his words are "hollow and artificial, vain and empty, offering useless remedies for human sorrow." Moreover, the disorder and vacuous nature of his lessons contrasts strikingly with the highly organized mode of expression presented by the Nutrice, in which form, meaning, and affect join together to present a single, well-practiced show of female rhetoric, besting the efforts of this far more experienced rhetorician.

This view of Seneca is made explicit by the subsequent speech of the pageboy, who, like the Nutrice, offers a most cogent philosophical analysis. Adopting a more critical attitude toward Seneca's reported greed, he accuses Seneca of adapting his philosophy not only to serve blatant self-interest, but also to manipulate it to assume powers of judgment that rightfully belong to the gods—another echo of Incogniti religious skepticism.⁶⁵ ("He does not have Jove for a god, but rather as a companion.") If Busenello's pageboy is critical and disrespectful of Seneca, in Monteverdi's setting he is downright insulting. His speech is peppered with almost nonsensical musical expansions on various words in an almost random fashion, piled one on top of the other, in a manner that seems to underline the pointlessness of such devices. Indeed, this is one of the few moments in the opera in which there is an explicit use of musical satire. In some instances, the Valetto simply exaggerates the sort of gestures sung by Seneca, such as the melisma illustrating the word *move* and the emphatic repetitions for *non posso*. In other instances, he seems to be making fun not just of Seneca's excessive rhetoric, but of the art of the composer—the musical-rhetorical devices that form the composer's most basic tools, as in the pageboy's blatant disdain in his use of the word "canzoni" that culminates in the self-deprecating dig in the *ciacconna*,⁶⁶ or the comical illustration of Seneca's self-contradictions in contrary motion. The Valetto imitates Seneca's style of expression with arguably greater effectiveness than the philosopher himself displays.

After the Valetto's outburst, Ottavia turns to Seneca for more practical aid. His admonitions about virtue seem even more hollow as she begins an

almost dispassionate description of Nerone's affair with Poppea. Her intensity increases, however, as she is once again obsessed by a vision of Nerone's sexual pleasure with Poppea. She expresses this, not surprisingly, with her customary neighbor-note figure, culminating in a final anguished accusation against the "indegno esempio," with an ascending skip of a seventh. With the uncharacteristically lyrical set of descending suspensions, she pleads with Seneca to intercede on her behalf with the Senate, only to return to her usual manner of speech as she proceeds to the temple for prayer and sacrifice, leaving the Valetto to utter the final condemnations of Seneca's philosophy of withdrawal, inaction, and acquiescence.

OTTAVIA'S CHOICE: LA VENDETTA

Ottavia's rejection of Seneca's philosophies signals the decline of Stoic influence in the opera. Indeed, before Ottavia is heard from again, Nerone too will have rejected Stoicism and Seneca will commit suicide, mourned by followers whose commitment to their teacher's precepts is nonetheless highly suspect. For Nerone and the poet Lucano (Marcus Annaeus Lucan), Seneca's nephew, the death of the philosopher also provides an opportunity for an unabashed celebration of sensuality, music, republican freedoms, and homoerotic pleasures. In a world in which all moral restraints have presumably been removed—whether hypocritical or sincere—Ottavia was ideally suited both historically and dramatically to embody the work's moral center, to provide yet another operatic display for woman's suffering, perhaps a more viable form of Stoic acceptance in the context of female virtues.

Strikingly, this was not the strategy chosen by composer and librettist. Indeed, Ottavia's rejection of Stoicism was a pragmatic response to the apparent futility of the philosopher's advice, as well as an astute realization that such an approach offered nothing for a woman in her position. It is this same recognition of the uniquely female dilemma of an abandoned woman that also bars her from accepting the Nutrice's advice to take vengeance via sexual gratification. Instead, we are left with Ottavia's seemingly inexplicable shift from victim to villainess as she uncharacteristically (and ahistorically) persuades Ottone to murder Poppea. As a member of the "miserable female sex," rejected by her husband, devoid of sexual appeal, Ottavia adapts the only remaining weapon at her disposal: the misuse of imperial power as exemplified in the contemporaneous writings about Agrippina.

The unspoken link between Ottavia and Agrippina is of critical importance for understanding this entirely anomalous treatment of a Venetian opera heroine. Agrippina, it must be remembered, is the one character in the historical narrative associated with the year A.D. 59 whose absence in the opera is most conspicuous. In Tacitus and the other historical sources, it was Agrippina—not Octavia—who was regarded as the true obstacle to the marriage between Nero and Poppaea. In the *Octavia*, Agrippina was elimi-

nated from the main action, yet her powerful presence was still felt in the form of a ghost who swore to exact revenge on Nero and haunted Poppaea's dreams. And, as noted above, it was Agrippina who so preoccupied the Incogniti writers Pallavicino and Malipiero as a negative female exemplum for her ambition and unconscionable sin of incest. Moreover, although she is absent from the opera, it is her voice, as we have noted, that Ottavia assumes briefly in the act 1, scene 5 monologue as the presumably barren empress bemoans the fate of women who give birth to tyrants only later to suffer death at their hands. As in *La Didone*, where Busenello cleverly conflated the two strands of the Dido legend in his depiction of the Carthaginian queen, Tacitus's silent, innocent victim is empowered by the spirit of the manipulative Agrippina, likewise the victim of Nero's murderous tendencies, and condemned by Incogniti writers for her ambition and eloquence.

The lesson in women and imperial politics—made explicit over a decade later in Pietro Zaguri's plays—is played out in the scene between Ottone and Ottavia within the peculiar constraints of operatic convention. Busenello's text clearly establishes the courtly frame within which such politics operate. Ottone appears before Ottavia and offers to serve her and obey her commands with the exaggerated manners associated with the polite courtier. The surprise, of course, is Ottavia's demand that Ottone kill Poppea—a decision, ironically, that Ottone had himself considered and discarded out of cowardice or excess of love, all the while condemning womankind in language reminiscent of Loredano's writings on women:

Otton, torna in te stesso.	Otho, return to yourself.
Il più imperfetto sesso	The most imperfect sex
non ha per sua natura	does not have for its nature
altro di uman in sè che la figura.	anything human except the face.

In this brief scene, however, Ottavia demonstrates the extent of her control over Agrippina-style political maneuvers. The empty rhetoric of Ottone's promise of service is interpreted as a binding pledge of loyalty. Disobedience would merely invoke an accusation of impropriety, perhaps ironic given Ottavia's self-consciously constructed chastity, but nonetheless lethal within the context of Nerone's court. More striking is the extent to which the substance of Ottavia's orders actualizes the gender reversal inherent in the descriptions of Agrippina. It was Agrippina, we recall, whose behavior embodied male attributes, who feminized Claudius by transforming feminine habits into masculine ones and pursued political ambitions inappropriate to her sex. Ottavia's insistence that Ottone kill Poppea in female disguise is a vivid realization of this apparent inversion.

Equally revealing is the mode of expression that Monteverdi uses for Ottavia in this scene. She does not relinquish the monotonal recitative style or the lower-neighbor figure that characterizes so much of her previous speeches. Here, however, she is empowered by an extraordinary single-

mindedness: a stubborn adherence to a single tonal region (primarily G) that Ottone repeatedly tries—unsuccessfully—to circumvent.

Notably, Ottone, not Ottavia, falls in and out of a depressive resignation in *mollis* sonorities. Ottavia, however, is bolstered by political purpose, the solidity of female ambition, and demonstrates an inability to hear or be influenced by the tonal meandering and pleading of her subjects. Agrippina's presence—and the dangers of female power—could not be more readily demonstrated. Indeed, it is precisely this aspect of Ottavia's behavior that elicits Ottone's most telling anti-female remark in the following scene as he considers himself in female clothing, transformed not from Ottone into Drusilla, but "from man into a serpent" with poisonous rage, "the like of which has not nor will be seen in the world."⁶⁷

Ottavia's adoption of Agrippinian methods serves to solve an important problem in the plot while at the same time elucidating a perhaps discomfiting political message. In Tacitus's report, Nero justified Ottavia's exile and subsequent murder by accusing her of an adulterous relationship with a servant. In Busenello's libretto, Ottavia's own deeds provide the necessary justification, in particular her threats to Ottone. Regardless of the paucity of virtue demonstrated by Nerone, his forgiveness of Ottone and praise for Drusilla gain him—as he himself immodestly notes—a certain degree of heroism. As in the *novelle* on Agrippina, in which the focus is curiously deflected from the male protagonists, Ottavia absorbs much of the remaining guilt.⁶⁸ Her chastity, her concern about the fate of women, and her exercise of power accomplish nothing.

OTTAVIA IN EXILE: THE FINAL LAMENT

Ottavia's final appearance in the opera returns the heroine to a seemingly more accurate depiction of Tacitus's historical narrative: in exile on the island of Pandateria. Tacitus devotes considerable attention to his description of Octavia's final days:

So this girl, in her twentieth year, was picketed by company-commanders of the Guard and their man. She was hardly a living person any more—so certain was she of imminent destruction. Yet still she lacked the peace of death. The order to die arrived a few days later. She protested that she was wife no longer—Nero's sister only. She invoked the *Germanici*, the relations she shared with Nero. Finally she even invoked Agrippina, in whose days her marriage had been unhappy, certainly, but at least not fatal. But Octavia was bound, and all her veins were opened. However, her terror retarded the flow of her blood. So she was put into an exceedingly hot vapor-bath and suffocated. An even crueller atrocity followed. Her head was cut off and taken to Rome for Poppaea to see. (*Annals*, 14.64)

Again, history creates a disconcerting mold for operatic expression. Unlike Arianna, whose abandonment on the island of Dia created an ideal

space for self-expression, our taciturn heroine is suspended in a liminal existence between life and death. Tacitus's description emphasizes Ottavia's passivity and reticence—her lack of suitability for dramatic action either as victim or criminal. Her terror at being bound and tied, with her veins opened, does not inspire cries or eloquent protests; by reporting the too-slow flow of her blood—the signifier of mortality—Tacitus reminds us of the almost inhuman nature of this nearly invisible historical figure. One cannot help but be surprised once more that Busenello and Monteverdi would have contrived for Ottavia to have so openly rejected Seneca's advice: it would be far easier to understand both her life and death as a silent expression of Stoic virtue and forbearance, a female counterpart to Seneca's suicide in which we observe the heroine's acquisition of wisdom in a seemingly corrupt universe. Nor is she a conventional lamenting woman with regard to either words or manner of expression. She does not condemn her murderer, lament lost passion, or catalog her sacrifices or the crimes against her person. She does not exult in the comforting beauty of lyric expression, the regular irregularity of a chromatic ostinato, or more organized song; nor are her final words characterized by the threatening and seemingly uncontrollable flow of heightened speech that allowed us to penetrate the psychological complexities of an Arianna or Didone.

Instead, Busenello distances us from her most private thoughts: Ottavia's farewell to Rome is in some respects a public utterance, reminding us even in this ultimate hour of the allure of the empire, the link to Agrippina, and the inadequacies of imperial power when wielded by a woman. Ottavia returns to the sound realm in which she began: the *durus* world of A minor, the stifled attempt at self-expression, and the assiduous avoidance of sonorous singing, without the urge to rebellion that has been so successfully quelled in the course of the opera. Her primary motivic material, of course, is the familiar lower-neighbor gesture, that generic recitative figure that permeated the opening monologue and so much of Ottavia's subsequent utterances, now isolated and exaggerated as the head motive for the entire scene. Her stuttering gasps, which in the hands of the Nutrice or Poppea could be transformed into a lover's sighs, are for Ottavia the choked-back sobs of a woman forbidden emotional display, lyric expression, or sensual pleasure. Like the blood that flowed too slowly in the veins of the historical Octavia, Monteverdi's setting for Ottavia's final scene problematizes the very act of singing: her utterances are broken down into wordless cries, choked-off sobs, a rare instance in early opera in which wordlessness is represented not by virtuosity—melismatic singing—but its opposite. It is not surprising that her only compellingly lyrical outburst in the entire scene concerns her utter inability to express sorrow—the final luxury that she is denied. Her reward and her punishment for chastity, political awareness, and the exercise of power are a life of isolation. Deprived of a feminine voice, she goes on to a solitary hermit-like existence—not unlike that of Tarabotti, whose

proto-feminist ideals were of little use. Ottavia is an embodiment of an operatic dilemma: a heroine who sings with only the greatest difficulty and whose survival within an operatic realm is all but impossible.

EPILOGUE: ANNA RENZI AND THE VOICE OF THE PRIMA DONNA

Ottavia's operatic existence, however, was not merely a function of her presence in the libretto and score of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. Indeed, the always contentious questions of authority, interpretive license, and cultural meaning are all the more apparent in a work in which the extent of Monteverdi's participation remains in doubt, and in which—as with all Venetian operas—the score transmits but a skeleton of what would have been heard in an actual performance. Our consideration of Ottavia thus far omits what was arguably the most compelling element for Venetian audiences: the creation of the role by the singer Anna Renzi.

The Roman singer Anna Renzi, regarded (perhaps ahistorically) as the "first prima donna," was one of the most renowned singing actresses of her time, beloved by Venetian audiences and held in particularly high regard by members of the Venetian Accademia degli Incogniti. Even Loredano problematized her voice and presence in a special way: in his version of Parnasus, Anna Renzi appears in front of the omniscient Apollo, representing the familiar dichotomy between female eloquence and virtue.⁶⁹

Incogniti writers also singled Renzi out for special attention in a volume entitled *Le glorie della Signora Anna Renzi*, a collection of poems and writings in her praise. The volume provides an intriguing glimpse into the ways in which seventeenth-century audiences may have managed the discrepancy between singer and role, acknowledging simultaneously the emblematic figure and the prima donna whose voice enlivened that figure. Renzi's voice may enamor audiences and inspire love; and as Deidamia (*La finta pazza*), Aretusa (*La finta savia*), or Ottavia (*L'incoronazione di Poppea*) her rhetorical power likewise overwhelms those with whom she appears on the stage. The result is a highly idiosyncratic way of hearing the character against the singer's persona.

This is apparent, for example, in Benedetto Ferrari's description of Renzi's captivating and almost inhuman performance of the final lament in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*:

Non è Ottavia, che lagrime diffonde	It is not Octavia shedding her tears,
Esule, esposte a le spumose arene;	Exiled, exposed on foamy shores;
È un mostro, che note alte,	It is a monster, who with notes high
e profonde	and deep
Acrescer vâ lo stuolo de le Sirene.	Augments the company of the Sirens. ⁷⁰

This wild, isolated, and uninhabited setting produces an Ottavia with an oddly unnatural and inhuman voice: a "monster" linked to the company of

the Sirens, whose wordless cries lured men to their deaths. At the same time, we might wonder why Ferrari wishes to differentiate this "monster" from the named character in the opera. If she is not Ottavia, we might ask, who is she? The praise of Renzi—and perhaps criticism of the peculiar musical setting in this extraordinary scene—consists here in the singer's ability *not* to embody the features of the character as provided by composer and librettist, but rather to transcend them.

Giulio Strozzi takes a similar approach in his description of Renzi. Here, he links Ottavia's exile with the sea imagery associated with Venice herself. The unjust Nero, he notes, may have consigned Ottavia to the sea, but "the miserable villain did not realize that she could not perish, as the sea is the true dwelling place of the Sirens."⁷¹ This confusion between singer and performer is all the more apparent in the following poem by an anonymous writer also included in *Le glorie*:

Poi cominciasti afflitta	Then, afflicted, you intoned
Tue querele canore	Your melodious complaints
Con tua voce divina,	With your voice divine,
Disprezzata regina,	O spurned queen,
E seguendo il lamento	And continuing your lament
Facevi di dolore	You forced Love
Stillar in pianto, e sospirar Amore.	To burst into tears and sighs.
So, ben io, che se vero	Well do I know that,
Fosse stato il cordoglio,	Had the grief and the
E l'istoria funesta,	Sorrowful tale been true,
Alla tua voce mesta,	Hearing your mournful voice,
Alle dolci parole, ai cari detti.	Your sweet words, your endearing expressions.
Si come i nostri petti	Just as they filled our breasts
Colmaro di pietade, ah so ben io,	With pity, ah, well do I know that
Neron s'avrebbe fatto umile, e pio.	Nero would have been rendered humble and compassionate.

On the surface, the hyperbole here appears to be little more than a conventional, if ingenious, poetic conceit. What better way for the anonymous writer to praise Renzi than to note the effect of her singing on Love himself? Here the passive becomes active: the audiences do not merely love Renzi; rather, Renzi herself moves Love itself to tears, perhaps even bringing Nero to pity in the bargain. Yet, by addressing these remarks ostensibly to the "disprezzata regina," that is to say to Ottavia rather than Renzi, the writer points out some of the opera's most striking contradictions. Even the most cursory reading of the libretto to *L'incoronazione di Poppea* reveals that Love is scarcely moved by Ottavia's fate and that Ottavia herself has little use for love. Instead, Love is Poppea's champion, who, along with fortune, fights for the interloper, all while insuring Ottavia's exile and eventual demise. How can we reconcile the poet's description of Ottavia's "sweet words"

and "endearing expressions" with her complaints about the fate of woman-kind, her denunciation of patriarchy, her rejection of both marriage and childbearing, and her utter lack of concern about love, that most feminine of preoccupations? Equally confusing is the line drawn here between fiction and truth—in what vision of history might Octavia have actually inspired pity in the breast of Nero? Moreover, the author even finds a way to grapple with Ottavia's most ahistorical act—the manipulation of Ottone. He continues:

Soprafatta dal sdegno
Contro l'empio marito
Per satollar col sangue
Di Poppea tua nemica
Tue giustissime brame,
Commettesti ad Ottone,
Ch'era suo fido amante,
Per sua cattiva sorte
Con le sue proprie man la di lei
morte.

Quella voce imperiosa
Che con grave sembiante
Essercitava un barbaro talento,
Parea, che a noi medesmi,
L'annunzio del morir anco
apportasse,
Ma con tale dolcezza
E tanta tenerezza,
Che anco recava aita
E quella morte al fin era la vita.

Overcome by wrath
Against your evil husband,
To satiate your most just desires
With the blood
Of your enemy Poppea,
You entrusted Ottone,
Who was her faithful lover,
For his evil fate,
To give her death with his own hands.

That imperious voice,
Which with an air of seriousness
Exercised a cruel talent,
Appeared to deliver to us
The news of death as well,
But with such sweetness,
And such tenderness
That it also brought aid,
And that death was life in the end.⁷²

It appears that our anonymous critic, perhaps reacting to the incongruity of Busenello and Monteverdi's characterization of Ottavia, has created for his beloved prima donna a character who was not only more suitable for Renzi's public persona, but also more compatible with the innocent and tragic bearing of the historical Octavia and the conventional representation of the lamenting woman. We might be tempted to assume that this critic was deaf—that he closed his ears to Ottavia's unusual mode of singing, her imperial ambitions, and her inappropriate condemnations of female existence. At the same time, the critic's words tell us something of primary importance about the still-ambiguous position of women singers on the operatic stage in the early years of the genre: the fluid boundary between singer and character—performer and heroine—that necessarily endows this Renzi/Ottavia hybrid with the power to transcend the virtues and vices of her own musico-dramatic representation. As Ferrari and Strozzi also remind us, this woman whose wordless cries are heard from the foamy shores is not Ottavia. She is another creation: a monster and a siren, a singer whose

voice was so powerful that it could even transform history, bringing Love to tears and even inspiring pity in the heart of Nero.

Listeners in the twenty-first century are no less susceptible to these forces. We, too, want to believe that Love would weep for Ottavia rather than fight for Poppea; we want to applaud the institution of marriage, to condemn immoral sensuality, to enjoy the happy ending, to believe in Ottavia's sweet, unvengeful nature, or, at the very least, to revel in her stoic acceptance of a tragic fate. Yet, as we have seen, this is not an opera that endorses any of these more conventional virtues or upholds, in the characterization of Ottavia, a more unambiguous view of female suffering. Instead, we are left with a world in which singing is linked to sexual pleasure. Ottavia, with her unappealing chastity and condemnation of female existence, left out of the erotic triangle, is exiled not only physically but also musically and left to die under ambiguous circumstances. At the conclusion of the opera, it is Poppea's sensuality that commands the stage.

Chapter 5

The Nymph Calisto and the Myth of Female Pleasure

The Arcadians are said to have possessed their land before the birth of Jove, and that folk is older than the moon. Their life was like that of beasts, unprofitably spent; artless as yet and raw was the common herd. Leaves did they use for houses, herbs for corn: water scooped up in two hollows of the hands to them was nectar. No bull panted under the weight of the bent ploughshare: no land was under the dominion of the husbandman: there was as yet no use for horses, every man carried his own weight: the sheep went clothed in its own wool. Under the open sky they lived and went about naked, insured to heavy showers and rainy winds. Even to this day the unclad ministers recall the memory of the olden custom and attest what comforts the ancients knew.

OVID, *Fasti*, 2.289–302¹

ARCADIAN MUSINGS

La Calisto (1651) takes place in two essentially inaccessible and uncivilized realms: first, the cosmos, wherein the nymph Callisto will achieve immortality as a constellation; and second, the land of Arcadia, inhabited by the half-goat deity Pan, Diana and her nymphs, the shepherd Endymion, and a host of satyrs in the service of an absent Dionysus.² Even in the ancient world Arcadia had always been understood as a place that belonged to the time before time, a land whose inhabitants witnessed the first rising of the moon and placement of the stars. The Arcadian myths intertwined in the opera by Francesco Cavalli and libretto by Giovanni Faustini remind us of the Arcadian origins of the cosmos: the opera not only begins and ends with Callisto's ascension to the heavens as the Great Bear constellation, but also presents the love between the goddess Diana and the shepherd Endymion, whose admiration for the moon goddess earned him fame as the first astronomer. Arcadia is an integral part of Greek mythology that stands outside of Greek civilization. As Philippe Borgeaud observes, Arcadia "is the rest of a dialectic where the role of one party is incomprehensible without that of the others."³ Arcadia is defined by archaic rituals, language, and fantastic beasts—and a primitive economy in a wild, untamed topography. It is both bucolic and primitive, idyllic and barren: hunting and herding form the basis of an economy that is the antithesis of the agrarian and urban so-

cieties whose imaginations fertilized and populated this strangely distant landscape.

It is the very special nature of Arcadia's mythical realm that so differentiates *La Calisto* from the operas considered in the earlier chapters. In Arcadia, man and the gods exist in a special relationship that profoundly influences the way that events are presented. Despite the occasional appearance or interference of a pagan god or goddess, *La Didone* and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* take place in a universe governed primarily by human virtues and frailties. Didone may have been inspired to love Enea through the interference of Amore (Love) and the competition between the goddesses Giunone (Juno) and Venere (Venus); but she was bound by societal expectations of the chastity of widows and assumed the responsibility for her own sexual crimes. And unlike the nymph Calisto, who will be both seduced and immortalized by Giove, Ottavia condemns Giove not for his power but his lack thereof—his inability to change the course of history.

In addition, Troy, Carthage, and Rome are urban centers, organized into appropriate civic, social, and political structures and institutions, constructed and maintained by human toil, albeit through the grace of supernatural powers: these are societies built and populated by men, where time and space are measured in human terms, and where man's power competes with that of the gods. Virgil's epic, particularly in Busenello's chronologically ordered drama, was part of a foundation myth of a great civilization, tracing the linear history of Aeneas's journey from Carthage to Latium. And despite Virgil's own distortion of history—the famous anachronism that made possible the mythical meeting between Dido and Aeneas—for early modern Italians Carthage was a real place, a legitimate historical and contemporary construct. As history, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, with its vivid depiction of imperial virtues and vices, is even more closely bound to the temporal world. The fates of Ottavia, Nerone, Seneca, and Poppea touched upon political and moral issues that linked the Roman Empire to the virtues and vices of early modern Venice and its myths.

But the Arcadian world represented in *La Calisto* is inspired most of all by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a poem that delineates time and space in a novel manner. While Ovid ostensibly presents us with a "history of the world" from its origins to his own day, his poem is one in which the temporal mode is often distorted, in which transformations collapse on top of one another in a seemingly haphazard way, and in which time is yet another element for play.⁴ As Denis Feeney observes, despite mention of specific historical incidents and figures, Ovid often "ignores, refuses, renounces all such schemes and ideologies, or else subverts the canonical reference points that no account of history could totally ignore."⁵ In Ovid's Arcadia, appearances are rarely what they seem, and the relationships between man, nature, and the gods are in constant flux.

Thus, the opera *La Calisto* engages with the myth of Venice in an entirely

new manner, intersecting in surprising ways with the city's unique self-image, political ideologies, and libertine tendencies. Indeed, this relation might provide some clues to an important aspect of the work's performance history, to which we will return later: *La Calisto* was a failure in its own time.⁶ Nonetheless, the images depicted therein had a special resonance for Venetians. The pastoral world presented on the stage in *La Calisto* was one that Venetians knew not only from literature, but also from countless visual representations of Arcadia—paintings of gods, goddesses, nymphs, and shepherds frolicking in the presumably idealized world that was distant from the realities of urban life. The rural landscape of Arcadia stands in opposition to water-bound, urban Venice, with its twisting narrow *calli*, bridges, and *campi*. The name Arcadia contains within itself the promise of country life and an escape from the various maladies that afflict urban existence: politics, prostitution, and disease—the vices that inspired the nobility to build grand villas on the Brescian Riviera. Like the Veneto villas, Arcadia offered a primitive and idyllic space, wherein erotica, untarnished by the vagaries of city life, could be enjoyed through the relative safety of a mythological veil. Moreover, human desires, exposed so nakedly in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, are instead projected onto the presumably safer bodies of immortals, demi-gods, and mythic beasts who could explore the limits of human sexuality with considerably more freedom than their human counterparts.

What is particularly intriguing for our purposes, however, is the fact that this highly eroticized realm is populated by inhabitants who exist largely within communities segregated by gender and marked by an unwillingness or failure to achieve sexual union with one another. Diana and her nymphs (including Callisto) maintain an existence that is linked to nature and precivilized notions of society: this is an entirely female sphere in which women operate in an autonomous fashion, hunting, riding, and pleasuring in the woods, while disdaining male company. At the same time, the shepherd-god Pan, half-man and half-goat, is equally isolated, balancing Artemis/Diana in a peculiar reciprocal relationship. Pan is involved in the protection of fertility and sexual unions, particularly in the realm of animals; yet, he also provides protection for shepherds and their flocks. Moreover, along with the satyrs, who inhabit this liminal space between man and beast, Pan's own sexual relationships, marked both with brutality and eroticism, are nonetheless doomed to failure, in part as a result of the aforementioned segregation: it is Pan who causes sexual "panic," whose frustration is expressed either in masturbation (the legend of Echo) or music (the legend of Syrinx), and, as explored in *La Calisto*, whose love for Diana is likewise unrequited.⁷ As Philippe Borgeaud notes, Pan's universe is thus "closed to women," creating what he aptly terms two "spheres of frustration" that mark all relationships between male and female beings.⁸

La Calisto is thus set in a world in which gender is stratified in an entirely different way. Male and female coexist in two erotic zones, and desire,

though celebrated, is rarely fulfilled in a satisfying manner. This has important consequences for the basic narrative structure of the work, in particular the sort of comic plotting that characterizes virtually every Venetian opera and that we have seen demonstrated so well in *La Didone*. Instead, this is an opera that assiduously avoids the conventional, fulfilling *lieto fine* that Faustini had used in each of his previous nine librettos: the ostensibly happy union of one or more pairs of lovers, confirmed by duet, and enjoyed by the likes of Didone, Poppea, and their respective partners.⁹ Instead, there is but a single sexual act in the opening scenes of the opera, the details of which are shrouded in the ambiguity of transvestism and the not so subtle innuendo of female homosexuality. The rest of the characters exist in states of relative sexual frustration. Calisto, seduced by Giove (disguised as Diana), is ecstatic about her sexual experience; but she is compelled to abandon physical love after first being turned into a bear by the jealous Giunone, and then immortalized as a constellation by Giove. Similarly, Diana yearns for Endimione (Endymion) and is desired by Pane (Pan). But she, too, relinquishes physical pleasure, and ultimately agrees to shine her beams chastely on Endimione from afar. And other sexual frustrations abound: Giunone complains of her husband's neglect; the nymph Linfea searches for a mate but is pursued only by satyrs; and even the satyrs fail to satisfy their perennially lustful natures.

At the same time, the avoidance of conventional fulfillment in the opera presents an alternative discourse about sexuality. There is much that could be said, for example, about the opera's apparent endorsement of divine rather than human love; for as we shall see, Calisto's elevation to the heavens by Giove in the third act establishes the nymph within an orderly, patriarchal universe. But perhaps what is most interesting here is the intersection between the profane and the sacred, and the ways in which an ostensibly Neoplatonic narrative masks or—perhaps, more accurately—interlocks with a discourse about more deviant forms of pleasure. With *La Calisto*, Cavalli and Faustini find a novel way to manage the problem of women's desire and eroticism in opera, casting a somewhat different light on the Venetian ambivalence toward female sexuality. This is an opera in which metaphysical passion replaces the physical, where eroticism masks a celebration of chastity, and in which female desire is exposed and vanquished by means of quite remarkable musical and dramatic strategies. The erotic play of the gods, and the baroque splendor with which it was associated, provides an ideal space in which to experiment with the hazy boundary between edification and pleasure that was so central to Venetian experimentation with sexuality in opera.

THE MYTHS

We know of the extraordinary audacity of Phaëthon and how, unable to guide his father's steeds, he was struck down by Jupiter's thunderbolt in order to save the earth

from being burnt up. Jupiter, concerned for the preservation of Nature, but seeing that the spheres had not been harmed by the Sun's fire, descended to earth with his son Mercury to repair the damage it had suffered. They divested themselves of their distinguishing marks, Jupiter of his thunderbolt, Mercury of his caduceus and the wings on his feet. The first soil upon which they set foot was that of the Pelasgians, frequented by Diana on account of the abundance of its springs, the number of its forests haunted by wild animals, but mainly because of its fair Endymion, for whom she cherished a secret love. The ornament of the quiver-bearing virgins, devotees of the hunting goddess, was Callisto, the daughter of Lycaon, who had derided the miraculous powers of Jupiter when he had at one time come down from Olympus and roamed about the world to acquaint himself with the increasing wickedness of the human race, further provoking the wrath of the all-powerful Divinity by serving his guests a horrible dish (roasted human flesh). Whereupon he found his castle in flames, was driven away, and transformed into a wolf. The tender simple maiden, renouncing royal luxury, went into the wilderness and offered Cynthia (Diana) her vow of chastity, almost as if Fate had driven her into the woods (now the abode of her metamorphosed father), later to elevate her among the stars.

GIOVANNI FAUSTINI, *argomento* to *La Calisto*¹⁰

The libretto of *La Calisto* is an interweaving of three separate myths in which Arcadia and the goddess Diana are the common elements. Unlike the operas considered thus far, which were inspired or at least inflected by a central group of classical sources, there is no single ancient text that links all three of these myths. Their intertwining is in and of itself a baroque invention, and an integral part of the expressive work of this particular opera. The story of Callisto and Jove, drawn primarily from Ovid but also other sources considered below, provides the narrative frame of the opera. But Faustini combines these with two other mythic strands that deal with a now-familiar topic—the frailty of female chastity: the goddess Diana and her reputed relationship with two very different lovers—the shepherd Endymion and the goat-god Pan.

Callisto and Jove

Callisto is associated with Diana and her band of nymphs, yet she shares with Pan a mythic history that engages the liminal space between animal and man, mortal and immortal. Her story is bound up with that of the earliest days of Arcadia: its rebirth and renewal after the fire caused by Phaëthon's disastrous chariot ride and the subsequent establishment of Arcadia's royal masculine lineage. In most reports, as Faustini notes in his *argomento*, Callisto is the daughter of King Lycaon, himself the son of Arcadia's first "resident" king, Pelasgos. According to some sources, Zeus/Jove turned King Lycaon into a wolf after the king and his sons served the god an impure meal containing human entrails from a sacrifice. According to Hesiod, Lycaon did this in order to punish Zeus/Jove for raping his daughter Callisto. Ovid, however, reorders the events so that there is no such cause or ef-

fect. Instead, Lycaon's impure meal inspires Jove to flood the earth to rid it of evil; he then rapes Callisto after the flood.¹¹ The result, however, is the same: after her encounter with Zeus/Jove, Callisto gives birth to Arcadia's next king, Arcas, after whom Arcadia was named.

Most of the primary sources agree as to the basic outline of the Callisto tale, albeit with some significant discrepancies.¹² Callisto is a nymph linked with Artemis/Diana. She is described as Diana's favorite (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.415–16), a nymph who assumed Diana's manner of dress (Apollodorus, 3.8.1–2), and both Apollodorus and Ovid (*Fasti*, 2.157–58) report that she had sworn an oath of chastity to Diana. Zeus/Jove then falls in love with her and lies with her (Pausanias 8.3.6); most others report that she is raped by him (Hesiod); Apollodorus notes that he is either in the guise of Apollo or Artemis/Diana. Ovid (*Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*) follows the tradition in which Jove chooses Diana's form as his disguise. Following the rape, Callisto becomes pregnant; her crime is revealed while bathing with Diana (Hesiod) and the other nymphs (Ovid, *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*). She then gives birth to a boy named Arcas, and is turned into a bear variously as a punishment by Diana (Hesiod and Pausanias 8.3), by Zeus to escape Hera/Juno's notice (Apollodorus), or by the jealous Juno (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*; Hyginus, *Fabulae*). The remainder of the tale concerns her transformation into the Great Bear Constellation by Jove after she was killed or nearly killed by various hunters. Apollodorus and Pausanias recount that she was shot down by Artemis/Diana, either for breaking her vow of chastity or at the urging of Hera; Ovid notes that she was rescued by Jove just before her son Arcas unknowingly tries to kill her. Moreover, he adds a final touch to the story (also cited by Hyginus): threatened by Callisto's ascension, Juno begs Tetys to forbid the Ursa Major to ever dip below the horizon, so that for all eternity Callisto would not be permitted to bathe herself in the cool waters of the ocean.¹³

Many of the discrepancies in the various versions of the story deal with the balance between masculine and feminine forces in Callisto's crime and punishment. Although she is an object of male violence, this is not a "conventional" rape story in which a male violator and a female victim are presented unambiguously.¹⁴ On the one hand, the myth emphasizes a familiar contradiction between Jove's spiritual and sexual prowess. Jove wishes to renew his beloved Arcadia and restore the rivers and to make green the trees and pastures. The rape of Callisto—which sets the entire plot into motion and results in the birth of Arcas—is thus an integral part of Jove's fertilization of Arcadia, a demonstration of masculine procreative power. In that context, his use of Diana's body in order to rape and impregnate Callisto is particularly suggestive. In Arcadian society, this was a violent and devious means of inserting a male presence into a strictly female society, or reaffirming patriarchal control in an inhospitable climate. Borgeaud suggests that there may well be an element of homosexuality; thus Jove might have



FIGURE 3. Peter Paul Rubens, *Jupiter and Callisto* (1613), Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Kassel. Used by permission.

known that such a disguise would gain him access to Callisto, perhaps emulating an ancient female initiation rite.¹⁵ Regardless, the ambiguity inherent in Jove's use of Diana's body was precisely what made Ovid's version of the myth so appealing to the voyeur. Rubens, for example, was among the artists to paint Jove as Diana, showing the two women in close proximity with a level of intimacy that would seem to belie Ovid's claims about Callisto's resistance (see fig. 3). For the male spectator, there could be no more compelling way to celebrate male sexual prowess than by presenting this feast of *faux* female homosexual delights in which attention is necessarily drawn to the absent male organ.

At the same time, the myth also emphasizes female control over the various stages of a women's life: virginity, marriage, and childbirth. Nearly all of the sources underscore the closeness of Diana and Callisto and their physical and temperamental similarities; it has even been proposed that they are different halves of the same woman.¹⁶ Callisto is one of many nymphs that are part of Diana's chaste band, an entirely female society that has chosen hunting and autonomy over intercourse with men—a fact about which Callisto will sing in Cavalli's opera. John Heath, for example, notes that Callisto's story follows a familiar narrative. Like other nymphs in Diana's band, including Daphne, Syrinx, and Io, Callisto is a virgin huntress, whose hair is "loosely arranged" and who is vulnerable to attack while wandering, resting,

or bathing in the woods.¹⁷ As Heath notes, these nymphs are always victimized in some way: “invariably attacked sexually, transformed (Daphne, Syrinx), and/or raped (Io, Callisto), or symbolically assaulted (Callisto by Diana).”¹⁸ But Ovid’s description also emphasizes the antagonism between Diana and Callisto after the rape, and the apparent impossibility of such behavior within Diana’s realm. The other nymphs expose Callisto’s pregnancy; they are, as several commentators have noted, more knowing about sexual matters than Diana herself is.¹⁹ Moreover, the punitive Diana banishes Callisto from the sacred pool so that she will not pollute the water in which the nymphs habitually bathe, thus—as Shawn O’Bryhim persuasively argues—denying her access to the purifying bath both before and after childbirth.²⁰ (Notably, it is this particular episode of the Callisto myth that was probably best known in the Renaissance through paintings.²¹)

But in this myth, Diana is not the only woman to punish Callisto for Jove’s rape. Callisto must also contend with the anger of Jove’s wife, Juno. As Johnson puts it, since “she can’t or won’t punish Jove, she is forced to punish whoever it is that she can punish.”²² Ovid’s account, moreover, emphasizes the brutality of the confrontation: Juno throws Callisto violently to the ground, covering her arms with hair as she pleads for mercy, and turning her speech into a fierce growl, all the while leaving her with inner humanity—a “womanly soul” unable to express itself. Nor is this to be her final punishment: after Jove transforms her into a constellation, Juno uses her power to decree that the Ursa Major never be allowed to touch the purifying waters of the sea.²³

The myth thus enacts a triumph of patriarchal powers, whose spiritual implications were suggestive in a Christian and/or Neoplatonic context. Callisto, like so many of Jove’s subjects, is violated by his sexual powers, but ultimately redeemed by his love. The actual fate of Callisto, however, was determined by both masculine and feminine influence. Callisto moves from virginity and autonomy in Diana’s female realm, to fertility through the birth of Arcas, into a beastly state through the interference of Juno (not without some help from Diana), and is finally immortalized through the beneficence of Jove, under the continued control of Juno. As in so much of the *Metamorphoses*, the gods play carelessly with Callisto’s fate. The pleasure, however, belongs entirely to Jove, and to the somewhat playful tone of the narrator that tends to minimize the violence and horror of the tale.²⁴

Diana and Endymion

Diana plays an important role in both the opera and the myth as the arbiter of female morality. Yet, ironically, both within the opera and in the ancient sources, it is her virtue that is called into question. Unlike Callisto, whose sexual encounter with Jove sets into motion a series of heavenly and earthly transformations, Diana is constrained by her chastity. In the opera she is

presented not only as the leader of the group of chaste nymphs to which Callisto belongs, but also at the crux of an erotic triangle involving the goat-god Pan and the beautiful young Endymion. Diana's involvement with two such different lovers engages themes familiar from *La Didone*: much like Busenello's Didone, Diana is an emblem of chastity who can either be praised for her purity or ridiculed for her lack thereof. Moreover, the juxtaposition of Diana and Callisto, like that of Poppea and Ottavia, emulates a structure that was adumbrated in seventeenth-century librettos: two seemingly opposite women, one presumably chaste and the other presumably promiscuous—thus replicating the Republic's familiar Venus-Virgin construct that was already so fraught with anxiety in mid-seventeenth-century Venice.

The story of Diana and Endymion can be traced back to the moon goddess Selene, a predecessor of Diana who was reportedly in love with Endymion.²⁵ Above all, the scant sources emphasize Endymion's extraordinary beauty. Hyginus compares him to Adonis and Ganymede, and it has even been implied that he was the father of Narcissus. Apollodorus tells us that Endymion was a young man with whom the Moon fell in love; he chose to sleep forever, thus retaining his youth and beauty. Pausanias (5.1.4) mentions that some say the Moon bore him fifty daughters but others link him with a mortal wife. Endymion's relationship with the Moon is associated both with the night and the passivity of sleep. His story also inspired several Neoplatonic works, most notably the epic poem by Giovanni Argoli published in Venice in 1621.²⁶ But Endymion's relationship with Diana also inspired cynicism and, in particular, observations about the Moon's sexual aggression. In the *Amores* (1.13.43–44), for example, Ovid used Diana's love for Endymion to demonstrate how much time must be devoted to love: "Look, how many hours of slumber Luna has bestowed upon the youth she loves."²⁷ Lucian exploits this strand of the legend in his satirical dialogue between Selene (Diana) and Aphrodite (Venus), thus casting considerable doubt on the chastity of Diana's heavenly ancestor. When Aphrodite asks if Endymion is handsome, Selene replies as follows:

I think he's very good-looking, Aphrodite, especially when he sleeps with his cloak under him on the rock, with his javelins just slipping out of his left hand as he holds them, and his right hand bent upwards round his head and framing his face makes a charming picture, while he's relaxed in sleep, and breathing in the sweetest way imaginable. Then I creep down quietly on tip-toe, so as not waken him and give him a fright, and then—but you can guess; there's no need to tell you what happens next. You must remember I'm dying of love.²⁸

Lucian's apparent cynicism about Diana's purity was taken up by a number of early modern writers and iconographers, who found two potential lovers for the chaste Diana: Endymion and the god of Arcadia, Pan himself. The accusation concerning Pan emanated from a single brief passage in Vir-

gil's *Georgics*, in which the poet seems to be affirming a well-known rumor: "Twas with a gift of such snowy wool, if we may trust the tale, that Pan, Arcadia's god, charmed and beguiled thee, oh moon, calling thee to the depths of the woods, nor didst thou scorn his call" (Virgil, *Georgics*, 3.391–93).²⁹

Faustini, like other early modern writers, was probably indebted to Boccaccio for pointing out the symmetry in Diana's relationships with Endymion and Pan. According to Boccaccio, it was the lure of the white wool that persuaded the goddess to abandon her typically chaste habits. After citing Virgil on Pan and Diana, he notes that the Moon was also "the lover of the shepherd Endymion," who, they claim, was first rejected by her and then, after a somewhat long time, when he had pastured his flock of white sheep, was gathered into her grace.³⁰ This same connection was exploited by Vincenzo Cartari, author of one of the most important humanist reference sources on the gods:

The fables pretended that the moon was in love with the shepherd Endymion, and that she lulled him to sleep on top of a certain mountain only to kiss him at her pleasure. But, as Pausanias relates, there must have been more than kissing between them, because some say that they had fifty daughters. And one also reads that it was not for love alone that the moon sold herself to Endymion, or to Pan, the god of Arcadia, as Virgil sings, but to have from him a flock of beautiful white sheep. And all are fables, but they have some semblance of truth, because Pliny writes that Endymion was the first to understand the nature of the moon, and therefore it was said that they were in love with each other.³¹

Cartari's formulation emphasizes the dual nature of Diana's love for Pan and Endymion that was to be of primary importance in the early modern period. The bond between Diana and Endymion is both an earthly and celestial phenomenon, representing the possibility of both human and divine love. Endymion becomes the beloved of Diana because of his attempts to understand the nature of the moon and the workings of the heavens. Their love can be understood in a Neoplatonic sense: Diana's kisses represent the love of God for man. But Cartari is equally explicit about the sensual, physical potential of Diana's love. There is nearly always a sense of irony in Diana's fall from chastity. She kisses Endymion for her own pleasure; she bears him daughters; she accepts the embraces from Pan because of a payment—the aforementioned white wool. Unlike Callisto, the chaste Diana is not a victim of rape, but of her own desire and greed.

The story of the love between Diana and Endymion inspired a number of Renaissance artists.³² While these paintings vary as to details, there are several conventional gestures that can be found in most images of Diana and Endymion. Endymion is almost always shown asleep, often accompanied by a dog that sleeps at his side, and usually lit by moonlight. Onlookers, such as a cupid or two, might observe the scene; other times the two are

alone. But perhaps the most important variant concerns the level of physical contact between the two.³³ One of the most famous and erotic representations of the two was painted by Annibale Carracci for the Farnese Gallery in Rome as part of the spectacular ceiling frescoes representing gods and goddesses in various amorous positions.³⁴ Here, Diana is shown embracing the sleeping Endymion with unambiguous passion, an image that is dramatized by Faustini and Cavalli with fascinating consequences in the opening of act 2. But, like Cartari, Carracci provides us the image of Diana's approval of Pan, the rumor that forms part of the opera's prehistory. The image on the Farnese ceiling thus gives credence to the goddess's affection for both the goat-god and Endymion (see figs. 4 and 5).

In fact, a single "vista" of the *camerino* ceiling provides the mythological material for the entire opera: from the center of the room, one can see not only both portraits of Diana with her reputed lovers Pan and Endymion, but also the two smaller medallions depicting episodes from the Callisto myth: Diana and the pregnant bathing Callisto and Juno with Callisto as a bear. Despite the fact that not all the stories depicted therein are Ovidian in origin, the overlapping of myths both within the frescoes and within the opera is in itself an essentially Ovidian act.

It is precisely this same sort of Ovidian thinking that informed Giovanni Faustini's libretto for *La Calisto*. The creative process for this libretto was unusually dynamic. Faustini culled mythic strands from any number of sources: ancient texts, Renaissance mythographers, and visual art. Indeed, more than any other opera considered in this book, *La Calisto* owes much of its sensuality to well-known visual images. Of prime importance are the individual paintings and prints of Diana and Callisto, of various satyrs, Pan, and Diana and Endymion by Titian, Rubens, and Poussin, whose works were certainly well known in seventeenth-century Italy. But the Carracci frescoes, noted above, are perhaps of greater significance for understanding not only the myths but also the peculiar dramaturgy of this work. Giovanni Faustini's previous nine librettos had been based almost exclusively on "invented" stories, in which pairs of couples find fulfillment after a series of closely entangled complications. *La Calisto*, however, engages a somewhat different aesthetic in which, as Jane Glover has noted, the two plots touch only tangentially.³⁵ For Glover, this was part of the reason for the opera's lack of success; Faustini had abandoned a familiar and reliable formula in favor of an odd configuration in which two mythologically based plots were juxtaposed but only marginally integrated. But it is in this regard that the images in the Farnese Gallery are so useful, regardless of whether Cavalli or Faustini had actually seen them. In both *La Calisto* and in the Farnese ceiling, loosely related mythological images dealing with the *amori degli dei* are presented in a manner that expresses a coherent program: the separate images are meaningful both individually and in relation to one another.³⁶ In the same way that the opera forces us to consider two plots both in their entirety and in rela-



FIGURE 4. Annibale Carracci, *Diana and Endymion*, from *Galeria nel Palazzo Farnese in Roma*, del Serenissima duca di Parma, dipinta da Annibale Carracci, intagliata da Carlo Cesio (Rome: V. Monaldini, 1650). Courtesy of the Princeton University Library.

tion to one another, so the Farnese *camerino* allows us to consider Pan's love for Diana and Diana's love for both him and Endymion as separate entities and in relation to one another. An awareness of this shared aesthetic—this composite mode of storytelling—may well help us to understand the seemingly haphazard layering of dramatic and musical features that pervades *La Calisto*: the rapid shifts from serious to comic, from sensual to frenetic, from divine to earthly, and the ways in which parallel tales of sexual desire and frustration influence one another throughout the course of the opera.

MYTHIC TRANSFORMATIONS

Faustini's transformations of the Callisto myth for his libretto set into motion a complex process that determined the operatic Calisto's fate, profoundly influencing the ways in which female sexuality is represented in the opera. Let us review the primary events described by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. First, there is the rape. Jove restores Arcadia and then approaches Callisto in the guise of Diana, kissing her "in a manner to which a virgin would be not accustomed" (*Metamorphoses* 2.430–31). Callisto resists, "fighting as hard as girls can fight," all to no avail. Second, there are the various consequences of the sexual act. Callisto, filled with shame, now hates the forest that she had once loved; she is expelled by Diana, turned into a bear by Juno, and remains in that state for sixteen years. Third, there is the ascension. Jove saves Callisto and transforms her from a bear into a constellation just as their son Arcas is about to kill her during a hunt. Finally, there is Juno's restriction on her divinity—that she never be permitted to sink below the horizon.

In *La Calisto*, Giovanni Faustini presents these events rather differently, making his own Ovidian chronological distortions. Of particular importance is the way in which he alters the significance of a single element—water—that plays such an important role in the literary and iconographic tradition associated with the Callisto myth.³⁷ Giove views Calisto *before* the renewal of Arcadia, while he is merely inspecting the damage done by Phaëthon's chariot ride. He learns of the maiden's identity from Mercurio and prophetically comments on the inhuman aspect of the nymphs' disdain for men ("Semplici giovenette! Votarsi a l'infecundia, per le selve / disumarsi in compagnia di belve"). Both gods observe her in a state of exhaustion, parched by the sun, and lamenting the fact that the waters have disappeared. Calisto describes herself as "burning with fierce heat," and cries out for someone who will restore the health-giving waters to her. Giove, still in his usual form, is more than happy to restore the fountain as part of his seduction. When she refuses his advances, he commands Mercurio to dry up all other sources of water so that she will be forced to return to the fountain, thereby leaving herself vulnerable to his "seduction" in the guise of Diana. Faustini omits the episode from the myth most often represented in visual art: the bathing of Diana and the nymphs in the sacred water, during which time Callisto's pregnancy is revealed. Thus, rather than associating water with Diana's purification ritual or the cooling of bodily passions, Faustini instead uses Calisto's thirst and its quenching as a metaphor for physical desire. No longer linked only to Diana's domain, water becomes a symbol of Calisto's desire as well as Giove's potency. Inhuman and incomplete in Diana's chaste band of hunters, Calisto is conquered by Giove's restorative and procreative powers.³⁸

A second mythic alteration involves the actual encounter between the

transformed Giove and Calisto. This is an act of seduction, not rape, in which Calisto is scarcely a silent or resisting participant. Thinking that she is speaking with the real Diana, Calisto promises to give her as many kisses as she might desire, and offers to use the lips that "once worshipped the goddess" for a far less sacred purpose. The two "women" disappear behind a bower in order to kiss at their leisure. With almost ironic accuracy Calisto afterward describes to the true Diana her "piacere maggiore," which surpasses the joy she would feel were her very soul to ascend to the heavens. Moreover, what Calisto describes is not only the experiencing of pleasure but the giving of it as well with utter innocence: "Immense and sweet was the joy that your sweet lips shed upon my heart. What sweetness, o beloved Goddess, there was in the kisses that you bestowed on me, but my mouth rendered you as much." And her words to Giunone later are even more explicit: "She led me into a pleasant grove and there covered me with kisses, as if I were her lover, her spouse." (Notably, she uses the masculine *sposo* to describe herself, clearly denoting Diana as the woman in the encounter.) Later, as she laments to the nymph Linfea, her description of Diana holding her against her breast, embracing her, and kissing her many times arouses Linfea to go search of her own sensual pleasure. Calisto spends much of the opera in a state of paralyzed ecstasy, obsessed by the memory of past delights and anticipation of future pleasures with the woman she believes to be Diana.

These variations interlock to form a unique mythological construct that is profoundly different from virtually any other telling of the Callisto tale. Most striking is the representation of female desire. Unlike Ovid's tale, where the reader always knows and Callisto quickly guesses the biological sex of the attacker, the operatic Calisto thinks that she has experienced pleasure with a woman and imagines herself as the "sposo." Faustini's libretto plays with the ambiguity inherent in the situation. Calisto sings eloquently of kisses and pleasure and she assumes that her lover is Diana. But the audience may have reacted differently to that act, and understood the various layers of meaning implicit in this situation of sexual confusion. Perhaps they wondered how thorough Giove's disguise was, or if his transformation into a woman allowed him to impart a special kind of pleasure to Calisto? The question as to what might or might not have lurked beneath Giove's clothing is hinted at with a touch of humor in one of the rare earlier dramatic treatments of the Calisto tale, an intermedio produced for Alfonso d'Este II (1586), and reprinted in Venice in 1612. In Luigi Groto's popular play, *both* Mercurio and Giove transform themselves into women in order to rape two unsuspecting virgins. In a playful dialogue with Mercurio, Giove describes his transformation as follows:

I dressed as Diana herself, and changed my hair, face, clothing, gestures, steps, speech, and made myself such that, when looking at myself in that clear foun-

tain, I was afraid that I had completely changed into a woman, and would have almost deceived myself, if I hadn't known differently.³⁹

In Groto's play *La Calisto*, Giove's comment playfully raises the question of hermaphroditism, as if the god himself is unsure of his own anatomical makeup. As we have already seen in chapter 1, all of this is particularly suggestive in light of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century discoveries about female anatomy and the mechanisms of female pleasure. By the early seventeenth century, as Katherine Park notes, anatomists such as the Paduan Renaldo Colombo were well aware of the importance of the clitoris as the "principal seat of women's enjoyment," which, upon stimulation, produced pleasure that "causes their seed to flow forth in all directions, swifter than the wind, even if they don't want to."⁴⁰ The Giove/Diana disguise is also reminiscent of discussions linking hermaphroditism to women with enlarged genitalia. The new curiosity about the nature of female pleasure also inspired anxiety, which Park describes as follows: "But the anatomical rediscovery of the clitoris as a normal structure in women, rather than as an illness or anatomical peculiarity, had even more powerful and troubling implications for the view of female sexuality, in the context of the newly visible tribade. In particular, it suggested that many more women than previously thought—indeed perhaps every woman—could potentially penetrate and give pleasure to another woman."⁴¹

It is clearly this possibility that is suggested in *La Calisto*. W. R. Johnson, for example, reminds us of the suggestiveness of this moment: "those excessive and forbidden kisses design an exciting lesbian moment for the masculine gaze; his sexy impersonation, his ignorant prey, two ladies in their lust, waiting (as in the porn flick) for a real male to still the frenzies their foreplay with each other has provoked, waiting for him."⁴² But the opera allows us to imagine an additional tantalizing thought, that this was not only pleasurable for Giove and the reader, but also for Calisto. Moreover, it might have been even more pleasurable than a conventional heterosexual encounter. This is a consummation of Calisto's affection for Diana and her dedication to her all-female society, an image that is exploited not only in the Rubens painting, but suggested in any number of images of the bathing Diana and her nymphs, such as Titian's painting of Diana and Actaeon or Diana and Callisto.⁴³

The anxiety about female pleasure to which Park refers is also explored in Faustini's reordering of Arcadia's renewal and the seduction/rape of Calisto. Regardless of what the operatic Calisto might believe, the audience *knows* all along that it is Giove who restored the beauty of Arcadia, it is Giove who made the luxurious waters in which Calisto bathed herself, and it is Giove who gave pleasure to Calisto. By linking the seduction of Calisto to the renewal of Arcadia, Faustini's libretto reminds us that both Calisto and the rest of Arcadia owe their sustenance and pleasure—even the continua-

tion of their society—to Giove, whose power is only minimally controlled by Giunone. It is his sexual prowess that actually *caused* Calisto's pleasure, regardless of her mistaken impression or his actual anatomical makeup while in disguise. The result is a series of tantalizing erotic images that play with the dangerous possibility of women pleasuring each other, but at the same time reaffirm the supremacy of Jove's potency and his power over all creation.

DESIRE AND THIRST

In his setting of Faustini's libretto, Cavalli makes much of the dynamic balance between female desire and Giove's power to satisfy that desire on both a spiritual and a physical plane. This is established in the opening scenes of the opera. As in Ovid, the opera begins with a voyeuristic episode: Giove and Mercurio watch the nymph Calisto wandering through the forest, thirsting. They comment on the maiden's beauty and her lack of interest in men. Here, however, voyeurism becomes eavesdropping: the audience both sees and hears her through their eyes at this vulnerable moment, as she searches for the waters that have fled from their sources.

Strikingly, the voyeurism and skepticism about Calisto's humanity also operate on the level of tonality. In the first scene of the opera, Giove and Mercurio converse about Calisto in recitative focused primarily on A minor. Giove concludes his comment about Calisto's inhuman behavior with a Phrygian cadence on E major, thus preparing her entrance in the following scene. Calisto, however, begins her aria not in the expected A minor but in an ambiguous tonal area opened up by Giove's remarks. The affect invoked is close to that of lament, albeit an unconventional one (see ex. 19). The first three notes of an ascending major tetrachord from E to A support her first utterances (mm. 1–8), comprised of repeated notes on E and B (mm. 2–5 and mm. 6–7) that are still heard somewhat insecurely as the dominant of Giove's A minor. The tetrachord in the bass establishes the plagal quality that marks so much of the aria: after the initial ascent, the A falls repeatedly back down to E, never reaching to the dominant B that might have defined E major as a tonal center. Moreover, the subsequent tonal motion is all in a flatward direction. After the almost catatonic opening, Calisto's lyric gift unfolds as she searches for the water (strophe 1) and shade (strophe 2). Here she uses a motive that Giove will overhear and later reinvent for illicit purposes: she outlines a descending fifth (three whole steps and minor third), which is sequenced upward by step, creating a series of interlocking ascending fourths in the bass: *e–a* (mm. 9–10), *d–g* (mm. 11–12), and finally *c–f* (mm. 13–16). This flatward progression leads her almost unexpectedly to the Phrygian cadence on E at the midpoint of the aria. There is something oddly frustrating about this point of arrival on the same sonority with which the aria began. It is both familiar and unfamil-

iar—as if Calisto has been searching for water so long that she has ended up precisely where she began. This, of course, is only a brief respite, and the sequential pattern begins anew with ornamentation—a rhetorical expansion of the previous fruitless journey, leading her once again into the *mollis* realm, as the dominant continues to allude her. Her remembrance of the Arcadian flowers, for example, inspires a brief decoration (mm. 19–20). The phrase “io vi sospiro”—the longing for shade and water—is set in a dramatic fashion with syncopated gasps (mm. 37–40), culminating in the first clear articulation of the dominant of E, which is left unresolved in the voice. The cadence is completed only as the bass recommences the tetrachord for the second, abbreviated strophe. The sensation of longing and thirst is thus evoked by the relative stasis of the E sonorities in the opening measure—without any sort of reinforcing dominant or resolution—and the subsequent flatward meandering away from E in the succeeding passages. Calisto’s passion is made explicit in an interruption of the second strophe in which she abruptly shifts into recitative. Her pleadings for Giove to “end the war”—perhaps an allusion to contemporary politics—inspire an almost violent wrenching of the tonality into a conventional confirmation of E minor.

As we have noted earlier, Giove indeed does satisfy Calisto’s most immediate need: he reestablishes A minor as the tonal center as he makes the fountains flow again, urging the nymph to “immerse the coral lips from your beautiful mouth into the billowing waves,” set by Cavalli with suggestive arioso. Calisto rejects his advances—describing the water itself as poisoned by the tricks of a “libidinoso mago.” But after Mercurio dries up the other springs and fountains, Calisto returns to the “poisoned” fountain, luxuriating in its freshness (1.4), which slakes a thirst “that an entire river could not quench.” In the recitative, she describes how she slowly enters the water, plunging in her face and arms. She then sings of joy about her freedom—hunting for wild beasts and fleeing from men’s “mendacious flatteries.” The tyranny of husbands, she notes, is far too bitter a yoke. Expressing a sentiment of which Diana would certainly approve, she extols liberty as her delight, all the while taking pleasure in the water that ostensibly cools her thirst (see ex. 20).

Cavalli gives this vivid image musical representation, demonstrating a skill at motivic unity and text painting that was less apparent in *La Didone*. In the opening recitative, stylistic and tonal shifts mark Calisto’s arrival at the water. In measure 10, the change to *cantus mollis* is highlighted by the luxurious half-note ascending sigh and dissonance, which initiates an unusually ordered passage of recitative: a descent in parallel tenths between voice and bass that surely depicts her gradual immersion in the fountain: first she sips the water, then splashes her face, and finally cools herself in the bath, as was habitual for the nymphs. In the aria that follows, this descent—this pleasure in the water—is linked to Calisto’s last celebration of sexual

C 3/2 Calisto:

Pian-te om - bro - - se,

pian-te om - bro - - - se, Do - ve so - no,

do - ve so - no, do - ve so - no i vo - stri o -

no - ri? _____ Va - ghi fio - ri

Dal - la fiam - ma in - ce - ne - ri - ti, Col - li e

Calisto: Cool shades, / where are your glories? / Gentle blossoms, / burnt to cinders, / hills and shores / once covered in emerald, / now deprived / of your green, I sigh for you.

EXAMPLE 19. Francesco Cavalli, *La Calisto* (1651), ACT 1, SCENE 2: Calisto, “Piante ombrose” (I-Vnm, It. IV, 353 [= 9877], fols. 10r–11r).

26

li - ti Di sme - ral - di già co - per - ti,

31

Or de - ser - ti, or de - ser - ti Del bel ver - de,

37

Io, io, io vi so - spi-ro.

4 3

EXAMPLE 19. (*continued*)

autonomy. Her declaration about the pleasure of the hunt, for example, is set over a descending bass pattern (mm. 27–31). The observation about tyrannical husbands, expressed with rhythmically punctuated descending fifths and piquant dissonances (mm. 36–43), inspires an impressive round of melismatic song (“Viver in libertade”), which in turn decorates yet another stepwise descent in bass and voice (mm. 45–49), again an invocation of the bathing nymphs.

On the surface, this is the aural equivalent of a familiar visual image: Calisto, like so many of Diana’s nymphs painted during the Renaissance, luxuriates in the water, declaring her freedom from the ills of men with lively syncopations and flourishes of coloratura that capture her sense of freedom as well. But at the same time, the nymph’s physical pleasure in the water reveals her potential as a desiring woman, one who ultimately will be controlled by Giove. Calisto’s joy in hunting and freedom is contradicted at the end of the strophe by the shift back to duple at measure 51: a sequenced, gasping ascent over a chromatic bass for the words “e il dolce, il caro” that depicts a more visceral, physical pleasure than might be associated with

Calisto:

Sien mor-ta-li, o di - vi-ni, I la-sci-vi par - ti-no; Ed io, ch'in-dar-no ag-

gi-ro Si - ti-bon-da, a - ne - lan - te, Il piè per il con - tor - no A ber qui

l'ac-que sca - tu - ri - te or tor - no. — Oh, —

co - me po - chi sor - si Del dol - ce e fred-do u - mo - re M'e -

stin - se con l'a - do - re Quel-l'in - gor - do de - si - o, Che vo -

first bass descent

#6

#6

6

Recitative: Be they mortal or divine / the libertines have left; / and I, dying of thirst, panting, / search these parts in vain. / I now return to the fountain to drink the spouting water. / Oh! how just a few drops / of this sweet, cool liquid / refreshed and calmed / the insatiable desire /

EXAMPLE 20. Cavalli, *La Calisto*, ACT 1, SCENE 4: Calisto, "Sien mortali"
(fols. 19r–20v).

15

lea di-sec-car l'on-de d'un ri-o. — Di que-sto ghiac-cio

19

sciol-to Fat-to la-va-cro al vol-to, E in lui le brac-cia

21

im-mer-se, I bol-lo-ri del san-gue raf-fred-dai. Gra-zie, gra-zieal-la

24

C 3/2

[Rit.] Aria:

fon-te, o-gni lan-guor sa-nai. — Non è mag-gior pia-

second bass descent

28

ce-re, Che se-guen-do le fe-re Fug-gir, fug-gir, fug-gir del-l'uo-mo i

6

that needed an entire river to quench. / In this melted ice / I plunged my face / and immersed my arms in it, / I calmed the heat of my blood. / Thanks to the fountain, I cured my languor.

Aria: There is no greater pleasure / than following the wild beasts / to flee men and

EXAMPLE 20. (continued)

32

lu - sin-ghie-ri in - vi - ti: Ti-ran - nie, ti-ran - nie de' ma -

36

ri - ti Son trop-po gra - vi, son trop-po gra - vi, e trop-po è il gio -

40

- go a - ma - - - ro. Vi - ver in li - ber -

45

ta - - - de, vi-ver in li-ber - ta - - - -

48

- - - - -

51

- de è il dol-ce, è il dol-ce, il ca-ro, il ca-ro. —

third bass descent

their mendacious flatteries. / The tyranny of husbands / is too heavy, too bitter a yoke. / To live in freedom is my sweetest desire.

EXAMPLE 20. (*continued*)

hunting (mm. 51–54). Calisto may declare her devotion to Diana and the life of chastity, but her words are contradicted by the musical setting, in which the chromatic language and drive to climax in both strophes hint at her capacity for pleasure.

It is at this point that Giove arrives, disguised as Diana in order to seduce Calisto. The audience has yet to see and hear the real Diana; we are, remarkably, seeing the counterfeit version *before* the original. The details as to the disguise are unclear at best. This is one of the few instances in this repertory (we will see another possible example in chapter 6) in which a change of gender is indicated by a change of pitch level: while in his own clothes and body Giove sings in bass clef, as Diana, he sings in soprano clef. Certainly this presented a casting problem: it is unclear, for example, whether Giove might have been played by a baritone who was gifted at singing in the upper register (the approach used in the recording by René Jacobs⁴⁴); or, given the fact that the true and false Dianas never appear together on the stage, Cavalli might have chosen to use the same soprano for both roles. But, in the age of the castrato, Giove's venture from bass to soprano register is particularly suggestive. The audience is not merely asked to imagine a temporary repositioning of the gender from a character who shares the same acoustic space with his or her opposite; rather, the shift to the higher register—regardless of the biological sex of the performer—is, at least briefly, the aural equivalent of castration, calling to our attention the possibility of true organic change. Indeed, there could be no clearer indication of the profound difference between Venetian opera—with women on the stage—and the English transvestite theater.⁴⁵

Giove, moreover, uses this ambiguity to advantage in his seduction. He borrows a motive that he must have overheard in act 1, scene 2: the descending sequential pattern from Calisto's first aria. He transforms this from a languid triple into a somewhat more emphatic duple, to which the nymph responds in kind (see ex. 21). The result is a curious kind of musical transvestism. Giove, who was in fact eavesdropping on Calisto's opening aria, adopts the nymph's own voice in order to seduce her. The fact that he cannot get the rhythm right tells us something about the nature of disguise: the powerful Giove is unable to lose himself in the languid triple meter that had so effectively represented Calisto's thirst or cannot completely adopt a feminine demeanor. We imagine, perhaps, the slight awkwardness in his disguise, the clues to his real identity that could have been played for laughs regardless of how the role was cast: this is not unlike the disguise of Jove described in Groto's play. Calisto, moreover, hears what she wants to hear. She imagines that the voice luring her is, in fact, a reflection of her own. By responding in Giove's duple meter, she shows an unawareness of his rhythmic (e.g., gender) transformation, a belief that Diana would speak her same language, or to take it still further, the fact that Diana is, after all, her other half, a more "pure" representation of herself. The result is that

(a) Calisto, act 1, scene 2

9

do - ve so - no, do - ve so - no,

13

do - ve so - no i vo - stri o - no - ri? _____

#

(b) Giove, act 1, scene 5

12

O de-co-ro Del mio co-ro, Ver-gi-nel-la Più che bel-la,

#

EXAMPLE 21. Cavalli, *La Calisto*: common motive used by Calisto and Giove.

Calisto goes quite willingly with Giove/Diana. There is no struggle in this encounter: the two women disappear into a bower behind the stream in order to exchange kisses and achieve the only consummated sexual act in the opera.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF PLEASURE

This single sexual act has consequences that will affect Calisto and the other characters for the remainder of the opera. Much of this is a result not only of Calisto's experience, but her musical response to that experience. After her encounter with Giove, she learns a new musical language that not only reflects her own experience of pleasure, but also inspires desire in others. This is apparent in her only encounter with the true Diana, one of the few moments in the opera in which the two plots intersect. In act 1, scene 10,

Diana and Linfea have been hunting and come across the lovesick Endimione, pining for the chaste Diana. Endimione sings somewhat cryptically of his love; Diana comments on her desire for Endimione only to herself, while Linfea instructs her to retain her chastity. Despite Diana's claims for purity—and the standard to which she holds her nymphs—she is indeed tempted by the beautiful Endimione, and fights this desire with only the greatest effort.

It is at this point that Calisto appears, not the despairing rape victim as portrayed by Ovid, but rather a woman fulfilled, singing joyfully of her "maggior piacere." As in nearly all of the versions of the myth, Diana rebukes Calisto; however, here it is for precisely the same crime that she had only recently contemplated committing with Endimione.⁴⁶ Unlike Diana, who understands but reluctantly rejects physical pleasure, Calisto believes herself to be chaste: she suffers no regret or guilt. The object of her desire—at least in her mind—is not a man, but rather a woman who is an emblem of chastity. As Diana immediately recognizes, Calisto has given in to passion and has gained knowledge about sexuality to which virgins should have no access.

But it is the consequences of that knowledge that most concern Diana. In Ovid's myth, as we recall, the moment of discovery is focused on the sacred pool. Diana orders Callisto to leave so that she does not pollute the water. But Faustini's Diana is concerned not with the purity of water but rather of the aural realm: she orders Calisto to leave the forest so that she will not "converse with her virgins and lead them into debauchery." Nor are Diana's fears ungrounded: knowledge of matters sexual has taught Calisto a new musical language. Whereas at the opening of the opera she sang either of thirst or freedom from men, she now sings of ecstasy, of passion, of kisses and embraces, and ultimately of sorrow at abandonment. In the scene that follows, she laments her sorrow at Diana's rejection with a brief chromatically inflected lyrical moment, overheard by the nymph Linfea. Here, her usual diatonicism gives way to agonizing, reiterated half-step motion, in which she seems to exult in the pain-pleasure of dissonance (mm. 1–5), before giving way to a despairing cry of incomprehension expressed in the Phrygian cadence with which the passage concludes (see ex. 22). Moved by Calisto's sumptuous lament, Linfea asks why she is distressed. The second strophe is even more explicit and intensified, as Calisto describes her encounter with Diana, the accelerated rhythm in the opening measures underlining the intensity of her passion, and now linking her new understanding of the sexual act with chromaticism. She describes to Linfea how Diana held her against her breast, embracing her and kissing her many times. Now, however, the one who kissed her "denies the kiss, and I know not why."

This is nothing less than a clever manipulation of a familiar operatic trope: the lamenting abandoned woman. Lawrence Lipking, we recall, had

(a) Strophe 1

Pian - ge - te, so - spi - ra - te, Lu - ci do -

len - - ti, Spir - ti in - no - cen - ti

(b) Strophe 2

Nel va - go se - no ac - col - ta, Ab - bra -

cia - ta, Fui ba - cia - ta più d'u - na, e d'u - na

Strophe 1: Weep, sigh, / suffering eyes, / innocent spirits . . .

Strophe 2: In that lovely breast / I was gathered, / embraced, and kissed many times . . .

EXAMPLE 22. Cavalli, *La Calisto*, ACT 1, SCENE 11: Calisto: "Piangete, sospirate," chromatic opening of strophes 1 and 2 (fols. 35r–36v).

emphasized the necessity of the abandoned woman's isolation: it is both her sexuality and her rhetoric that are dangerous. It is no coincidence, for example, that after Teseo's departure, it is Arianna's lament that summons forth Bacco and the celebration that follows. But in this daring Ovidian moment, in which Calisto both laments and describes her special pleasure, she is not alone, and her words have a profound effect on the listener. Di-

ana's worst fears are fulfilled. Linfea is aroused as much by Calisto's words as by her manner of singing, as we shall see in her subsequent aria.

Like that of Ottavia's nurse in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Linfea's aria reminds us of the power of female erotic speech and its associations with the procuress/instructress figure in the courtesan dialogues of Aretino and Pallavicino. Indeed, the aria rehearses the entire process by which erotic speech arouses a woman's desire and leads her to illicit behavior. The first portion of the aria, in triple meter, recalls the words of Linfea's old nurse, who spoke to her about the sweet pleasure that one could find with a man (see ex. 23). First we have a demonstration of the pleasure described by the nurse: Cavalli uses a now familiar device associated in this opera with physical gratification—the voice and bass descend in parallel tenths, followed here by an ascending passage that invokes the excitement of the “dolce cosa,” imitating the mounting excitement. The pleasure itself—“che l'anima conforta,” described vividly by the nurse—is expressed this time with augmented and ornamented stepwise descents in the bass, creating a luxuriant series of 4–3 suspensions with the voice, with *mollis* inflections (mm. 6–14). The memories cease, as Linfea returns to rational contemplation—that is, recitative (m. 20), and the necessity of fulfilling these needs within the legitimate bonds of marriage. Nonetheless, the highly sensual musical language has influenced her, and she returns to a more lyrical expression (mm. 23–28), this time moving toward a climax in a diatonic, rhythmically active setting. Cavalli builds Linfea's contradictions into the setting of the first strophe: despite the fact that she claims to say “no” to passion, she cries—set on a climactic upper G (mm. 25–27)—imitate precisely the sexual fulfillment that she claims to reject. By the second strophe, in which Linfea considers her own languorous reaction to a young man, her internal conflict is resolved (albeit to the same music), and the “no” becomes “yes.”

The result is a highly explicit statement of female sexual desire: Linfea has learned from Calisto about women's erotic pleasure, and expresses this newfound knowledge in explicit terms. Moreover, it is her expression of desire that arouses the unquenched and sexually aggressive masculine desires of the satyrs and the goat-god Pan that conclude the act. Act 1 thus ends with a host of clearly articulated but unfulfilled desires precipitated in large part by Calisto's lament.

THE AWAKENING OF ENDIMIONE

Even Diana is not exempt from the consequences of Calisto's adventure with Giove. As in the Carracci ceiling, the juxtaposition of these plots constructs an elaborate discourse about female desire. Diana may have exiled Calisto, but the poor nymph nonetheless had an effect on the goddess, reminding her about the possibility of achieving her own sexual gratification. This is played out in the opening of act 2. Here, Faustini has chosen to

C3

Linfea:

L'uo-mo è u - na dol - ce, dol - ce co - sa, Che sol di - let-to ap -

por - ta, Che l'a - ni - ma

con - for

ta; Co - sì mi dis - se, co - sì, co -

sì, co - sì mi dis - se la nu - tri - ce an - no - sa:

Linfea: Man is a sweet, sweet thing / who brings only delight / that comforts the soul. / So my old nurse said. / Perhaps I will try it in a legitimate bed. / A certain something calls me with a "yes," and rebukes me with a "no."

EXAMPLE 23. Cavalli, *La Calisto*, ACT 1, SCENE 12: Linfea, "L'uomo è una dolce cosa" (missing folio number-37r).

20
In le-git-ti-mo let-to For-se, for-se pro-var-lo vo'. Un cer-to sì mi

23
chia - ma, mi chia - ma, un cer-to sì mi chia - ma, mi chia - ma, e sgri -

26
- da, e sgri-da un no.

EXAMPLE 23. (*continued*)

represent what was certainly the most famous image of Diana and Endymion: the young man in eternal sleep on Mount Latmos visited by Diana, who kisses him in his sleep. It is this image, as we recall, that inspired Lucian's satiric dialogue between Selene and Aphrodite. Regardless of Endymion's association with a Neoplatonic realm through his study of the stars, this mythic strand nonetheless presents us with another variation on the theme of female sexual desire: Diana, despite her pretensions of chastity, is aroused by Endymion. The scene is presented with particular power in the image painted by Annibale Carracci, noted earlier (see above, fig. 4). Diana embraces and kisses the sleeping Endymion. Some twenty years after the premiere of *La Calisto*, the seicento art biographer Giovanni Pietro Bellori described Carracci's painting of Diana and Endymion as follows:

The beauty of Endymion is best contemplated in sleep, which holds him immobile for the eyes of Diana, who also is motionless, not because of weakness on the part of the painter, but out of stupor. The young shepherd is resting on his elbow placed on a rock on Mount Latmos in Caria; nor does his tender arm feel the hardness of the mountain, because he has spread his mantle over the rough stone . . . Diana appears from behind a cloud, no longer frigid and

stand-offish but completely heated with amorous fire. She draws near, meditating upon the beautiful flower of his youth and his exquisite young form. She inclines her face over the shepherd's brow, and embraces him in a manner that pleasingly expresses her concern not to disturb him; she lightly spreads her fingers, placing one hand between his cheek and neck, and the other beneath his chin and over his naked chest. So concerned is she not to break Endymion's rest, that in the silence his faithful dog near at hand sleeps on, and does not waken. From a thicket opposite two cunning cupids appositely show themselves, one of whom, with finger to his mouth, signals silence, while the other, with arrow in hand, rejoices, and laughs at the sight of the most chaste of goddesses subject to love.⁴⁷

The relationship between image and drama suggested by Bellori's description of the meeting between Endymion and Diana is given far more explicit realization in the opening of act 2 of the opera *La Calisto*. First, more so than even Bellori's description, music expands the temporal plane: the sequence of scenes suggested by the Carracci painting is spread over three scenes and would last for at least fifteen minutes. While along with Bellori we might imagine the events that both led to and followed the image depicted, Faustini and Cavalli allow us to see and hear them with unambiguous specificity. Thus, we not only imagine the moment in which Endimione falls asleep, but we are actually able to see *and* hear it. In addition, the music provides an enhanced sense of the individual personalities of our two protagonists: the languid nature of Endimione and the impetuous energy of the huntress Diana. Moreover, the music will also tell us something new about their encounter: their desires (both expressed and unexpressed), and their inability or reluctance to consummate their relationship.

As in Bellori's description, the operatic representation of Diana and Endimione begins just before Diana's arrival. First we see and hear the shepherd as he prepares for sleep on the mountain, contemplating the solitary peaks that surround him and bring him closer to his beloved Diana. He sings a gentle, lyrical aria praising the beauty of Diana's distant light and considering how her "raggi di gelo"—her icy rays—nonetheless inflame his heart. And as sleep overtakes him in the recitative that follows, we hear him surrender to erotic fantasies over a descending bass with an increasingly ornamented vocal line.

In the scene that follows, Diana the huntress arrives in a flurry of rapid runs and scales that remind us of her wild, impetuous nature, her skill as a huntress, and her detachment from the world of men. Her music changes, however, as she glances at the beautiful, sleeping shepherd; we hear her transformation from the carefree huntress to the lovesick, desiring woman, perhaps enticed by his scented breath and rose-colored lips depicted so vividly by Carracci. Diana sings in a more private mode about her happiness at adoring him in secret, expressing, as if for the first time, her desire to kiss him. Moreover, the music allows us to hear something we might dimly imag-

ine from this painting. Diana overhears Endimione's dreams of the same kisses. As he dreams, he sings; during his sleep we are able to *hear* rather than merely see the pleasurable thoughts that Carracci had placed on his face in the fresco. At the same time, the juxtaposition of their two voices matches that of their bodies.

But what is most striking is the way in which Cavalli and Faustini go well beyond the drama implicit in Carracci's fresco. In this version of the tale, the cupids' warnings go unheeded: Endimione grasps Diana in the midst of his dreamy fantasies; she tries to disentangle herself from his arms, and the impossible happens: Endimione awakens.⁴⁸ After a moment of disbelief the two most illicitly declare their mutual desire: first with a vitality that seems to contradict the languor inherent in the scene, yet ultimately relinquishing their passion with a brief farewell. Here, Cavalli makes explicit both the passion and its interruption. The two lovers bid each other farewell with a brief passage that sounds like a beginning rather than a conclusion. In setting this critical moment, Cavalli reminds the listener of one of his favorite devices: a love duet set over a stepwise descending tetrachord ostinato in the continuo. Had he wished to imply a more explicit physical encounter, he would probably have written a more extensive farewell duet placed over multiple statements of the tetrachord that would allow the listener to lose himself or herself in the insistent repetitions. Indeed, this is precisely what he will do in the "ascension" duet between Giove and Calisto discussed below. What happens here, however, is a frustration of both our desires and those of Endimione and Diana. Endimione is the first to wonder when he will next see Diana ("quando più ti vedrò"), becoming increasingly impassioned with the phrase "Teco l'anima vien" (my soul goes with you), an extravagant arch-shaped line set over a single statement of the descending tetrachord (see ex. 24). Diana's answer, however, is a fragmented, almost breathless farewell, without the expected accompaniment of the descending tetrachord, that puts an end to Endimione's more impassioned, expansive plea. Indeed, rather than intertwining, their voices dovetail, as if to represent the apparent lack of physical union. The farewell duet concludes almost before it begins—after a mere seven measures. The passion is halted just as its sonic equivalent—the tetrachord—has been initiated. Desire, once expressed, is ultimately suppressed.

The audience, however, is not the only observer of this aborted love scene. In the Carracci frescoes, and as Bellori observed, the laughing cupids eavesdrop on the passionate urges of the chaste Diana. In this operatic transformation of Arcadia, Cavalli and Faustini go still further to satirize Diana and her chastity. The indulgent glances of the cupids are replaced by the misogynist tirade of a *satirino*, a little satyr, who, like the cupids in Carracci's painting, observes the foreground action from the back of the frame, and sings as follows: "In the end this goddess, inflexible, the despotic sovereign of her virgins, is like other women, subject to weakness and submissive

Diana:

Endimione: Pre-sto, pre-sto, mio ben. Lie-to, lie - to ri -

Quan-do più ti ve - drò?

man-ti, io vò. Mio so-le. Ad -

Te-co l'a - - - ni-ma vien. Cor mi-o.

descending tetrachord

di-o. Cor mi-o. Ad-di-o, ad - di - o.

Ad-di-o. Mio so-le. Ad - di-o, ad - di - o.

Endimione: When will I see you again?

Diana: Soon, soon my beloved. / Be happy; I am going.

Endimione: My soul goes with you.

Diana and Endimione: My sun, / my heart, / farewell.

EXAMPLE 24. Cavalli, *La Calisto*, ACT 2, SCENE 3: Endimione and Diana (fol. 56r-v).

to their worst instincts." The result is an uncomfortable truce between desire and fulfillment, a sense that at any moment Diana might actually change her mind, give in to her desire, and conform to the expectations of those who condemn women for false chastity. For Pan and the other satyrs, in a state of constant arousal, Diana is yet another symptom of the spheres of frustration that mark sexual practices in Arcadia.

FULFILLMENT

Calisto's fate in the opera would have been no surprise. The audience would know about her ascension not only from Ovid but from the proclamation of Fate, Destiny, and Nature in the allegorical prologue: "Let Calisto ascend to the heavens." Thirst, desire, pleasure, and rejection were all part of the process that Calisto had to endure in order to achieve her immortality. Nonetheless, there is something unsettling about the juxtaposition of the sensual and the spiritual that characterizes this opera, that moves us a bit further away from Ovid's often ironic tone. In the first two acts of the opera, Cavalli and Faustini explore the boundaries of erotic activity in Arcadia through the desire, pleasure, and rejection of Calisto and the yearnings of Diana. But the work of the final act is to reconcile Calisto's physical pleasure with spiritual fulfillment through the power of Giove.

First, the act opens with Calisto's ultimate and most explicit description of her sexual experience, addressed, notably, to Giove's magic fountain. She speaks of pleasure with Diana, both anticipated and remembered. In this memory, the water does not soothe the heat of the body with its touch, but heightens pleasure with its sound, the bubbling murmurs that accompanied their lovemaking. Faustini links the fountain not only with Calisto's desire, but also with musical imagery, the "sweet melodies" that she and Diana will form together, while Cavalli plays suggestively with the imitative possibilities inherent in Faustini's text, aurally painting Calisto's erotic fantasies and linking these fantasies to musical gestures. The progression of her thoughts is represented with somewhat conventional tonal moves: the vision of herself and Diana as a "*coppia diletta e cara*" and their anticipated kisses, for example, inspires a sharpward motion to E major, cadencing on A minor, which shifts somewhat elegantly flatward as she considers the "sweet melodies" that the kisses will engender (see ex. 25, mm. 11–18). Most intriguing, however, is the way in which the relationship between physical pleasure and musical expression is made explicit in the ordering of musical ideas. First, Calisto demonstrates the sweet melodies formed by the kisses with a florid sequence over a static bass (mm. 14–18); then she describes the response from the murmuring fountain, conjuring up an echo on beats 1 and 2 of measure 21, reminiscent of the way in which the false Diana had imitated her voice in example 21. As Calisto speaks of unity with Diana, reiterating the same pitch, the continuo responds in kind, now a persistent

Calisto:

Re - sti-no im-bal-sa-ma - te Ne le me-mo-rie mie ____ Le de - li - zie pas -

4

sa - - - te. Fon - ti lim - pi-de, e pu - re, Al vo-stro gor-go -

8

glio La mi-a di-vi-na, ed i - o, Cop-pia di-let-ta, e ca - ra Ci ba-ce -

11

re - mo, ci ba - ce - re - mo, ci ba - ce - re - mo a ga - ra,

14

sweet melodies

____ E for - me - re - mo me - lo - di - e, me - lo - di - e

Calisto: May past delights / remain engraved / in my memories. / Pure and limpid fountains, / to your bubbling murmurs / my divine goddess and I, / a happy and cherishing couple, / will kiss as much as we want. / And we will form sweet melodies, / here where with many voices Echo responds, / the sound of the kisses united with the sound of the waves.

EXAMPLE 25. Cavalli, *La Calisto*, ACT 3, SCENE 1: Calisto: "Restino imbalsamate" (fols. 91v-92v).

17 echo

so - a - - vi. Qui do - ve con più vo - ci Ec - co,

21 unison

ec - co, ec - co ri - spon - de, U - ni - to, u - ni-to il

26 sequence

suon de' ba - - ci, al suon al suon

29 extended sequence

al suon del - l'on - de. Ritornello

34

EXAMPLE 25. (*continued*)

throbbing at the octave (mm. 23–26). Finally, this erupts into an ornamented sequential pattern in which bass and soprano join together at the tenth (mm. 27 ff.). The progression is one of increasing intensity: the solo melody is then answered by an echo (mm. 20–21), progressing to unity (mm. 23–26), and finally the intertwining of voice and instruments suggests the sexual act that Calisto both remembers and anticipates. The sounds of the water, the mingling of the voices, and the sharing of kisses all result in the same sound world associated with Calisto's desire for and pleasure with the false Diana.

Just as Calisto's sexual experience is given its most explicit musical expression, Giunone appears with her noisy chorus of furies and transforms the nymph into "an inhuman beast to grace the bed of her husband." Cavalli, not surprisingly, marks this moment by using the most *durus* sonorities in the opera. As in the *Metamorphoses*, Calisto loses her ability to speak, a fact that is striking in an operatic context: our heroine is left on the stage without the power of song—the dangerous erotic language that she had learned so readily. But the treatment of Giunone also achieves a particularly elegant transformation of Ovid's poem, demonstrating her lack of power with regard to Jove's sexual adventures. In the poem, Juno, unable to punish Jove himself, had taken out her anger on the innocent rape victim, and, with extraordinary savagery, as Johnson observes, destroys her beauty.⁴⁹ But in the opera, Giunone's vengeance is stimulated by something new: Calisto's pleasure. In the brilliant aria that follows Calisto's transformation, Giunone, constructed as a satirical representation of wifely authority, sings of her own frustrated desire. She advises wives about punishing their husbands' conjugal offenses; she condemns those men who wander or who are too sleepy or irritable to satisfy their wives; and she makes reference to the thirst metaphor: "the abandoned wives are dying of thirst in the middle of a river." Calisto may briefly be silenced, but Giunone continues the discourse of frustration.

Nonetheless, Calisto's beastly existence is short-lived. With the immediate reappearance of Giove in his proper body—not after some fifteen years, as required by Ovid—Calisto regains her power of speech, silencing Giunone's complaints. First, Giove turns Calisto back into a human, restoring to her the power of speech and the vision of the sun and the heavens. He then informs her that he must change her back into a bear for the time allotted in the book of life, but before that—while she is in the midst of the beastly transformation—he gives a glimpse of the immortality that she will enjoy in the heavens. Calisto's response is to praise Giove as king of the universe, accepting his divine authority. She acknowledges her own transformation through his beneficence. She is "recreata" (recreated), "rinovata" (renewed), and "riumanata" (rehumanized). She describes herself as his "handmaiden," his *ancella*—thus quoting, as Susan McClary has observed, the text of the Magnificat.⁵⁰ Giove has effectively refashioned in his own im-

age this nymph who had first appeared to him so “inhuman” as a member of Diana’s chaste band. Moreover, he has extinguished not only the horrors brought on by the furies, but the “fire that had burned within her”—the crippling desire and thirst that afflicted her from the outset of the opera. As a newly formed human, refashioned in his image, Calisto is also given the gift of sight: she sees both the heavens and the sun. The pleasure that she experienced on a physical level with Giove, the false Diana, has almost incomprehensibly resulted in possession of divine knowledge. In another quintessentially Ovidian move, Mercurio and Giove have themselves metamorphosed: “jovial” rogues pursuing innocent virgins with tricks are—as the tradition so often permitted—transformed into dignified, noble, and paternal gods, capable of bestowing immortality and satisfying through spiritual means the thirst that Calisto had expressed throughout the opera. As a result of that experience—the “frode felice,” the happy fraud, as Calisto herself describes it—she is indeed Giove’s creation. As Giove prepares to transform her, albeit temporarily, back into a bear, he tells us of the promised divinity—“the ambrosial nectar” that she will drink; and Calisto gladly accepts her beastly fate, not with the misery of her Ovidian counterpart, but with the hope of redemption that is unmistakably Christian in outlook. Female desire gives way to spiritual knowledge and acceptance of divine authority and patriarchal wisdom. The sacred implications are, of course, unmistakable. Giove’s divinity is now in the Christian sphere, and he confers life on a grateful Calisto.⁵¹

At the same time, the sensual aspects of the divine union are made explicit in Cavalli’s lush setting for Calisto’s apotheosis.⁵² First, she sings an ecstatic duet with Giove in which they exploit the spiritual and erotic implications of the descending tetrachord; then the light-footed Mercurio sings a florid declaration of Giove’s power, musically painting the lightning bolts with which he is associated, and finally the tension dissipates as the three sing together, marking Calisto’s ascent to the heavens. This extraordinary passage provides a musical realization of the link between the sensuous and the divine that pervades so much of this opera, tracing the process through which Calisto’s sensual love is transformed into divine love and she becomes part of the celestial realm. In this duet her melody is a mirror reflection of Giove’s: she sings the consequent to his antecedent, or vice versa, emulating an important aspect of their seduction (see ex. 26). Moreover, all this is set over the descending tetrachord: this most simple means through which baroque composers, as we have seen, depicted a variety of extreme emotional states—spiritual oblivion, orgasm, grief—at once hypnotizing and arousing the listener by rhythmic and harmonic predictability. Notably, it is precisely at the moment in which Giove and Calisto acknowledge their physical separation that we actually have a climax: their alternating lines build with sweet dissonances, finally interlocking at the duet’s end as Giove’s cry of “oh” on the ascending fifths elicits the same from Calisto,

C3

Calisto:

Giove:

Be - a - ta mi

Mio fo - co fa - ta - le, son Gio - ve e tor - men - to

7

sen - to a que - sta sa - li - ta,

Per te, per te, mia tra - di - ta. —

13

Mer - cè, mer - cè del mio di - o, O —

O — dol - ce,

20

dol - ce, dol - ce, dol - ce a - mor mi - o. Be -

dol - ce, dol - ce a - mor mi - o.

Giove: My fatal fire, I am Jove, and torment / for you, my betrayed one. / O sweet love of mine.

Calisto: I feel myself blessed in this ascent. / Thanks, thanks to my god. / O sweet love of mine.

EXAMPLE 26. Cavalli, *La Calisto*, ACT 3, SCENE 4: Giove and Calisto (fols. 108r–109r).

25

a - ta mi sen-to, be - a - ta mi sen-to a

Son Gio-ve e tor - men-to Per te, per

31

que-sta sa - li - ta, Mer - cè, mer - cè, mer -

te, per te, per te, mia tra - di - ta.____

37

cè, mer - cè del mio di - o.____ O____ dol -

O____ O____ dol-ce, dol -

43

ce, dol-ce, dol - ce, dol-ce a-mor mi - o.

ce, dol-ce, dol - ce, dol-ce a-mor mi - o.

EXAMPLE 26. (*continued*)

and the two join together for simultaneous cries of “dolce, dolce, amor mio” (mm. 39–48).

Mercurio’s florid comments about Giove’s power and the heavens break the spell momentarily and return the listener to normal time, only to be followed by the declaration of Calisto’s ascension sung by all three. Indeed, here Mercurio’s presence is hardly trivial, for the homophonic trio all but erases the sexual union between Giove and Calisto that had precipitated the events of the opera. Giove as the loving father and the false Diana have provided the nymph with two kinds of pleasure, licit and illicit. Female pleasure, particularly in the context of the hemaphroditic Giove-Diana, has been proved illusory; but after her submission to Giove’s power and wisdom, Calisto has found a new kind of delight outside of physical needs: she is redeemed and glories in the pleasure of pure sound. Cavalli and Faustini thus invoke a popular trope in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art, exploited by such artists as Carracci in the ceiling for the Farnese Gallery: the surprising slippage between man’s love for God and the loves of the gods. Calisto’s rapture in the trio is thus both sacred and secular; the sensuality that she had relinquished on earth is replaced by a musical substitute for the same.

If the opera had ended here, perhaps the implications would be less ambiguous. But in the subsequent scene, when Diana rejects Pan and tells him and his satyrs to “unleash their dishonest desires with similar beings”—*con pari forme*—the beasts condemn Diana and all women for their false chastity, echoing Iarba’s condemnation of Didone. Their words are, in fact, somewhat disingenuous: Diana’s final duet with Endimione once again confirms the Neoplatonic discourse. Thus, in a strange reinvention of Venetian conventions, Faustini and Cavalli conclude the opera with love duets for these curious Arcadian beings for whom physical pleasure has been denied. Diana and Endimione once again declare their intention to exchange only chaste kisses from afar: Endimione claims that he is the master of his senses, that his heart no longer burns, and that kisses are enough (3.7). Cavalli captures something of their lack of fulfillment: there is more imitation than genuine duetting, as if the temporal displacement of their voices reflects the spatial distance imposed by Diana’s chastity and Endimione’s sleep. The frustration here is still less than that which is expressed in the final moments of the opera: a fragmented, fundamentally unsatisfying encounter between Giove and Calisto, mediated by Mercurio, in which she gladly ascends to the heavens, now forgetful of the desire that once tortured her, while Giove complains of being left unhappily behind.

Thus, this opera accomplishes yet another metamorphosis, not imagined by Ovid: the transformation of female sexual desire into spiritual fulfillment. In this special realm, myriad forms of desire—celestial, corporeal, and even bestial, along with a host of same-sex yearnings—are isolated and juxtaposed, but never truly realized. Pan and the satyrs may express male arousal and frustration; but within this highly sensual atmosphere, the

yearnings of Diana and Calisto are expressed vividly in music and then suppressed in a disturbing distortion of generic expectations. But perhaps this explains the failure of the opera in the carnival city of Venice, for this is a work that tries to have it both ways. In the pre-civilized Arcadian realm, Cavalli provides us with a musical language that represents explicit female pleasure, but nonetheless contrives for its ultimate suppression in the guise of spiritual enlightenment. We are left with a vague discomfort, a set of unfulfilled erotic yearnings, a fleeting aural impression of the music of desire that extinguishes itself not with fanfare but with a quiet resignation. For by the end of the opera, Cavalli himself seems bereft without the passion of Diana and Calisto, and, like Giove, we are left behind as they ascend to the heavens.

Chapter 6

Semiramide and Musical Transvestism

AMAZONS AND WARRIORS

The confusion of gender characteristics implicit in Jove's adoption of Diana's identity in *La Calisto* is played out somewhat differently in the Venetian operas that focus on female warriors. Women warriors present a special opportunity for heroic self-definition. Whereas the abandonment of sensual, foreign women usually protects the hero, freeing him to pursue a glorious destiny away from feminine influence, battle with a warrior woman is also an important means of proving male prowess. In grappling with the great warrior queens or the amazons, the hero's conflict moves from the realm of Venus to that of Mars. These women provide a different sort of threat: they do not fight men with the traditional "female" weapons of beauty and magic, drawing men into their effeminate, lascivious circle of sexual desire. Rather, they engage with them on their own terms, with weaponry, physical strength, and cunning in battle. Like Diana and her band of nymphs, the warrior women crave chastity and autonomy; they are more interested in hunting and male pursuits than in love, and they can be conquered only by superior strength or—as the Incogniti pointed out—the "force of love." Indeed, as reflected in so many ancient and early modern sources, male heroism often required *both* the abandoning of a woman and the conquering of a female warrior. Theseus may well have insured his heroism by abandoning Arianna on the island of Dia; yet, he also affirms his prowess through the conquest of the amazon Hippolyta by marrying her.¹ Although Aeneas had triumphed in Carthage through the submission of Dido, Virgil still contrived for his hero to conquer the warrior woman Camilla, thus excluding her from the noble Roman lineage that Aeneas was to establish (*Aeneid*, book 11). And in sixteenth-century epics, the taming and conversion of such warrior women as Bradamante—placed in juxtaposition with the alluring sorceress Alcina—was essential to the creation of the early modern hero.

Much of the anxiety about warrior women was expressed in the legends of the amazon women. The problem was not merely that amazons equaled and even eclipsed men in traditionally male endeavors such as war and governance; they also provided a basic threat to male sensibilities. This was a society that was structured to exist without men and worked actively for their destruction. Amazons were sexually autonomous, described variously as chaste and promiscuous; they were rumored to kill male children; the mutilations of their right breasts were a basic denial of femininity and biological destiny that was particularly threatening. Moreover, this myth had a universality that allowed it to be adapted by any society to represent that which it most feared. For the Greeks, the amazon myth was an integral part of their self-definition—of the way in which they separated their own civilized world from that of the barbarians.² For medieval Christians, the amazons could be used to represent the danger of the pleasures of the flesh.³ For societies involved in exploration and conquest, they could be viewed as an infidel population, which could be socialized and Christianized appropriately.⁴ In early modern Europe, amazons and amazon imagery were used both to argue against female rule and to express a host of fears about male effeminacy. Boccaccio, for example, praises the skills of the amazon Penthesilea, but notes that she had become more “manly in arms than those born males who have been changed into women—or helmeted hares—by idleness and love of pleasure.”⁵ Proto-feminist writers such as Ribera, Marinella, and Della Chiesa used the strength and skills of the amazon to argue in favor of women, usually including in their discussion those non-amazon warrior queens gifted in combat or governance, such as Zenobia and Semiramis. The nun Arcangela Tarabotti also cited the amazons in support of the female sex, astutely recognizing the extent to which the myth stimulated male anxiety, even in seventeenth-century Venice: “Perhaps you fear the multiplicity of women in the world. You are cowards! We are not in the times of those valorous amazons who prudently killed men in order to avoid being their subjects.”⁶

Amazon women (as well as more generic warrior women) became particularly popular in the operas of the mid-seventeenth century, which is not surprising given the amazons’ special role in the debate about women—and their potential for self-expression. The librettist Paolo Pietro Bissari had chosen Bradamante as the heroine for his 1650 opera, garnering praise for the libretto from no less a critic than Arcangela Tarabotti herself.⁷ Pietro Ziani and Giacomo Castoreo brought *La guerriera spartana* to the stage in 1654. And the great warrior queen Zenobia was featured in another of Ziani’s operas, produced in 1666. I have elsewhere discussed the fortunes of the invincible heroine Veremonda in Giulio Strozzi and Francesco Cavalli’s *Veremonda amazzone di Aragona*, written in the season following *La Calisto*.⁸ The libretto for this opera is an adaptation of Giacinto Cicognini’s *Celio*, originally written for Florence in 1646, in which the heroine was

probably inspired by Queen Isabella, wife to Ferdinand and champion of the Spanish Inquisition. Strozzi's use of the label "amazon" to describe the heroine of his opera, however, had enormous significance. Unlike the somewhat passive queen depicted in Cicognini's original opera, Strozzi's Veremonda, *detta Amazzone*, is a fierce and virtuous warrior woman who vanquishes the enemy while her husband stays home and studies astrology. By calling his heroine an amazon, Strozzi signals to his readers the inversion of gender that characterizes this reworking of Cicognini's libretto. Veremonda, one of the most heroic of the seicento operatic women, defeats the enemy, subdues a treasonous general enamored of an enemy Muslim princess, and returns the kingdom to the hands of her husband, all the while retaining her virtue. That this entailed a discrepancy in gender roles is reflected in Cavalli's music: he "feminizes" a young general with a comic lament about his own beauty, and successfully juxtaposes representations of Veremonda's conventional feminine wiles—the feigned sighs and tears—with dramatic deeds and musical gestures that also reflect her amazonian tendencies.⁹

In the present chapter, we move ahead twenty years and consider the operatic representation of a far less virtuous and more unconventional warrior woman, Semiramis, the queen of Assyria, as presented in Pietro Ziani and Matteo Noris's *La Semiramide*, first performed at the Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo in 1670. The Semiramis legend is a conflation of various stories concerning a Semitic fertility goddess and a warlike Assyrian queen. This is a tale that grapples with the ultimate consequences of gender instability: what happens when women turn into men and men turn into women, and the consequences of joining female vices with male virtues. In the most widely disseminated versions of the tale, Semiramis is brilliant and accomplished in politics, battle, and love; she murders her husband to take over the rule of Assyria, exchanges identities with her son in order to go to war in his place, and is eventually murdered by her son after attempting an incestuous union with him. Semiramis's skill in governance and politics, her incestuous leanings, and her eventual fate are strongly reminiscent of Agrippina the Younger and the Venetian tendency to link bad empire with women (and poor mothering skills).¹⁰

But with Semiramis the risk of female power is exacerbated by a discourse that emphasizes sexual aggression and transvestism. We have seen the ways in which Giove's adoption of Diana's identity in *La Calisto* gave him access to Arcadia's forbidden feminine zone, allowing him to exercise his sexual power and prowess. Semiramis's exchange of identities with her son also opens the male realm to female interference, with consequences that varied according to the discrepancies in her mythic reputation. While one tradition emphasized the positive aspects of Semiramis's skill in governance, using her as a positive emblem of female power, another tradition underscored the consequences of her sexual transgressions and misuse of power.

Military exploits are linked to sexual exploits, both of which cause the feminization or destruction of the men who surround her. In the most damning versions of the myth, the progression is almost always the same: skill in traditionally male activities leads to androgyny and transvestism, which is inevitably followed by seduction, castration, incest, murder, and anarchy.

Not surprisingly, it was the latter tradition that was most appealing to Venetians, as is apparent in the peculiar compositional history of this particular opera. The libretto to *La Semiramide* was an intricate recasting of Giovanni Andreas Moniglia's *La Semirami*, produced at the Viennese court in 1667 to music by Antonio Cesti originally composed for a Medici–Hapsburg wedding.¹¹ As I have shown elsewhere, Matteo Noris's revision exaggerates the sexually volatile elements explicit in the legend, highlighting the effeminacy of the son Nino, Semiramide's sexual aggression, the erotic jealousy between mother and son, and the possibility of same-sex encounters implicit in a plot driven by cross-dressing.¹² This is nothing less than a carnivalization of a foreign opera for Venetian consumption: a codification of the dramatic and musical conventions for the treatment of sexuality that the Venetian audiences had come to expect.¹³ Not surprisingly, it is precisely this kind of libretto that has inspired severe criticism, beginning with Crescimbeni's concerns about "true acting" in the early eighteenth century and culminating with Joseph Kerman's famous charge that the Venetians had "thrown dignity into the canals."¹⁴ But all of this misses the point—namely, the extent to which such play with gender ambiguity, violence, and sexuality was an integral part of the Venetian cultural landscape. Opera had inherited from the Incogniti's philosophical interests a set of conventions that lent themselves perfectly to the kinds of exaggeration and humor that could be continually transformed in a popular, carnival entertainment such as opera. Against the backdrop of Venice's changing self-image, elements that had served Incogniti interests—misogyny and eroticism—were explored in operas like *La Semiramide* with increasing zest and decreasing self-censorship.

Matteo Noris's emphasis on gender incongruity in *La Semiramide* is highlighted by the score provided by Pietro Andrea Ziani.¹⁵ Ziani, one of the most successful Venetian opera composers in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, is the senior member of the second generation, which includes Cesti, Legrenzi, Sartorio, and Pallavicino, whose *Messalina* we will examine in the next chapter. After our considerations of Monteverdi and Cavalli, the music is undeniably something of a disappointment. Ziani is not a genius. His operas demonstrate little of the psychological insight or the compositional integrity of Monteverdi; his arias do not possess the lyrical charm of Cavalli's best works nor the sensitivity to text and source that we have seen thus far. Many of his compositional virtues and vices, however, are symptomatic of stylistic changes that occur after mid-century. Ziani began his career as an opera composer just after the balance between recitative and aria had shifted, and arias had become the primary agents of affective

and musical expression. During the third quarter of the century, he and his colleagues wrote literally hundreds of brief arias in which they codified a vocabulary of musical gestures for representing conventional affects and character types that could be easily understood by an increasingly experienced audience. As enthusiasm for arias and singers increased, composers—many of whom had begun to write more expansive instrumental works—wrote longer arias, focusing primarily on the da capo or ABA form, which would soon become standardized. At the same time, composers also began to gravitate toward modern tonal practices—the use of major and minor keys whose hierarchical primacy was defined by a strong dominant and cadences on closely related sonorities.

Ziani's skill as a musical dramatist was in manipulating both modern and more old-fashioned devices for dramatic purposes. Full-blown da capo arias in a modern tonal style were particularly useful for representing strong characters and sentiments; the shorter, more old-fashioned ABB' arias, more often composed in an "old-fashioned" tonal style with less secure tonics or without complete tonal closure, were more appropriate for conflicting emotions, insecurity, or idiosyncratic characters.¹⁶ While Ziani's often diminutive arias cannot always be said to demonstrate extraordinary sensitivity to poetic nuance, they can be distinguished from those of his contemporaries by virtue of their enormous variety of meters, rhythmic gesture, choice of accompaniment, and tonal style, and his utilization of a variety of formal options and tonal types for dramatic purposes. But his recitative, like that of his older contemporaries, was not completely devoid of affective expression. One of his favorite strategies, for example, was to juxtapose a series of contrasting affects through frequent lyric interruptions and shifting meters, thus allowing him to create a genuine sense of comedy or depict the extreme emotional shifts associated with the rare recitative monologue. His progressive, flexible use of tonality—in particular the avoidance of tonal closure in long passages of recitative—allowed him to show dramatic progress over the course of a single scene, to depict emotional conflict between two characters, or to mark pivotal moments of the plot.¹⁷

Indeed, it is precisely because of his occasional failure to rise above the mediocre that Ziani's settings are so revealing of conventional representations of gender during this period.¹⁸ His seemingly automatic and even occasionally thoughtless realization of given affects for conventional characters or situations demonstrates the relative inequality in which male and female transvestism might have been understood. This is particularly striking in his setting of *La Semiramide*. Unlike the many cross-dressed women in Venetian opera and Renaissance drama who used male clothing to protect their chastity or to follow faithless lovers, in this case transvestism is the first step in a process whereby Semiramide not only assumes Nino's role in public life but also takes over his voice. The problem is not only that Nino and Semiramide choose to wear each other's clothing, but also that they *sing*

wearing the wrong clothes. Transvestism, as we shall see, is not merely a dramatic phenomenon or a bit of naughty stage business; as with Giove's assumption of Diana's voice and body in *La Calisto*, it had musical consequences, which reveal once again the slippery space between the genders in mid-seventeenth-century Venice.

Thus, this particular opera now asks us to consider not only what happens if men turn into women and women turn into men, but, more importantly, what the consequences are of men and women *sounding* alike—of one gender attempting to emulate not only the actions but the rhetorical and musical style of the other gender. This is an issue with which opera will grapple for the next two hundred years. Ironically, Semiramide's attempts to sing as a man actually tell us about the development of specifically female rhetoric in Venetian opera, a topic that lies at the core of this book. Despite Semiramide's brilliance and the complexities of her mythological reputation, she was unable to overcome the assumptions about female speech and song that ultimately controlled her musical representation. Ziani's setting, as we shall see, demonstrates the friction between the narrative and the rhetorical content of the opera, and the way in which even unsuccessful musical portrayals tell us more about cultural assumptions than the text alone.

SEMIRAMIS IN HISTORY AND MYTH

The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus provides the most detailed description of Semiramis's life and death, hinting at many of the ambiguities that were to be exploited by subsequent commentators.¹⁹ He emphasizes her connection with the divine and the primitive: she was the abandoned daughter of the goddess Derceto, nurtured by doves and, according to some reports, she was herself turned into a dove and worshipped as a goddess upon her death.²⁰ He is also generous in his praise of her accomplishments. We are told that her beauty and military cunning (and androgynous disguise) attracted the attention of her second husband, King Ninus of Assyria (Diod. 2.6.10–11).²¹ After Ninus's death she went on to accomplish tremendous feats of engineering: building cities, temples, and statues to the gods, fashioning the gardens of Babylon, diverting the Euphrates for irrigation, and even daring to invade India and do battle with the legendary King Stabrobates.

Diodorus also refers to some of the more problematic aspects of Semiramis's legendary persona. We learn, for example, that her first husband Onnes was "completely enslaved by her," yet "since he would do nothing without her advice he prospered in everything" (Diod. 2.5.2). Later, her military victories are always linked to sexual indiscretions. While encamped with the army after the death of her husband, she was reluctant to marry and put her command at risk; thus, she reportedly took her pleasure with the most handsome members of the army, only to have them put to death afterwards in spider fashion (Diod. 2.13.4).

But for our purposes what is most important are the reports on Semiramis's feminizing influence on her son. Diodorus tells us that Ninyas "conspired against her through the agency of a eunuch." But after her death (of natural causes) he did not emulate "his mother's fondness for war and her adventurous spirit." He stayed in the palace and was seen only by the "concubines and the eunuchs who attended him"; he "devoted his life to luxury and idleness" and "the enjoyment of every kind of pleasure without restraint" (Diod. 2.21.1–3).²² But in the influential account by Marcus Junianus Justinus, Semiramis feminizes her son by actually taking over his identity, aided by the similarity in their appearance and voice, and her use of androgynous clothing:²³

She neither daring to deliver up the government to a minor, nor openly take it upon herself, so many and such great nations being scarce likely to obey one man patiently, much less a woman, pretends herself to be the son of Ninus, instead of his wife, a boy instead of a woman. For both had a mean stature, and voice equally small, and the quality of their lineaments were alike in mother and son. Wherefore she covers her arms and legs with cloths, her head with a turban; and lest she should seem to conceal something by this new dress, she orders the people to be clad in the same habit which fashion of clothing the whole nation keeps from that time. Thus at her first beginning dissembling her sex, she was believed to be a boy. (Justinus 1.2)

Justinus imagines a different end of the story: Semiramis "desires to lie with her son," who subsequently slays her, after which time the son gives up all thoughts of war and grows old in the company of women "as if he had changed sex with his mother" (Justinus 1.2). Ammianus Marcellinus and Claudian take this still further by crediting Semiramis with the invention of castration to preserve high voices in men. This allowed her to hide her true sex not only by means of her physical appearance, but also by means of her voice.²⁴ The Christian historian Paulus Orosius provides yet another perspective: Semiramis is not dressed androgynously but has actually assumed her son's identity by wearing his clothing; "burning with lust and thirsting for blood," she commits numerous adulteries and homicides, culminating in a series of sexual and maternal crimes: she all but abandons the son that she has conceived shamelessly, desires him sexually, and finally passes a law permitting incest between parents and children.²⁵

Medieval and early modern writers called upon all of these various traditions in their depictions of Semiramis. Dante places her in the second circle of Hell (*Inferno*, 5.52–60), the first of a long list of *lussuriosi*, and, after Orosius, credits her with legalizing vice.²⁶ Boccaccio regarded Semiramis as sufficiently important to list her second in *De claris mulieribus*, where she is preceded only by Eve. Borrowing heavily from Justinus's account, he emphasizes the ways in which Semiramis's accomplishments, though "great even for a man," feminized her son, who "rotted away in bed"; he also condemns her inordinate sexual appetite, her incestuous leanings, and the sex-

ual jealousy between mother and son (she presumably invented the chastity belt to protect her son from other members of her household).²⁷

Muzio Manfredi's popular tragedy *La Semiramis* (Bergamo, 1593) combines Semiramis's legendary incestuous leanings with the familiar dilemma of the widowed queen that was explored so thoroughly in Lodovico Dolce's *Didone tragedia*.²⁸ Semiramis claims that her desire to marry her son is not born of lasciviousness, but rather is necessary in order to protect herself, her son, and her country. Only after having exchanged identities with this son who so strongly resembled her, she explains, was she able to conquer neighboring lands and expand the realm. Now that all know her to be a woman, she must marry her own son or risk losing the throne through his marriage to another woman or her own forced marriage to a neighboring king (who would assuredly kill her son). Unlike Dido, her choice is for incest rather than suicide. After Semiramis murders Ninyas's wife and children, her death at his hands is inevitable.

SEMIRAMIS IN VENETIAN WRITINGS

Semiramis also played an ambivalent role in the debates about women, depending—as usual—on the inclinations of the author. Anti-female writers, such as Giuseppe Passi, used Semiramis as an example of excessive female ambition and insatiable lust.²⁹ Pietro Paolo Ribera, on the other hand, praises her for bravery and her use of power to “govern justly, and for the peace of the Empire.”³⁰ Della Chiesa likewise commends her for rebuilding the city of Babylon, fighting the Ethiopians, and invading India, and even praises her for giving her people a valuable code of laws by which to live.³¹ Following the tradition established by Christine di Pizan, Lucrezia Marinella also cites Semiramis to support a number of female virtues: she is “wise and prudent” (chapter 4); she is “an illustrious woman in the military arts and the making of war” (chapter 7); she is a “magnificent and courteous woman,” who oversaw the construction of the walls of Babylon along with a magnificent temple from whose tower the stars could be observed.³²

Semiramis's sexual transgressions and rhetorical skills intrigued members of the Accademia degli Incogniti, and they constructed her in a manner that was not dissimilar to that of Agrippina the Younger. Francesco Pona includes Semiramis in his *La galleria delle donne celebri* as one of four lascivious women. He praises her various accomplishments—a “tenacious memory, profound intellect”—and her ability to “discourse, discriminate, and deliberate at the same time,” and he applauds her unerring political skill.³³ But once again the Venetian horror of women and empire is made explicit. In fact, Pona's description of Semiramis's sexual transgressions conflates all of the most damning versions of the legend:

She passed the nights not only in the arms of her husband, but with many, many brave adulterers in lascivious entertainments and obscene games with

unchecked and unprecedented wantonness . . . And still warm from the embraces, leaving the breast she had bared during lovemaking, she would have them killed . . . She had the audacity to consider such an evil thought as killing Ninus; and quickly and violently she resorted to the instruments of death and in the very same marital embrace she killed him with a sword. Vixen! Evil Monster! Even hell has not heard of such cruelties!³⁴

Ferrante Pallavicino, whose portrayal of Agrippina was considered above, created a dramatic monologue that reconstructs a scene only hinted at by other writers—Semiramis's incestuous advances toward her son, who responds by killing his mother.³⁵ Her desire for Ninyas, Pallavicino suggests in his preface to "Semiramide lascivia," can be seen as a sort of narcissism: since she adopted his identity, she could no more not love him than not love herself, nor could she permit anyone else to so rule over her heart, which was otherwise "invincible to every assault." When her initial advances to her son meet with silence, she becomes particularly impassioned:

Yes, yes it is true, dear one, that a lover must have more actions than words . . . I have erred and by your silent reproach I am persuaded to think again. Close your mouth in order to join the rubies that bedeck your lips. Receive these kisses, my beloved. . . . Oh woe! Thus you reject me? What spirit causes your hand to drive me away, forbidding your mother to kiss you? . . . I wish to feed my appetite in every way on you. I am Queen, and your Mother, I wish to enjoy you and be nourished from your flesh, even though [it is] not yet ripened for love.³⁶

The speech ends with Semiramis's death, as Ninyas responds not with the passion that she craves, but with a "lingua di ferro"—a tongue of steel. Ninyas may succeed in silencing his mother; but it is Semiramis's utterances and dramatic power that are most resonant. Ninyas is given no voice in Pallavicino's dramatization.

OPERATIC SEMIRAMIDE

Semiramide's first appearance on the opera stage was in Venice in *La Semiramide in India* (1648), with music by Francesco Sacrati (now lost) and libretto by Maiolino Bisaccioni, a member of the Accademia degli Incogniti.³⁷ Like his Incogniti colleagues, Bisaccioni was fascinated by Semiramis's adoption of male clothing and habits, but was somewhat less concerned with the lurid aspects of the tale. Instead, the primary focus is on the consequences of female rule, as later codified in Loredano's *La forza d'amore*. Bisaccioni tells us in the dedication that the libretto is "built loosely on the action of the most celebrated heroine who ever clasped the sword," who—like Loredano's Queen Ardemia—was nonetheless vulnerable to the "frailties of love."³⁸

The frontispiece of the libretto, however, tells us much about Bisaccioni's benign conception of the notorious Semiramis (see fig. 6). She is pictured

at a military camp, with war tents in the foreground and hills in the background, far from the private, indoor realm with which women are usually associated. Semiramide, the central focus of the portrait, is clothed in a modest dress, with only armor on her breast, her maidservant at her side. Directly opposite her, his back to the viewer, is a man in military attire, who, we will later learn, is her general (and former lover) Argillante. The primary symbol of her military inclination is her shield, which she holds directly in front of herself in a self-protective and defiant gesture, as if to fend off Argillante or love itself. The image is one of feminine strength, and there is little hint of the sexual depravity with which she was so often associated.

Bisaccioni follows Diodorus's account of the tale, thus ignoring the incest issue, and sets the libretto against the backdrop of Semiramide's invasion of India. The *argomento* begins with a description of Semiramide and her son Nino's identity exchange, emphasizing their discomfort in their "natural" gender roles. Nino is inclined to pleasure, while Semiramide desires power and military victories. Thus, since they resembled one another, she takes Nino's name and pretends to be him, placing him "among the women." Notably, Bisaccioni tells us that the reason that Semiramide gathered an army and went to war was in order to avoid discovery of the fraud, and this is why she advanced into India, ruled by King Stavrobate.³⁹

Semiramide's susceptibility to love, however, is emphasized in the fictional plot elements that Bisaccioni adds to Diodorus's historical account of the famous stalemate in India. A failing Indian king sends his young son Arimeno to battle in his place. Subsequently captured by the Assyrians, Arimeno, who had long been in love with Semiramide (after having viewed the young Nino in his womanly disguise many years before), has also been loved by the real Semiramide in secret. Meanwhile Nino, who has yet to prove himself as an appropriate male ruler, has rebelled against his mother's authority, discarding his queenly disguise as well as his responsibilities in order to frolic in a pastoral setting with a beautiful shepherdess. Semiramide struggles between her desire for power and her love for Arimeno—to whom she eventually surrenders willingly. Nino, who has fallen in love during his pastoral episode, eventually rejects the irresponsibility of youth—and his mother's clothing. Instead, he takes up his appropriate position as king, and marries the shepherdess (who conveniently finds royal lineage to justify such a fine marriage). Semiramide's power and sexual desire are safely neutralized; the opera celebrates the coming of age of the son Nino, who boldly reclaims his power, manhood, and kingdom, and like so many heroines before her, Semiramide demonstrates her vulnerability to love.

THE ROSES OF VENUS

A far less vulnerable Semiramide appears on the stage in Pietro Ziani's 1671 opera *La Semiramide*, based on the libretto by Giovanni Moniglia and revised



FIGURE 6. Maiolino Bisaccioni, *La Semiramide in India* (Venice: Miloco, 1648), frontispiece. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana.

by Matteo Noris. On the surface, both Moniglia's original libretto and Noris's revision follow the familiar narrative plan. Female power—in place at the outset of the opera—is threatened by an outside force—in this case the vassal-king Creonte of Babylon, who rebels against Semiramide's rule. The identity exchange between mother and son, which presumably facilitates the war effort, only exacerbates the incongruity of female rule that is necessarily resolved by the end of the opera with a pair of happy marriages that restore the balance of power to masculine forces. But, as noted earlier, what is most interesting about Moniglia's libretto and Noris's subsequent revisions is the increased interest in Semiramide's sexual exploits, the dramatic and musical consequences of transvestism, and the invocation of the discourse on incest. In both versions of the libretto, each has lovers of whom the other is ignorant: Semiramide loves one of her generals (Ireo) and Nino loves the slave girl Iside, who is really the daughter of the enemy king. Moniglia's libretto plays with the various comedic consequences of mistaken identity, hinting at the possibility of same-sex encounters that result from the disguises. Noris's detailed reworking of Moniglia's libretto highlights the homoerotic implications implicit in the plot and exaggerates the sexual jealousy between mother and son. Nino, in disguise, confronts his mother's lover and plots to kill him; Semiramide, captured by the enemy while in disguise, contrives to escape while singing a love duet with her son's lover.

Both Moniglia and Noris chose to begin their opera with the single most famous episode in the Semiramis legend. Boccaccio recounts this as follows:

One day, when all was peaceful and she was enjoying a leisurely rest, she was combing her hair with the dexterity of her sex. Surrounded by her maids, she was plaiting it into braids according to native custom. Her hair was not yet half finished when she was told that Babylon had defected to her stepson. So distressed was Semiramis by this news that she threw aside her comb and instantly rose in anger from her womanly pursuits, took up arms, and led her troops to a siege of the powerful city. She did not finish arranging her hair until she had forced the surrender of that mighty place, weakened by a long blockade, and brought it back under her power by force of arms.⁴⁰

Semiramide's half-combed hair symbolizes the dualism implicit in the legend. Female vanity is juxtaposed with military aggression; the feminine world of the dressing table is sacrificed for the battlefield. The story contrasts her feminine nature with her masculine, unruly, and seductive other self.

Moniglia's dramatization of this famous scene gives little evidence of Semiramide's warlike tendencies, aggressive nature, or lasciviousness. Contemplating peace with the Assyrians, the queen adorns her breast with "innocent blossoms" and thinks only of the war of love. She sings entirely in recitative; Moniglia gives her no arias in this first scene. But for Noris and Ziani, Semiramide's famous appearance at the dressing table was an ideal

opportunity to explore her more lascivious nature. Let us consider, for example, the rather different portrayal of her in the frontispiece of Noris's libretto (see fig. 7).⁴¹ The woman depicted here shares little with the primly attired woman represented in the frontispiece of Bisaccioni's 1649 libretto. Noris's Semiramide sits alone at her dressing table, adorning her hair with roses in anticipation of her lover's arrival. She admires herself in the mirror, eternal symbol of female vanity.⁴² The bare breasts and navel contrast strikingly with the metal shield that girds her chest. A high-topped military sandal is displayed prominently beneath the folds of her skirt. Prior to assuming the male disguise that she will wear for much of the opera, Semiramide is already pictured in a manner that is warlike and sexually dangerous, challenging and seductive.

Much of this is reflected in the rather different version of the opening scene presented by Noris and Ziani. As in the frontispiece, Semiramide adorns herself at the mirror, waiting for her lover Ireo, who will "cure all her ills." Reshaping Moniglia's recitative—and adding some brand-new material—Noris supplies three aria texts for the heroine, which allow her to express her rhetorical power immediately. The first aria, a paraphrase of Moniglia's recitative text, describes the conflict between the pleasures of peace and Cupid, who challenges her to a different sort of war.⁴³ From the outset, however, Ziani's musical setting highlights the contradiction between Semiramide's sensuality and her warlike nature (see ex. 27). He somewhat predictably exploits the imitative potential of such words as "ride" (laughs) and "guerra" (war), juxtaposing graceful ornamental gestures (mm. 3–5) with virtuosic displays of militaristic—and often awkward—dotted rhythms (mm. 12–14). Her power is also demonstrated—as it will be in so much of the opera—in her vocal flexibility and command of the upper register.

In the second aria Semiramide deals directly with the roses in the portrait, which reveal much about the Venetian Semiramide's enhanced sexual threat. As she adorns her hair with roses, she asks that they be "whitened by the ashes of a thousand lovers" whose faith she carries in her breast (see ex. 28). These are not the "innocent blossoms" of Moniglia's heroine. This queen adorns herself with roses, the flower associated with none less than Venus herself. The pricking of Venus's foot by the thorn is a symbol of deflowering. In the same way that Venus's blood turned the white roses red, so, too, are the roses transformed by the blood produced in the act of love.⁴⁴ Giulio Romano, for example, had presented this image in one of the frescoes at the Palazzo Te in Mantua. Semiramide's invocation, however, inverts this image. She vows that the red roses—already colored by blood—will instead be whitened by the ashes of her thousand murdered lovers. Thus, rather than losing her own innocence or blood, this is a woman who murders her lovers and turns them into cinders once she has finished with them, as described, for instance, by Francesco Pona. Moreover, Noris further evokes Semiramide's association with women of power by creating the



FIGURE 7. Matteo Noris, *La Semiramide* (Venice: Nicolini, 1671), frontispiece. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana.

Semiramide:

Cin-ta la fron-te Di bian-che ben-de Las-sù nel cie -

4
- lo Ri - de, ri - etc.

12
Mi sfi-da a guer - ra,

15
con la sua fa - ce.

EXAMPLE 27. Pietro Andrea Ziani, *La Semiramide* (1671), ACT 1, SCENE 1:
Semiramide: “Cinta la fronte” (I-Vnm, It. IV, 455 [= 9979], fol. 2v), mm. 1–5
and 12–17.

ritualistic quality of an incantation by using *versi sdruccioli*, which are usually associated with the bestial, the rustic, or the demonic (Or *infioratemi*, / *le chiome lucide*, / *Rose, che a Venere*).⁴⁵

In setting this unusual text, Ziani combines what we might describe as more up-to-date and old-fashioned procedures to accommodate Semiramide’s dualistic nature. He organizes the aria in the more traditional ABB’ or bipartite form, but nonetheless uses a modern tonal style that reflects Semiramide’s strength: a limited chordal vocabulary, restricted to keys closely related to the tonic (relative major and dominant), external and internal

14 [Ritornello]

Semiramide:

Or in-fio-ra-te - mi Le chio-me lu-ci - de Ro-se che a Ve-ne - re Pun-ge-ste il piè,

ro-se che a Ve-ne - re pun-ge-ste il piè.

Pria con la ce-ne - re Di mil-le a-

Semiramide: O roses / that pierced the foot / of Venus, / adorn my shining hair. / Before they be whitened / by the ashes / of a thousand lovers / whose pure faith / I carry in my breast.

EXAMPLE 28. Ziani, *La Semiramide*, ACT 1, SCENE 1: Semiramide: “Or infioretemi” (fols. 4r–5v), mm. 14–26 and 37–45.

(continued)

37 Conclusion of B'

pria con la ce-ne - re di mil-le a - man-ti Sian bian-cheg-gian -

ti Qual por - to can - di-da Nel sen la fè, qual por-to

can - di - da nel sen la fè.

EXAMPLE 28. (*continued*)

ritornelli with clear modulatory goals, and a relatively slow harmonic rhythm. The melodic material provides a rather unconventional treatment for the *versi sdrucchioli*, without actually disguising them. Rather than following the natural rhythmic scansion of the text (as, for example, in Hecuba's lament in *La Didone*), Ziani saturates the aria with a syncopated rhythmic pattern and melodic accent on the third beat of the triple meter, which he then varies at phrase endings, as marked in example 28. Thus, the display of power and otherworldliness associated with *versi sdrucchioli* is balanced by the spirited nature of the syncopated pattern. In this unusual invocation, Semiramide is carefree and confident, but her power and obsession are apparent in the persistence of the rhythmic motive. Notably, despite the fact that the text is concerned with self-ornamentation, the aria is surprisingly devoid of melismatic singing. Instead, the persistent syncopated motive pervades even the B section, which is enlivened only by occasional ornaments on suggestive words, culminating in the descending stepwise melisma at the conclusion of the aria (mm. 43–46)—a gesture of strength that Ziani often associates with our heroine. Semiramide has yet to declare war and don male clothing; yet, even in her preparation for lovemaking, there is little about her that would suggest feminine vulnerability.

NINO EFFEMINATO

Semiramide, however, does not leave the dressing table directly to run off to war. First, she must exchange identities with her son Nino. Once again, Noris's revisions emphasize the gender incongruity between mother and son. Moniglia's Semiramide justifies the exchange by citing Nino's youth and inexperience, eventually overriding her son's objections. Noris's Semiramide, however, takes a far more aggressive stance, noting not only Nino's youth, but also his effeminacy and incompetence at male pursuits. Moreover, rather than rebelling against his mother's authority, Nino willingly accepts her decree. His sole concern is that the female disguise will complicate his romantic goals, as he notes in his first aria (1.3). His primary preoccupation is having to silence his heart and hide the cruel "torches" of love that make it vibrate. (Indeed, the torches that Nino has such difficulty hiding may well be that part of his body hidden by a skirt, a problem that he will expound upon more explicitly somewhat later in the opera.) Ziani's setting of Noris's text adheres to musical conventions associated with effeminate or lovesick men, usually roles sung by castrati: lamenting affect, triple meter, minor sonorities, and descending melodic lines (see ex. 29).⁴⁶ But Ziani's Nino is not merely lovesick; his relative insecurity and timid nature—particularly as compared with his mother—are evident in the relative tonal instability of the harmonic language, not dissimilar to Calisto's search for water in act 1, scene 2 of *La Calisto*.

Despite the metrical emphasis of the initial G-minor sonority, the A_♭s and

Nino:

A-ma, e ta - ci, O mi - se-ro co-re, o mi - se-ro, o

mi - se-ro co - re. Na-scon-di le fa - ci, Che cru-de e vo -

ra - ci, na-scon-di le fa - ci, che cru-de e vo - ra ci Ti vi - bra-no ar -

do - re, che cru-de e vo - ra - ci ti vi - bra-no ar-do -

re. A-ma, e ta - ci, O mi - se-ro co-re, o mi - se-ro,

o mi - se-ro co - re.

Nino: Love, and be silent, / o miserable heart. / Hide the torches, / cruel and voracious, / that make you vibrate with love. / Love, and be silent, o miserable heart.

EXAMPLE 29. Ziani, *La Semiramide*, ACT 1, SCENE 3: Nino: "Ama, e taci" (fol. gr).

B $\flat$ s in Nino's opening cry suggest a C-minor tonal center. C minor is indeed briefly confirmed in measure 2 at the first caesura; the cadence on G/g in measure 5 at the end of the brief A section—along with the rise in tessitura—sounds somewhat more like a modulation to the dominant than a confirmation of a G-minor tonic. In the B section, as Nino bemoans the cruelty and selfishness of hiding “vibrating passion,” C minor is even more strongly suggested by the flatward move to F minor and further descent of the voice (m. 10), which leads to the repeat of the A section that recasts the initial G-minor sonority as the goal of a Phrygian cadence (m. 13). The bass now adopts the half-step descent from A $\flat$ to G that had marked Nino's cries of despair (“O misero”) in measures 3–4 and will recur with the rest of the first section in measure 15. Regardless of the relative authority of this reaffirmation of C minor as a tonic, the A section is repeated without change; thus, the final authentic cadence is on G minor. Nino's tonic, masculinity, and identity are thus undermined: he not only allows his mother to assume his identity and dress him like a woman, but he is overly preoccupied with love and even has apparent difficulty establishing his own tonic. By exaggerating Nino's cowardice, his preoccupation with love, and the gender confusion inherent in his disguise, Ziani and Noris thus not only compromise his heroic stature but also align him with numerous other men in Venetian opera who neglect their heroic responsibilities and exchange Mars for Venus, becoming, in the words of the librettists, *effeminati*.⁴⁷ By actually exchanging roles, Semiramide and Nino make explicit something that was only implicit in other operas involving exceptional women: she appropriates his power and masculinity, leaving him to such “feminine” pursuits as making love. The exchange of both gender and power is further emphasized in cross-dressing: the queen becomes king and the king is feminized.

The irregular representations of gender for Nino and Semiramide are balanced in this work by a character who offers a more conventional view of femininity: the slave girl and princess Iside/Elvida. An ancestor of the Egyptian Aida, albeit with none of her nationalistic aspirations, Iside falls in love with Nino after she has been captured by the Assyrians. She sings in praise of her physical and emotional bondage—the “double knots of iron and faithfulness that encircle her soul and her feet.” Unlike the “inhuman” Calisto who relishes freedom and extols her liberty, Iside praises her “adored slavery” (*adorata servitù*), extolling the laces that tighten around her. “I don't want liberty,” she proclaims.

For Iside's aria, Ziani establishes a completely joyful affect, representing her happiness despite her somewhat dubious predicament. Beginning with an extensive ritornello, her C-major aria is set in a lilting triple meter with ample melismatic expansion so as to portray her spontaneous expression of joy, while the images of slavery are presented with text painting. A charming, twisting melisma decorates the ties that bind her; doubled note values illustrate the double knots, and turns represent the tightening and encircling of

the irons. Another melisma joyfully depicts her repeated declaration that she does not desire liberty. Closure is attained with the repetition of the brief refrain (*adorata servitù*), expanded and highly ornamented, with the hemiola effect driving toward the final cadence. Iside is not the only one comfortable in her subservient role. In this instance the composer's successful setting demonstrates his own overall ease with her character and situation, and he has little difficulty finding a pleasing musical means with which to depict her.

Ziani is even more successful with Iside's most tragic moment, her act 1 lament. Notably, this lament is inspired by an ambiguous dramatic situation: she has not actually been abandoned by her lover Nino, but rather by a jealously enraged Semiramide in male attire.⁴⁸ To represent Iside's anger, despair, and suicidal inclinations Ziani provides a recasting of the old-fashioned recitative-style lament of the prototypical lamenting heroine (see ex. 30). The marriage of old and new procedures, however, is striking. Unlike Monteverdi or Cavalli, he does not portray Iside's emotional volatility with a nuanced shaping of the vocal line to match the rhythms of the text; rather, her various emotions are represented by metrical shifts that allow for the juxtaposition of contrasting affects, underlined by abrupt excursions to *durus* sonorities. The notion of lament, for example, is immediately signaled at the outset with Iside's cry to the gods by the descending tetrachord in the bass between *e* and *B* (mm. 1–4) and the ascending fourth and descending half-step (mm. 3–4) for the Phrygian cadence on *B*. With a rapid change of mood—and meter—this move toward lyricism suddenly breaks off: with shifting accents Iside cries in disbelief “this was not Nino, this was not the king of Assyria” over a now ascending tetrachord between *e* and *a*. (The audience, of course, would probably have been torn between amusement and sympathy; they knew that it wasn't Nino!) Despair and disbelief change to anger (m. 8). This second mood is marked by the return to 3/2 meter and a shift to *durus* sonorities: the downward leap of a diminished octave in the bass is followed by another ascending tetrachord (mm. 8–11), leading to a new tonal area (D major) and exploration of the upper register for the vocalization on the word “sdegno.” This moment of anger reverts to depression: both melody and bass descend, culminating in another Phrygian cadence, now on *F#* (m. 17). Thus having moved to the sharpest tonal area in the opera, Iside contemplates Nino's change of affections.⁴⁹

The next mood change is signaled by yet another metrical shift—the fifth thus far. Iside now sings in a generously lyrical 3/4 aria style (m. 24 ff.), questioning the sanity of those who believe in love. Ziani's placement of the extended melisma on the word “volante” (flying) in measures 31–37 is a predictable imitative gesture, but the burst of emotion at precisely this moment—the acceleration, expansion of range, use of disjunct melodic motion in the coloratura passage—provides an apt release of tension and a moving musical climax to the lament. Atypically, he resists Noris's indications for an

Iside:

Nu - mi, stel - le, ch'in - te - si: e non fu Ni - no,

6 Non fu Re del-l'As - si - ria Quel, ch'ar - ma - to di sde -

11 - gno Fe - ce qui del mio cor lu -
[Amor]

15 di - brio in - de - gno. Co - me, co - me da sé di -

19 ver - so Can - giò af - fet - ti, e de - si - ri, e ar - ma - to

22 d'i - ra, Lun - gi da chi a - do - ro vol - se le pian - te? Ah ben

Iside: Divinities, stars, what is happening? That was not Nino, / that was not the King of Assyria / who, armed with disdain / made an unworthy laughingstock of my love. / How, so unlike himself, did he change affections and desires, / and armed with anger, / so distant from him whom I adore, make me cry? / Ah, how crazy are those who believe in the flying god [Cupid]! / But that cruel judge of Hell has cruelly destined me to languish, to die.

EXAMPLE 30. Ziani, *La Semiramide*, ACT 1, SCENE 11: Iside: "Numi, stelle" (fols. 25v-26r).

(continued)

25

fol - le, chi cre - de, ah ben fol - le, chi

30

cre - de al di - o vo - lan - - - -

34

- - - - - te.

38

Ma qual giu - di - ce d'A - ver - no a lan - guir, a mo -

41

rir cru - del - men - te, cru - del - men - te mi de - sti - na.

EXAMPLE 30. (*continued*)

aria to conclude the scene, opting for what might be regarded as a more “realistic” ending: a recitative expressing quiet despair and resignation.⁵⁰ Ziani’s treatment of Iside is a conventional portrayal of the female response to abandonment or unrequited love. The result is both musically and dramatically satisfying, though not without some awkwardness, conforming to accepted standards for the representation of female suffering and virtue. Although this is Iside’s only recitative lament, she will spend much of the opera exalting or despairing in her love with a series of lyrical and often moving arias that unequivocally define the parameters for appropriate female self-expression. The virtuous Iside inspires some of Ziani’s best music in the opera.

“BEARING THE SPIRIT OF A MAN AND
WEARING THE CLOTHES OF HER SON . . .”

We have seen the ways in which the characterizations of Nino and Semiramide contradict normal expectations with regard to the musical and dramatic representation of their respective genders. However, in the opera, their exchange of roles is not merely metaphorical: they actually spend the majority of the opera dressed in each other’s clothing, assuming the identity of the “wrong” (or perhaps “other”) gender, deceiving other characters while at the same time playing to a knowing audience. On the surface, this offers a kind of symmetry not exploited in Faustini’s libretto for *La Calisto*. For Giove, the taking of Diana’s identity—and perhaps her body as well—was a means of seducing Calisto and demonstrating masculine power. Calisto and Diana had no such mobility: the separate spheres of Arcadia all but guaranteed the women’s isolation from the realm of the beasts or male gods. But the plot of *La Semiramide* goes a step further by exploring the consequences of a symmetrical exchange of gender: what happens when both men and women invade each other’s territory. Or, to put it another way, we are left wondering what kind of access a cross-dressed woman might have to masculine society, particularly when she possesses the vices and virtues associated with Semiramis. How does that compare with or influence Nino, the male transvestite? And, more importantly for our purposes, what are the musical ramifications of the exchange?

Noris’s text for Semiramide’s first cross-dressed aria emphasizes her legendary dualism. Two champions fight in her breast, love and war, representing her feminine and masculine tendencies, respectively. Her militant urges are restrained by passion; the inspiration of the trumpet is quieted by the lover’s cheek. This is by no means an unconventional sentiment, though it is one more commonly expressed by male characters, who are more often torn between love and war. The composer may well be merely responding to the imitative possibilities suggested by the individual words, yet the result is an aria in which a series of highly contrasting, individualistic ideas follow one another with little overall coherence (see ex. 31). The light syncopated

Semiramide:

Due cam-pio - ni fie - ri e spie - ta - ti

3
Di stra-le ar-ma-ti M'ar - do-no il sen. Due cam-pio - ni

6
fie - ri e spie - ta - ti Di stra-le ar-ma-ti M'ar - do-no il sen.

9
Mi vuol Mar - te tra le _____ ban - die - re.

11
A-mor mi fre-na, a-mor mi fre-na per lu - ci ne -

14
Adagio
- re. E se la trom - - - -

Semiramide: Two champions fierce and ruthless, / armed with arrows / burn in my breast. / Mars beckons me with war flags, / love restrains me with dark eyes. / And if the trumpet gave me courage, / the cheek of a certain face restrains my steps.

EXAMPLE 31. Ziani, *La Semiramide*, ACT 1, SCENE 9; Semiramide: "Due campioni" (fols. 22v-23r).

17

20

23

26

- ba cor-rag-gio mi diè, La guan-cia d'un vol-to m'è re -

- - - - - mo-ra al piè, la guan-cia d'un vol-to m'è

re - - - - - mo-ra al piè.

EXAMPLE 31. (*continued*)

character and clipped phrases as well as the key of G major are associated with the militaristic Semiramide, contrasting with the metrically regular cadences and E minor with which she expresses her amorous urges. Mars, for example, rules Semiramide with the flourish of his war banners (m. 10). Yet, the force of love literally stops the flow of the aria: after a sequential repetition of the phrase “Amor mi frena” (love restrains me), love itself is described by an extended melisma that sensually illustrates the lover’s dark eyes. At the rare tempo indication, *adagio*, Semiramide gives herself over to the warrior within, singing the trumpet’s call to war with a highly virtuosic coloratura enlivened with a dotted *guerriero* gesture over a G pedal (mm. 15–20). By measure 21, she returns to a softer, more sensual style of expression in the extended melisma on the word “remora,” exploring the

upper register now with a series of sigh-like motives. Only this final phrase is repeated; but the repetition does little to alter the sense of disjunction created by the sharp contrast in musical ideas. Love and war—feminine restraint and masculine aggression—are thus presented in an uncomfortable truce with an incoherent representation of affect and unstable key. Semiramide's combination of male and female characteristics removes her from the acceptable realm of behavior for either men or women, and consequently there is no conventional model for Ziani to rely on.

Semiramide's other arias in disguise also demonstrate the ways in which poet and composer both struggled to accommodate the contradictory implications of her cross-dressed character. In act 2, scene 10, for example, she has just become suspicious that her lover Ireo may be having an affair with her son's lover Iside. This is a result of a comic scene of mistaken identity played in the garden at night in which the two abandoned lovers (Iside and Ireo) lament their fate in a striking parody of an invocation scene. All the while they are observed by the disguised Nino and Semiramide, who assume that their two lovers are instead bemoaning their love for each other. Semiramide, still in her manly disguise, confronts Ireo, unsure as to what approach to take. On the one hand, she is compelled to silence, as any direct accusations might well give away her true identity. On the other hand, the text of the aria tells us that her fury is quieted by feminine weakness: her attraction to Ireo's "locks," which produce lightning bolts that restrain her fury (see ex. 32). In short, it is precisely the same sort of problem expressed in her previous aria: her instinct for masculine action—be it war or vengeance—is necessarily restrained by her passionate, feminine nature.

Ziani's setting only exacerbates the confusion suggested by Noris's text. First of all, he places the first portion of the aria in the unusual meter of 12/8—a meter associated mostly with servant characters—which gives the aria an almost inappropriately cheerful, even pastoral, affect. The question at the end of line 4 is set with a Phrygian cadence (m. 9), propelling the shift to common time. The image of Ireo's locks as bolts of lightning is set apart in recitative, which then explodes into a series of melismas that all too literally depict the chains binding her fury. The aria is strikingly disjointed; the casual and light nature of the 12/8 A section seems to have little in common with the vivid coloratura of the B section. These contrasting styles are put to curious use: Semiramide's eloquence is far less pronounced when speaking of vengeance, and far more expressive when singing of restraint. As in the previous aria, Ziani uses abrupt shifts in affect in a compressed style to represent the dual nature of the travestied Semiramide.

"AS IF HE HAD CHANGED SEX WITH HIS MOTHER . . ."

Semiramide's arias in masculine disguise demonstrate the difficulties of reconciling cultural and biological gender in a musically coherent fashion.

The inconsistent juxtaposition of masculine and feminine gestures, the lack of compelling lyricism, and the inconsistent support for her demonstrations of strength undermine the powerful image that she ostensibly sought to portray. Given the symmetry of the cross-dressed characters, one might expect the same sort of problems in the representation of Nino. Indeed, as the sources suggest, Nino and Semiramide not only looked alike but also presumably sounded alike. Yet, from his first appearance in his mother's dress, it is apparent that composer and librettist have approached this particular problem rather differently in their portrayal of the young king. Rather than emphasizing the inappropriate mixture of male and female characteristics in terms of behavior and affect, they stress the physical and aural incongruity necessitated by Nino's costume and voice. The disguised Nino sings two arias in this scene (1.13). The first is a conventional expression of love. He sings of the happiness he receives from his lover's beautiful eyes, and his eternal devotion to her as long as he has breath in his body. The aria itself is a fairly straightforward setting of a non-problematic text: sweet, lyrical, with a somewhat lilting melody, and little in the way of dissonance or depressive affect—it is far more cheerful and confident than Nino's first aria. The incongruity, however, lies in the intersection between music and drama. First, this is the only one of Nino's arias that appears in the Venice score in soprano rather than alto clef, with the tessitura nearly a fourth higher than that of the majority of Nino's music, in the same tessitura as Semiramide.⁵¹ While we can only guess as to the staging for any of these works, it would appear that Nino's adoption of female clothing and mannerisms might have been played for comedy—perhaps with a singer who was adept at utilizing a falsetto—as might have been the case with Giove and Diana in *La Calisto*. Indeed, the comic implications of the disguise are emphasized in the remainder of the scene, as the counselor Eliso warns Nino about his responsibilities. The gods, Eliso sings, may have given him a face too similar to his mother's; perhaps by wearing feminine garb he will “acquire balanced judgment, observe, and rule.” But just in case he gets caught up once again in love, he should “not let the nude archer remove his skirt.” The humorous implications of Eliso's comment are then made apparent in Nino's subsequent aria. “When the infant Cupid goes naked,” Nino complains in the first strophe, “I don't know how to cover up my ardor. When love becomes a giant, it can't be hidden any more” (see ex. 33). The second strophe is even more explicit:

Fiamma accesa quand'è vorace	When the lit flame is voracious
Erge ad alto fiero rigor.	It rises to a high fierce stiffness.
Non può il seno	My breast
Farsi capace	Cannot handle
De l'incendio, che strugge 'l cor.	The fire that battles in my heart.

Nino's language could not be more suggestive. Eliso's warning about keeping his skirt on, as it were, leads Nino to demonstrate to the audience one

Semiramide:

Qui ti vo-glio pen-sie-ro a - man - te. Tu ri -

sol - vi, tu ri - sol - vi che deg - gio far?

Ven - di - car - mi del-l'in - co - stan - te, ven - di - car - mi del-l'in - co -

stan-te, O ta - cer, o non par - lar? O ta - cer, o non par -

lar? — Ah no, quel crin, che ful - gi-do ba - le -

- na, Tut - te le fu - rie mie le -

Semiramide: Here, lovesick mind, / resolve what I must do. / Do I take revenge on the inconstant one? / Speak or be silent? / Ah, no, those locks that dazzle like lightning bolts / bind and chain my fury.

EXAMPLE 32. Ziani, *La Semiramide*, ACT 2, SCENE 10: Semiramide: "Qui ti voglio" (fol. 54r-v).

14
ga, le - ga, e in-ca-te -

17
na, tut - te le fu - rie mie le -

19
- ga, le - ga, e in - ca - te -

21
- - - - - na.

EXAMPLE 32. (*continued*)

way or another that his costume hides a virile organ ready for action. Ziani expresses this with a galliard-like aria that might well have inspired a comic staging that played on the absurdity of Nino's attire.

What is particularly striking here, however, is the apparent difference in the treatment of the gender exchange for the two characters. For Semiramide, the mixture of masculine and feminine gestures necessarily pervades the aria's affective surface and profoundly changes her rhetorical style. As mentioned above, the mixture of aggressive gestures and more passive sigh motives in "Duo campioni" and the curious metrical/affective shifts in "Qui ti voglio" express her vacillation between masculine and feminine traits, which have less to do with biology than behavior. Nino's gender incon-

Nino:

Se va nu - do cu - pi - do in - fan - te Il mio ar-do - re co -

4

prir non so, il mio ar-do - re co - prir non so. Quan-do a-mo - re

8

Fat - to è gi - gan - te, Più na - scon - der-lo, più na - scon - der-lo

11

non si può. Quan-do a - mo - re Fat - to è gi - gan - te,

14

Più na - scon - der-lo, più na - scon - der-lo non si può.

Nino: If the infant Cupid goes naked, / I don't know how to cover up my ardor. / When love / becomes a giant / it can't be hidden any more.

EXAMPLE 33. Ziani, *La Semiramide*, ACT 2, SCENE 13: Nino: "Se va nudo" (fol. 2gr).

gruity, however, is handled by an emphasis on his physical endowments—the hard evidence of his masculinity—that lurk beneath his female clothing. Indeed, it may well be the comedy that makes the gender exchange possible, that provides a suitable frame for the abnormal configuration of power and gender in this opera. Moreover, for Nino it appears that the female disguise is what actually helps him to acquire his masculinity. Once he dons his mother's dress, he moves away from the initial characterization of repressed son and closer to that of a powerful king, for whom female clothing becomes increasingly problematic. After this point in the opera, Noris provides Nino with a series of conventional texts that, despite his attire, reinforce rather than negate his heroism. Nino's show of power culminates in the center of act 2 with an elaborate vengeance aria, directed toward his mother's lover Ireo: a full-fledged da capo aria in D major, featuring stunning feats of coloratura and tonally definitive *ritornelli*. Unlike Semiramide, Nino's desire for vengeance is given prominence with considerable virtuosity and instrumental support. He is well on his way to achieving manhood.

This apparent asymmetry in the treatment of the cross-dressed characters is brought into sharp relief in the two most sexually provocative scenes in the opera: as mother and son, still in disguise, sing compromising love scenes with the other's lover. Indeed, it must be remembered that both of these scenes were added by Noris to Moniglia's original libretto, thus heightening the sexual innuendo and play with homoeroticism that occurs with greater frequency in the operas of the second half of the century.⁵² Moreover, the addition of these scenes in *La Semiramide* provides an important gloss on the incest theme that is such a fundamental part of the Nino and Semiramide legend. While the two characters cannot actually make love to each other on the stage, they can, thanks to Noris's revisions, plot both to kill and make love to the other's lover.

Nino's love scene with Ireo occurs in act 3, scene 4. Frustrated at the persistence of his mother's lover, Nino decides to substitute cunning for murder. Through a variety of subterfuges and deceptions, alternating warmth and coldness, accusing Ireo of infidelity with the slave girl, and deftly avoiding physical contact, he achieves his ultimate goal: he persuades Ireo to go behind enemy lines as Semiramide's ambassador in order to offer Nino in marriage to Iside and Semiramide to the enemy Creonte. This is not an easy feat; Ireo resists, as he fears he will actually lose his beloved Semiramide to Creonte.

Ziani's setting of the scene skillfully portrays Nino's complete control over the hapless Ireo with the artful use of simple—but dramatically effective—musical devices (see ex. 34). For example, in measures 14–20, Nino reveals his “immenso ardore”—feigned, of course—over an ascending bass, deflecting Ireo's inevitable embrace with an abrupt downward leap of a diminished octave in the bass from *c'* to *c*♯ (m. 19). He then cleverly moves

14 Nino:

Or, che nel cam-po è pri-gio-nier tra cep-pi, Sco-pro l'im-men-so ar-do-re:

17

T'o-dia-va il lab-bro e ti bra - ma-va il co-re? Io t'ab-bra-cio; ma

20 Ireo: Nino:

no, sei tra-di-to-re. Io tra-di-tor, re-gi-na? E non ap-pel-li tra-di -

23 *a parte*

men-to, o cru-de-le, a-mar la schia - va? (Co-sì in a-mor fui

27

scal-tro; Na-scon-do un fal-lo, e ne di - sco-pro un al - tro.)

31 Ireo:

Que-sto cor, che die-di a te, Co-me d'al - tri es-ser — po-trà?

EXAMPLE 34. Ziani, *La Semiramide*, ACT 3, SCENE 4: Nino and Ireo: "Ireo mio cor," excerpts, mm. 14–33 (fols. 74v–75r).

to an unexpected cadence in F major to distract Ireo from erotic thoughts. Ireo, caught off base by the accusation of infidelity, proclaims his love for "Semiramide" in a brief ABA aria in G minor.

This is no longer the shy young man who was unable to establish a tonic, and who feared the consequences of wearing his mother's clothing. Not only does Nino imitate his mother's assertive melismas, he also manipulates Ireo by harmonic control. While the insecure Ireo finishes his aria with a Phrygian cadence on D, it is Nino who achieves tonal closure for his opponent, boldly switching meter from duple to triple, with mocking asides about sincerity in love. Then, beginning in E-flat major, Nino controls the tonal direction of the ensuing fifty measures of recitative, beginning a harmonic ascent by fifth that culminates in an arrival on E major, thus telescoping, in one brief moment, the entire tonal spectrum of the opera. (Example 35 shows the ascent from F major to E major.)

Moreover, the arrival in the *durus* realm of E major in measure 93 is not only the tonal climax of the scene, it is also the moment in which Nino finally gains Ireo's cooperation and trust. In the ultimate act of duplicity—and humorous play with homoerotic innuendo—Nino offers Ireo his right hand and assures him that he will become his wife "if at all possible." Nino may be willing to flirt provocatively with Ireo, but he ultimately confirms his heterosexuality with a florid ABA aria that concludes the scene. Fate, he declares, will not betray him. Today is the day he will enjoy pleasure with Iside.

For Semiramide, whose reputation with regard to sexual matters was somewhat more problematic, composer and librettist handle the similarly provocative situation differently. In act 3, scene 7, Semiramide is still languishing in the Babylonian prison, condemning her incarceration with bold declarations in *versi sdrucchioli*. Iside, who is actually the daughter of Semiramide's captor Creonte, arrives only to find her beloved "Nino" in chains, and then proceeds to tempt "him" with the prospect of release should "he" be willing to submit to overtures of love. (Indeed, Iside is more than willing to consider betraying her family and country—despite the vigilance of her frustrated lover Arsace, who witnesses the entire scene.) Semiramide resists

Opposite: Nino: Now that he ["Nino"] is in the field / a prisoner in chains, / I can reveal to you my immense love. / My lips despised you, but my heart desired you. / [Moves to embrace him, then pulls back.] I embrace you, but no, you are a traitor.

Ireo: I, a traitor, queen?

Nino: And don't you call it / treachery, o cruel one, to make love to the slave girl? / (Thus, in love I was clever; / by hiding a fault, I discover another.)

Ireo: This heart, which I gave to you, / how could it belong to anyone else?

65 Nino:

Vat-te-ne al re ne-mi-co, Il re-gio im-pron-to Dal-la mi-a de-stra a-vrai,

68

ra - pi-do vo-la. Di-gli, che se mi ren-de Li-be-ro

70

Ni-no, Il ca-ro fi-glio, io l'of-fro Spo-so ad Elin-da sua fi-glia, e se tra -

73

mu - ta In lac - ci d'I - me - neo fer - re e ri -

75

tor - te, Se-mi-ra - mi a Cre - on - te og - gi è con-sor - te.

78 Ireo: Nino:

E I - re - o? Go - drà, go-drà con-ten-ti (in brac-cio a mor-te).

Nino: Go to the enemy king. / You shall have the royal seal / from my hand; / fly quickly. / Tell him that if he / frees Nino, my dear son, / I will offer him / as husband to his daughter Elinda, and if he exchanges / the bounds of iron for those of marriage / Semiramide will become the consort of Creonte today.

Ireo: And Ireo?

Nino: He will enjoy happiness (in the arms of death).

EXAMPLE 35. Ziani, *La Semiramide*, ACT 3, SCENE 4: Nino and Ireo: "Ireo mio cor," mm. 65-95 (fols. 75v-76r).

81 Ireo: Nino: Ireo:

Qual con-ten - to è al - trui? Tu non pe - ne - tri. T'a-vrà Cre -

84 Nino: Ireo: Nino:

on - te? No. Ti go - drà co - me spo - sa? Es - ser non

87 Ireo:

può. Es - ser non può, se ap-por-ta-tor io so - no Del-le ri-chie - ste

90 Nino: Ireo:

noz - ze? Du - bi - ti di mia fè? Te - mo sven - tu - re

93 Nino:

Dam-mi la de-stra; io giu-ro Se pos-si-bil pur sia d'es-ser - ti mo-glie.

Ireo: What satisfaction is that for others?

Nino: You cannot fathom.

Ireo: Will Creonte have you?

Nino: No.

Ireo: Will he enjoy you as wife?

Nino: That cannot be.

Ireo: Why not, if it is I who will bring about / the desired marriage?

Nino: Do you doubt my faith?

Ireo: I fear misfortune.

Nino: Give me your right hand. I swear / that if it is at all possible, I will be your wife.

EXAMPLE 35. (continued)

Iside:

Vie - ni pu - re, a - ma - to re,

Semiramide:

Se - guo l'or - me

6

vie - ni pu - re D'a - mor la fa -

del tuo piè, se - guo l'or - me del tuo piè

Iside: Come then, beloved king.

Semiramide: I follow in your footsteps . . .

EXAMPLE 36. Ziani, *La Semiramide*, ACT 3, SCENE 7: Iside and Semiramide: “Vieni pure/Seguo l’orme” (fol. 82r).

Iside’s overtures of love, all the while asserting her indomitable strength: “an unconquerable heart does not feel the outrages of fate.” Indeed, her coldness and courageous stance only further excite Iside’s passion; she reveals to Semiramide her true identity. It is this that inspires Semiramide to change her manner. As Iside feigns departure, Semiramide calls her back, using her given name: “Elinda, return; don’t you notice the hot sighs of my inner flame?” Iside returns with her own lyrical cry of ecstasy and the two leave the prison together singing a lilting love duet, in which Semiramide ingeniously uses quasi-imitation to echo Iside’s loving sentiments (see ex. 36).

As in *La Calisto*, Ziani and Noris play provocatively with the possibility of a female same-sex encounter, although this is clearly a case of cross-dressing rather than actual transformation. Again there is a touch of humor: Semiramide responds to Iside’s loving words with some ambivalence, playing along by praising Iside’s beauty, but focusing primarily on escape. Moreover, the asymmetry is once again clear. While in both seduction scenes deception and mistaken identity, as well as gender incongruity, played a

prominent role, only Semiramide and Iside express passion with the single most reliable indicator of sexual desire in seicento opera, the love duet. Semiramide and Iside's vocal lines intertwine in a manner that is undeniably sensual in its implications. Semiramide lives up to her reputation for sexual excess; if she could not make love to her son, this expression of illicit passion for her son's lover may have been as close as operatic conventions might allow.

THE ABDICATION

We have noted that Semiramide's usurpation of Nino's birthright, identity, and gender is eventually resolved in a manner that manages the problem of female power, regardless of the distortion to myth and legend. Thus, although the legendary Semiramis only suffered a single defeat—the stalemate with the Indian king Stabrobates—she is, in her operatic guise, compelled to lose the war, marry the enemy, and abdicate power. Nino, unlike his namesake Ninyas, who languished among the women and eunuchs, must likewise reject the feminization imposed on him by his mother, accept the mantle of power, and prove his virtue by attaining the bride of his choice. Iside, the fortunate slave girl turned princess, is thus rewarded for her demonstration of faith and virtue. As in so much of the opera, the initial symmetry of the cross-dressing/dual-lover plot is altered, much to Semiramide's disadvantage: Nino marries his lover, but Semiramide must reject hers.

The necessity of this sort of conclusion was particularly urgent in the original version of this opera—Moniglia's *La Semirami*—conceived initially to celebrate a political marriage of the Habsburgs. Indeed, in Moniglia's version, the resolution is clear and unambiguous. Nino challenges Semiramide directly, reclaiming his power and masculinity in a single heroic move. "I take off this skirt," he declares, "while I clasp the scepter." He informs Semiramide that he pretended to be a woman only to obey her, while denying his "native courage." From then on, he commands, he will deal with the affairs of war and Creonte, while she must give up her lover so that he can establish peace in Assyria. But, he threatens, if she fails to follow his counsel, he will be to her "no longer son, but king." In this version, Semiramide agrees to marry Creonte, giving up all former claims to power. As Creonte asks for her hand, she urges her soul to "be strong," and tells him: "Se a Nino così piace, ti son serva, e consorte" (If it pleases Nino, I will be your servant and consort.) Order is restored; the war is ended. All four sing together of love, happiness, and the union of their kingdoms through the bonds of marriage. Nino emerges unambiguously as the hero, entering into manhood. His masculinity has been compromised only temporarily and he reclaims it in a highly public fashion. Semiramide is subdued and patriarchal order is restored. The monarchy and royal marriage are exalted.

In Noris's revision of the libretto, however, the conflict between patriarchal and matriarchal power is particularly problematic. He has, after all, created a far more compellingly powerful queen, for whom a voluntary abdication would be decidedly uncharacteristic. This Nino likewise angrily discards his female attire, but in a less public context; moreover, his final challenge to Semiramide is hardly threatening:

Madre,	Mother,
Che qui t'annodi al vincitor regnante,	That you must bind yourself to the ruling conqueror,
Ch'io sia sposo ad Elvida	That I marry Elvida
Oggi è destino,	Is destined today.
Segua la pace, e non s'apponga a	Let peace follow and do not oppose
Nino.	Nino.

When Creonte comes to claim Semiramide's hand, she boldly rebuffs his advances:

Creonte: Tu caderai dal soglio.	Creonte: You will fall from the throne.
Semiramide: Non temo.	Semiramide: I am not afraid.
Creonte: Sei mia sposa!	Creonte: You are my wife!
Semiramide: Io non ti voglio.	Semiramide: I do not want you.

When she finally relents, it is with no genuine change of heart. Instead she recognizes that she has been out-manuevered: only marriage to Creonte will put an end to the war. Acquiescing, she recognizes that she "constructed her own ruin," and in order not to reveal the deception she consents to "smile upon the union"—and applaud Cupid's bow—which will bring peace to the kingdom.

Notably, this is not a conventional *lieto fine*. Semiramide may indicate willingness to abdicate control, but her resistance is nonetheless apparent in her unwillingness to join Creonte in the lyrical expression of joy at their proposed union. After Nino asserts his power by sending the frustrated Ireo back to govern the Suez, Semiramide sings her last words in the opera: "Così impone 'l destin ch'il mondo rege" (thus imposes destiny that rules the world) in an unadorned style. Destiny frowns upon the desires of Semiramide and Ireo, while glorifying those of Nino and Iside, who express their mutual love in a brief lyrical passage. Indeed, it is Iside who gets the final word. Using her always lively and lyrical mode of expression, she concludes the opera with an AB aria that conveys an important message about the pleasures of love and constancy (see ex. 37). Notably, sexual innuendo is still present. In an unmistakable reference to Nino's cupid aria ("I don't know how to cover up my ardor"), Iside declares that there is no one who can discard Cupid's bow and arrow: "I kiss the arrow that has pierced my breast with a mortal wound." In the dance-like concluding section, constancy (mm. 107 ff.) and the love of the young couple emerge victorious.

How then do we regard Noris and Ziani's treatment of the legendary Semiramis? On one hand, as we have seen, Noris's revisions to the libretto are well in keeping with Venice's cynical attitudes toward monarchy. By distorting the moral stature of his primary characters Noris converts heroes to anti-heroes. His libretto questions the very values that the original version sought to glorify: the nobility of the monarchy, the importance of royal marriage, and the inevitability of patriarchal rule. Moreover, his reluctance to suppress Semiramide's legendary strength and sexual danger focuses a cruel light on the consequences of matriarchal power. Ostensibly, Noris's more powerful, more lascivious Semiramide is less easily subjugated and more damaging to the men who surround her. Noris endows her with greater power, but he balances this strength by exaggerating her moral weaknesses and potential threat to men. Indeed, the nature of that threat is quite specific. The exaggerated play with disguise, distortion of gender roles, and "misplaced" seductive activity all vividly play upon contemporary anxieties about the mutability of the sexes. If women behave like men, men can be transformed into women, clearly an unacceptable state of affairs.

At the same time, Semiramide's exceptional nature as an operatic character posed some challenges to the available musical conventions. Ziani, the fluent composer who once boasted of his ability to write an entire opera while traveling in the coach between Venice and Vienna, was hard-pressed to find accepted techniques to portray a woman of her nature. In terms of rhetorical power, she loses the battle for musical superiority to the virtuous Iside. Nino, despite the disguise, gains strength and primacy throughout the opera; but Semiramide's musical representation is less consistent: bursts of virtuosity contrast with moments of indecisiveness, expressed with shifting meters and often unclear affects. Banned from lamentation or expressions of joy and fulfillment in love, it can be no accident that her most lyrical expression of feminine submission is in the form of a love duet, sung in male disguise with the woman who will become her son's wife. Semiramide, despite her extraordinary personality and historical legacy, proves once again that it is female virtue—not the acquisition of male powers—that paves the way to rhetorical prowess.

THE FORTUNATE SLAVE

Despite the fact that Noris and Ziani would go on to write a number of successful operas for the Venetian stage, it would seem that their collaboration on *La Semiramide* was not well received. Ellen Rosand cites a letter to Johann Friedrich, duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, from his secretary in Venice, Francesco Maria Massi, dated 12 December 1670, in which Massi reveals that the first performance of *La Semiramide* the previous evening had not been a success, despite excellent singers.⁵³ While it is all but impossible to discern the true reason for any opera's success or failure, given the peculiar nature of

85 *Iside:*

Non vi sia chi di Cu - pi - do Spez - zi l'ar-co, e la sa -

87

et - ta. Io ba-cio lo

90

stra - le, io ba - cio lo stra - le, Che in se - no m'a -

92

per - se Fe - ri - ta mor - ta - le. Io ba - cio lo stra-le Che in

95

se - no m'a-per - se Fe - ri - ta mor-ta - le Chi vuol

99

gio-ie in a - mor, chi vuol gio-ie in a - mor a - mi,

Iside: There is no one who can / break the bow and arrow of Cupid. / I kiss the arrow / that has pierced my breast / with a mortal wound. / He who wants joy in love / should love with constancy. / He who is not a lover / does not know pleasure.

EXAMPLE 37. Ziani, *La Semiramide*, ACT 3, SCENE 14: *Iside: Conclusion* (fols. 95v-96r).

104

a - mi co - stan -

108

- - - te. Non co -

115

no - sce pia - cer chi non è a - man - te.

EXAMPLE 37. (*continued*)

Semiramide's representation by Noris and Ziani, Massi's comments are particularly suggestive. It is difficult to place the blame entirely on the quality of Ziani's music. Regardless of the critical stance taken by some modern commentators, Ziani was a highly successful and well-regarded composer. He had already written over ten operas for the Venetian stage, as well as several for the court in Vienna during a hiatus from Venice in the latter part of the 1660s. His *L'Antigona delusa da Alceste* (1660; libretto by Aureli), for example, was sufficiently well regarded that it was revived some ten years later. Moreover, he quickly followed *La Semiramide* with two more operas for the Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo, *Heraclio* in the same season and *Attila* the following year, both of which share musical and dramatic features with *La Semiramide*. These operas are not dissimilar: they feature anti-heroic male characters, mistaken identity, and even gender exchange (albeit with less threatening implications). Ziani's scores always display a mixture of brief and more elaborate arias of varying quality along with a sometimes bland recitative that is frequently enlivened by *ariosi* and metrical shifts.

What then was the reason for *La Semiramide*'s failure? It is perhaps not too fanciful to propose that Semiramide's challenge to the conventional order—her lack of appropriate submission and somewhat incoherent mode of

expression—may have been unpalatable, even for Venetian audiences. Evidence in support of this hypothesis emerges four years later. In 1673, the Teatro SS. Angelo presented yet another opera featuring Semiramide. This one, however, was a far more faithful rendering of Moniglia's original libretto, with minimal revisions by Giulio Cesare Corradi, including much of Cesti's original music and some new arias added by Marco Antonio Ziani, Pietro's nephew. What is most striking is the change of title from *La Semiramide* to *La schiava fortunata*.⁵⁴ The new title is indicative of an important change of focus away from the problematic Semiramide to the happy fortunes of a virtuous slave girl who rejoices in her slavery, laments her abandonment, and submerges all desires except those that concern her lover Nino. It is this version that traveled to numerous other Italian cities, probably providing the impetus for the many subsequent Semiramide operas. Indeed, perhaps we should not be surprised that like so many other threatening women in myth and history, Noris and Ziani's *La Semiramide* would soon find herself abandoned.

Chapter 7

Messalina *la Meretrice* *Envoicing the Courtesan*

STAGING VENUS

He who praises the female sex lives greatly deceived. Women have always been (I speak only of the bad ones, with no prejudice against the good ones) the corrupters of mankind and the infection of nature. Woman is the inventor of sin, and the road paved with death. She is an infernal volcano that outwardly offers snow that entices, but inside hides fire that burns. She is the devilish spring that flatters with flowers but conceals serpents. She is the unlucky comet that delights the eyes with splendor, but presages death for the mind; she is a disguised witch that under a benign appearance conceals dreadful harpies. She is a tragic theater, where, as in a majestic apparatus, one sees the death of hearts.¹

BONAVENTURA TONDI, *La femina origine d'ogni male; overo, Frine rimproverata* (1687)

In 1687 Bonaventura Tondi, an abbot and the royal chronicler of the town of Gubbio, published a book entitled *La femina origine d'ogni male; overo, Frine rimproverata*. Tondi's slim volume, the opening passage of which is cited above, is perhaps one of the most virulent contributions to the debates about women published in seventeenth-century Venice. Written nearly a century after Giuseppe Passi's *I donneschi difetti* and some fifty years after the height of Incogniti influence in Venice and the arrival of public opera there, Tondi's treatise surpasses nearly all of his predecessors in its brutality and unequivocal anti-female message.

Tondi's use of Frine (Phryne) in the title clarifies the nature of the evil and the type of woman in question. Phryne was a notorious courtesan in fifth-century Athens, famous for her beauty and lascivious nature, her insistence upon monetary rewards for sexual favors, and her congress with Greece's most learned philosophers.² As the mistress of the sculptor Praxiteles and the model for his statues of Aphrodite—in which he presumably captured the depth of his passion—Phryne was also renowned for

her utter physical perfection: a frozen image of love itself that incites desire and is forever inaccessible. The Greek sources provide a marvelously ambivalent picture of Phryne's attractions. As the model of Aphrodite of Cnecias, she gained that city everlasting fame; she was also the inspiration for Apelles' painting "Aphrodite Anadyomene." Her beauty presumably transcended even the eloquence of the most able rhetoricians: condemned to death as a courtesan for various impieties, she was defended by the great orator Hyereides, who dispensed with speeches and revealed her breasts to the jury, who subsequently acquitted her.

Tondi's invocation of courtesan imagery to open his diatribe against the female sex is both provocative and timely. The publication of his book coincides with a similar preoccupation with erotic and licentious women in the operas of the preceding decade, of which *Messalina* is a quintessential representative. On the surface this seems to be an exclusively operatic phenomenon. Some commentators have associated the increased operatic interest in explicit erotica with the decaying of the genre: the pandering to audience taste, the demands of singers and virtuosity, the continued search for novelty—what Ellen Rosand has described as an overripening of a genre that had become a victim of its own popularity.³ This attitude is reflected in the increasingly self-critical stance of those involved in the opera industry. By 1667 Cristoforo Ivanovich, the chronicler of Venetian opera, laments the change in taste as a result of a decrease in the involvement of nobles in the production and reception of opera—in particular, a shift in the fragile balance between pleasure and edification.⁴ There is certainly some truth to these charges; in these years the genre seems more self-referential, more aware of its own history, while the encounters between opera and the ancient sources are perhaps less vital, less spontaneous than in works discussed in the previous chapters. Internal political and economic forces may also have taken a toll on the opera industry. Alternately buoyed and deflated by Turkish wars, torn by the conflicting demands of maintaining an empire on *terra ferma* and at sea, a more anxious Venice may have been inclined both to exploit and to decry the kind of sensual freedom and carnivalesque excess that had so long been part of her allure.⁵

A striking feature about *Messalina* and so many other operas of the period is the extent to which this carnivalesque excess spills onto the stage itself, dissolving the boundary between audience and proscenium in often unexpected ways. With the opening of the luxurious Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo in 1678, just two years before the premiere of *Messalina*, the Grimani family found an operatic equivalent for the conspicuous consumption that was always so much more apparent during carnival. Irene Alm has described the ways in which the Venetian ball—the *fiesta di ballo* that the Grimani brothers ingeniously staged in the actual theater on the final night of carnival—became a fixture in the operas.⁶ While the *fiesta di ballo* may have been a natural way to integrate operatic and carnival spectacle, in

other instances the sudden intrusion of masked characters and carnival processions into the operas is far more haphazard. The Venetian carnival processions that appear at unexpected moments in the midst of the Piazza del Popolo in Rome (*Messalina*), in front of the Athenian Senate (*L'Alcibiade*), or on the streets of Sidon (*Alessandro Magno in Sidone*) illustrate the fluid boundaries between the stage and the streets of Venice, and demonstrate the extent to which this quintessentially Venetian entertainment was regarded as an extension of the Republic herself.

Both Ivanovich's criticisms about opera's lack of nobility and Tondi's condemnation of Phryne and her sisters underline the extent to which a variety of anxieties transcended the confines of the operatic stage, engaging the somewhat precarious condition of Venice's self-image in the latter part of the century. For Ivanovich, as we may recall, the fortunes of the opera industry were intrinsically bound up with those of Venice herself; concerns about opera seem to have absorbed more profound fears about the waning influence of the Venetian aristocracy. For Venetian consumers of printed books and opera, writings such as Tondi's treatise may likewise have made explicit the connection between the corruption on the stage and on the streets; or, in other words, the link between badly behaved emblematic women and Venice's own decaying female icon.

Strikingly, Bonaventura Tondi makes this link explicit in the opening paragraphs of his treatise by using both theatrical and political metaphors to describe Phryne's evil. In the passage cited above, he describes Phryne and her brand of female evil as a "tragic teatro" wherein one sees represented "the death of hearts." Like Ferrante Pallavicino and Paolo Botti, who used a similar literary device to describe Poppaea's face, Tondi blurs the line between theater and women, suggesting that those women fashioned in Phryne's image are themselves theatrical events: stages upon which pass a series of illusions, costumes, sets, and eloquent speeches that both dazzle and deceive the viewer. Tondi's admonitions also remind us of the theatrical implications of the many sumptuary laws directed by Venetian authorities with such vehemence at Venice's prostitutes.⁷ Considerable effort was devoted to removing courtesans from public display on the Grand Canal and to preventing them from attending church on major festivals and wearing clothing and veils associated with noble women or novices. Prostitutes were also forbidden to adorn themselves with pearls or to have access to certain luxurious fabrics or clothing, and by the third quarter of the century laws were enacted requiring them to wear masks at the theaters and casinos. The fear, it would seem, is that women of this sort would use props, costumes, and even the appearance of chastity and nobility in order to create an artificial realm that would inevitably result in tragedy. Moreover, as Tondi emphasizes, this sort of female theatrical display had profound political ramifications. "Women," he reminds us in another paragraph, are "the poison of the world," whose influence causes men to lose their glory and splen-

dor, damaging political institutions. "The virtue and the sword that were preserved in prudent times for political preservation and the sacred principles of the Republic," he observes, "must now relinquish their triumphs and zeal. One beauty is enough is corrupt a flourishing senate and infest the glories of the [Roman] capitol."⁸

Tondi's condemnation of the courtesan as both a theatrical and a political entity thus closes the circle that joins Venetian opera to Venetian politics and invokes the Venus–Virgin dichotomy upon which Venetian mythology rested so precariously during the second half of the seventeenth century. Phryne and her colleagues both on and off the opera stage come to symbolize the promotion of Venus and the decay of the Virgin half of the icon. Ivanovich's anxieties seem more than justified. Venice, whose opera industry and urban spaces provided a theater for the world, is thus corrupted, both literally and figuratively.

OPERATIC COURTESANS

The courtesan is the most visible symbol of this slippage between life and theater in seventeenth-century Venice. Featured prominently in any number of sixteenth-century comedies, discourses, prints, and canzone, the Venetian prostitute was a readily available figure in popular erotic culture, with a well-understood set of character traits that opera could easily absorb. Indeed, as we have seen with *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, there is certainly a precedent for the use of courtesan-like figures in opera, especially in those instances in which the ancients reported events compatible with contemporary social practices. However, the operas of the late 1670s and early 1680s exploited a particular type of heroine: the lascivious, promiscuous, and intelligent woman—usually juxtaposed with a foolish, tyrannical ruler—who embodied those qualities associated with both the courtesan and the more negative aspects of Venus as Venice. Unlike Semiramis or even Dido, whose sexual danger was in part a result of a usurpation of male endowments and accomplishments, the courtesan-like women in the operas of the later 1670s and early 1680s were drawn to female vices rather than male virtues. While these women may or may not have sought power for themselves, their primary purpose was to seduce men away from the paths of virtue, to damage their reputation, and to consort with other men who threatened the patrilinear succession or political structures. As noted earlier, the implications of such transgressions for contemporary Venetians were apparent in the persistent and often illogical intrusions of Venetian carnival into opera: balls, gaming, masquerades, and carnivalesque plotting.

Among the many examples of such women in Venetian opera during this period is Alinda, the heroine of Adriano Morselli's *Candaule*, set by Pietro Andrea Ziani for the 1679–80 season at the Teatro SS. Giovanni e Paolo. Morselli's libretto treats a well-known episode from Herodotus (*Histories*,

1.8–12), which was also reported by Plato. The fulcrum of this story is, as in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, an erotic triangle: Candaules, who ruled Persia until approximately the year 672 B.C., sowed the seeds of his own destruction by “falling in love with his own wife” and revealing her naked beauty to his most trusted aide, Gyges. Upon discovering her husband’s attempt to shame her, Candaules’ wife calls Gyges to her and threatens to have him killed if he does not kill Candaules and rule Persia at her side. In Morselli and Ziani’s opera, Candaule’s wife Alinda takes Gige as her lover and the two plot to murder and deprive Candaule of his kingdom.⁹ Eventually, an angry mob murders Candaule, and Alinda marries Gige, with the blessing of Imeneo, god of marriage. Indeed, the immorality of the ending of *Candaule* is in some respects reminiscent of *Poppea*. In this case, however, it is the tyrant, rather than the abandoned empress, who is eventually punished.

The same year featured the infamous Thais in pursuit of Alexander the Great in Aurelio Aureli and Marco Ziani’s *Alessandro Magno in Sidone* (Venice, 1679). Most notable is Aureli’s description of Taide as a “famous woman” who is both “lascivious and interesting,” and the *argomento* likewise emphasizes the connection between female lasciviousness and intelligence: young King Eumene was utterly fascinated with Taide, the most “interesting and wise woman living at that time.” Taide uses her sexuality to gain power, discarding the effeminate Eumene for the more appealing Alessandro Magno. Yet, unlike the *effeminato re* Eumene or his counterparts, Alessandro Magno resists all temptations and banishes the beautiful, interesting, and lascivious Taide. Alexander’s greatness, in this case, derives not merely from his undisputed strength in battle. Rather, he is praised primarily because of his ability to resist this most fascinating and seductive of all women.

A still more vivid example of courtesan imagery and carnivalesque leakage can be seen in Aureli’s final libretto, *L’Alcibiade* (1680), set by Marco Antonio Ziani. The courtesan figure in this libretto is none other than Phryne herself, the Greek courtesan whose debauchery embodied Tondi’s complaints about the female sex. Notably, Frine is constructed unambiguously as a courtesan. She is shown in the opening scene of the opera refusing the attentions of the frustrated Praxiteles—the sculptor of Aphrodite—because he is unable to pay her fee. She is also the lover of the notorious Alcibiades, a point of friction in the ambiguous relationship between Alcibiades and Socrates. Indeed, Aureli’s libretto deals at once with a number of familiar aspects of Venetian sexual obsessions: a satirical representation of prostitution, made explicit in Frine’s disdain of love and desire for money, is juxtaposed with the sexual license and homoeroticism associated with the dissolute Alcibiades.

This chapter traces the representation of a woman who easily straddles the differing worlds of carnival, imperial politics, and opera: the Roman empress Messalina, the unfaithful wife of the emperor Claudius. Her literary–historical reputation presents intriguing elements in the context of Venice

and Venetian opera: eventually put to death for her infidelities, the mother of Octavia and Britannicus played a central role in yet another Tacitist narrative on the failings of empire in the context of uncontrolled female sexuality. A familiar focus for carnal fantasies in the early modern period, associated with unmitigated pleasure and an unquenchable sexual appetite, Messalina belongs to the darker, erotically charged underbelly of the humanist tradition that had been so readily adapted in the service of Incogniti ideals. She is also among the most inherently theatrical of the badly behaved women of myth and history, meshing private and public in a manner that challenged the principles of Venetian public life. As an operatic heroine making her debut in the 1680 carnival season, Messalina is in many respects the embodiment of the corruption inherent in the shifting image of the female icon *Venetia*. She is the mistress of illusion and artifice, devoted to excess and display, with utter control over the inversions of power and gender inherent in carnival. But what is perhaps surprising is the extent to which this Messalina also epitomizes the now familiar contradiction between the requirements of female virtue—chastity and silence—and the seductive power of song as a vehicle for female eloquence. For while Messalina may control the visual and narrative spheres of this opera, it is in the realm of rhetoric—the art of singing—that she is most challenged, confined to an affectively neutered harmonic and melodic sound world in which sexuality and eloquence stand diametrically opposed.

HISTORY, SATIRE, AND SPECTACLE

In chapter 4, we considered some of the operatic and non-operatic uses of Tacitus in mid-seventeenth-century Venice, and their significance for understanding aspects of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. The representation of Octavia—her evocation of Agrippina's political policies, her austerity, and lack of erotic appeal—revealed much about the relationship between politics and sexuality, woman and empire. Her characterization demonstrated the ultimate failure of the female voice in the public sphere. With the triumph of Poppea, reason of state gave way to reason of desire; political will is subsumed by the erotic fulfillment that is manifest in the sumptuous sonic realms of Monteverdi's most sensual duets, whether sung by Nerone and Poppea or Nerone and Lucano.

Messalina's varied representations engage a somewhat different aspect of the Tacitist tradition exploited in seicento Venice, although the tension between female sexuality and politics is ever present. First, there is again the question of sources. Unlike that of any of her Roman contemporaries—Agrippina, Poppaea, and Octavia—Messalina's representation is complicated by a complex existence in the ancient sources: she is a historical figure in the writings of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius and a model of

insatiable desire in the satires of Juvenal. Thus, while her crimes are no less fraught with political consequences than those of Poppaea or Agrippina, her presence in the public arena is even more tainted by the ever-present specter of sexual misdeeds, excess, and unquenchable desire.

Let us consider the basic “facts” of Messalina’s crimes as reported by Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius. Messalina, although married to the emperor Claudius, celebrates a public marriage with Gaius Silius, an aide to Claudius, and is subsequently put to death either by Narcissus and his henchmen (according to Tacitus and Suetonius) or Claudius himself (Dio Cassius).¹⁰ Notably, among all the lurid details included in Tacitus’s description of imperial excess, it is in this particular episode that the historian reveals his greatest sense of shock and outrage, anticipating (and encouraging) the disbelief of his reader.

It will seem fantastic, I know, that in a city where nothing escapes notice or comment, any human beings could have felt themselves so secure. Much more than that, on an appointed day and before invited signatories, a consul-designate and the emperor’s wife should have been joined together in formal marriage—“for the purpose of rearing children”: that she should have listened to the diviners’ words, assumed the wedding-veil, sacrificed to the gods; that the pair should have taken their places at a banquet, embraced, and finally spent the night as man and wife. But I am not inventing marvels. What I have told, and shall tell, is the truth. Older men heard and recorded it. (*Annals*, 11.27)

What Tacitus describes with such horror is an act of public defiance rather than private passion, with legal and political ramifications. Messalina’s marriage to Gaius Silius engaged both civic and religious rituals and authorities; it was enacted in a public space; it was intended to produce children whose claims for legitimacy would certainly have threatened the imperial lineage. Indeed, Tacitus is quite clear about the ways in which this differed from ordinary adultery. He recounts, for example, how the freed slave Narcissus contrived to have Claudius’s own concubines Cleopatra and Calpurnia be the first to break the news of Messalina’s infidelity, before he informed Claudius of her many infidelities:

I must excuse my earlier silences about Vettius Valens, Plautius Lateranus, and the like . . . *But are you aware that you are divorced?* Nation, senate, and army have witnessed her wedding to Silius. Act promptly, or her new husband controls Rome! (*Annals*, 11.30)

All the sources embellish the description of this essentially public act of treason with a discourse about the dangers of illicit sexuality and unquenchable libidinous appetite. Tacitus first describes Messalina’s infidelities as a distraction from the usual imperial activities: the new and “maniacal” love affair with Gaius Silius, Claudius’s consul-designate, thus prevented

her from initiating the appropriate precautions that might have kept the always ambitious Agrippina the Younger from plotting her next moves (Tacitus, *Annals*, 11.12). Her adultery was “going so smoothly that she was drifting, through boredom, into unfamiliar vices” (*Annals*, 11.26). From Dio Cassius, for example, we learn that it was not enough for Messalina to be an “adulteress and harlot” but that “in addition to her shameless behavior in general she at times sat as a prostitute in the palace herself and compelled other women of the highest rank to do the same . . .” (*Dio’s Roman History*, 61.31.1–2). Juvenal elaborates on the link between Messalina and prostitution in his sixth and longest satire—a catalog of immoral Roman wives—focusing not only on her delight in degradation but the physiological manifestations of her insatiable desire:

Are you disturbed by Eppia’s doings in a private household?
 Look at our quasi-divinities; think of what Claudius had to
 endure. As soon as the wife perceived her husband was sleeping,
 she would steal away from him, taking with her a single maid,
 and actually bear to prefer a mat to her bed in the palace.
 The imperial harlot (did not blush)
 to don a hooded cloak at the dead of night.
 No, with a yellow wig concealing her raven locks,
 she made for a brothel warm with the stench of a much-used bedspread,
 and entered an empty cell (her own). Undressing, she stood
 there
 with gilded nipples under the bogus sign of “The She-wolf,”
 displaying the womb which gave the lordly Britannicus birth,
 She smilingly greeted all who entered, and asked for her
 “present.”
 Then, when the brothel’s owner allowed the girls to go home,
 she lingered as long as she could before closing her cell
 and sadly leaving, still on fire, with clitoris rigid.
 At last she returned, exhausted, but not fulfilled, by her men;
 and with greasy grimy cheeks, and foul from the smoke of the lamp,
 she carried back to the emperor’s couch the smell of the whorehouse.
 Why should I tell of philters, spells, and deadly concoctions
 given to stepsons? Women commit more serious crimes
 at the *bidding* of sex; lust itself is the least of their sins.
 (Satire 6, lines 114–35)¹¹

Thus, Messalina’s *public* act of treason—the marriage to Gaius Silius—is presented as the penultimate episode in a series of progressively perverse *private* debaucheries that begins with the usual vices and ends with a cowardly demise. While the historical reports place most of the blame for all of this on Messalina herself—only Tacitus suggests obliquely that Gaius Silius’s ambition may also have played a role—none credits her with the sort of political acumen that motivated Agrippina’s sexual as well as non-sexual mis-

deeds. Dio Cassius is most explicit about this link between private and public: Messalina's sexual appetite was so great, he observed, that in addition to other vices she "conceived a desire to have many husbands, that is, men bearing that title," and suggests that she would have been married by legal contract to all of her lovers had the marriage with Silius not been her undoing (*Dio's Roman History*, 61.31.2–3). In this formulation, uncontrollable female desire is only temporarily sated by conventional adultery: ironically, legal sanction (whether obtained licitly or illicitly) is, for Messalina, a more gratifying perversion. Tacitus takes a similar approach, reporting that she eventually agreed to the legal union with Gaius Silius because of her unquenchable desire: "the idea of being called his wife appealed to her owing to its sheer outrageousness—a sensualist's ultimate satisfaction" (*Annals*, 11.26).

The excess leads to the ceremony, which—as Tacitus describes—was an inherently theatrical spectacle. The wedding was carefully planned and executed, with an elaborate choreography involving both legal and religious ritual, and observed by a captive audience of civic authorities. He emphasizes the bacchanalian quality of the celebration: a feigned grape harvest, streaming hair, a Bacchic wand, and a disreputable chorus (*Annals*, 11.31). Tacitus's expression of disbelief culminated in his hints about the public nature of their consummation of the marriage ("that the pair should have taken their places at a banquet, embraced, and finally spent the night as man and wife"). Juvenal, however, provides the most detailed and dramatically suggestive description of the celebration in his advice to Messalina's new husband:

Decide what advice

you think should be offered to the man who Caesar's wife is determined to marry. He's a fine fellow of excellent birth, and extremely handsome; but the luckless wretch is being swept to his death by Messalina's eyes. She has long been sitting there, all prepared in her flaming veil; a purple bed stands open to view in the grounds. A dowry of a million will be paid in the old, ancestral manner; a priest will come with people to witness the contract. Perhaps you thought all this was a secret known to a few? Not at all; she insists on a proper ceremony. State your decision. Unless you're willing to obey her commands, you must die before dusk.

(Satire 10, lines 329–39)

The description of Messalina's death contrasts markedly with the description of that of her daughter Octavia. Messalina, who was devoid of all decency, had neither the courage to accept the decree of the executioners nor to end her own life. Lepida urged Messalina to accept her execution and "make a decent end"; however, her "lust-ridden heart" did not have such decency, nor did she recognize the seriousness of the situation, even

when the officers arrived. Terrified, unable to kill herself, they finally killed her and left the body with her mother:

Claudius was still at the table when news came that Messalina had died; whether by her own hand or another's was unspecified. Claudius did not inquire. He called for more wine, and went on with his party as usual. (*Annals*, 11.37)

Claudius, woefully oblivious to her infidelities in life, was equally oblivious to the details of her death. Messalina may have transgressed the most basic rules of wifely behavior. But, as numerous commentators were to point out, this was in no small part a result of Claudius's masculine failings and inability to control his household.

MESSALINA IN THE SEICENTO

Seicento writers took several approaches in their criticism of Messalina's evils. Predictably, she was condemned for her sexual excesses and overactive libido. Giuseppe Passi, for example, had used Messalina specifically to argue that women have a greater sexual appetite than men.¹² More often, however, she was used to represent female evil that could never be controlled, contained, or corrected. Indeed, the moral lessons seem to have been intended as much for men as for women; for while there may have been little hope of reforming a woman of Messalina's tastes and inclinations, most authors seem determined that husbands and rulers learn from the tragic fates of Claudius and Gaius Silius. Passi, for instance, had blamed Messalina's promiscuity at least in part on the authority that Claudius had inappropriately conferred upon her: "Claudius called Messalina 'Signora'," he notes; thus he wished to curse all men who called their wives "signore" and humbled themselves in their sight. Because Claudius called Messalina "Signora," other men called her their consort.¹³ If a woman like Messalina is determined to do evil, Passi tells us, even the "walls themselves will corrupt her."¹⁴

The writer Antonio Loredano discusses Messalina extensively in volume 2 of his five-volume set of moral reflections on Tacitus's *Annals* and *Histories*. She appears frequently in his commentary on book 11 of the *Annals*. He regards Tacitus as an important guide for daily life as he "knows how to speak to the hearts of those who read him, and to persuade all those to study him who profess to live a civil life."¹⁵ He begins each commentary with a general observation about some aspect of human behavior and concludes with a Latin quotation and summary from a specific episode in Tacitus that illustrates the moral point. For instance, Messalina's behavior demonstrates the inconstancy of a woman's soul;¹⁶ the danger of living only for the present;¹⁷ that men should always avoid female advice;¹⁸ and the impossibility of being truly loved by an evil woman.¹⁹ Loredano also makes much of the public nature of Messalina's debauchery: the unlawful mar-

riage to Gaius Silius should teach readers that feminine evil will always find a way to show itself in public.²⁰

As perhaps the ultimate representative of an insatiable female sexuality and threat to male authority, Messalina was a particularly fascinating figure for the Incogniti. In the midst of their condemnations of Agrippina, both Ferrante Pallavicino and Federico Malipiero take a few moments to focus on Messalina's evils. In Pallavicino's view, for example, it is Messalina who demonstrated Claudius's gullibility with regard to women:

Messalina was not the first among these [Claudius's wives], but she was the first to give him a clearer experience of the unhappiness of marriage. Her outrages made such display of his humiliations that blushes were no longer enough to cover the deadly pallor of the decaying cadaver that was made of her reputation . . . Miserable are those men who, gifted with a sweet nature, have a temperament dedicated to the love of women, so that under the vile-ness of [the female] sex they leave all their glory trampled, in order to enjoy pleasures, even mixed with deceptions.²¹

And Malipiero is equally negative—Messalina is a woman “of whom a historian cannot write anything either honest or good.” Like Diana (a curious reference), she transformed the emperor into an Actaeon. Because she plotted against her husband in order to give the throne to Silius, both of them merited death.²²

In seicento Venice, the most influential portrayal of the infamous empress was Francesco Pona's *La Messalina*. Indeed, this *novella* provides the essential background for most subsequent portrayals of both Claudius and Messalina. G. F. Loredano, for example, cites Pona along with Aristotle as the primary authorities to support his assertion that since “there is nothing more incontinent, more lascivious, more dissolute, and more promiscuous than a woman,” a woman with only a single lover is essentially chaste.²³ And it was probably Pona's *Messalina* that persuaded Aprosoio not only to refer to Messalina as a “meretrice” but also to praise Juvenal as “veracissimo” (most truthful) in his description of her “heroic actions” in the sixth satire.²⁴

Pona's *novella* follows the historical outline provided by Tacitus, particularly with regard to Messalina's death. The freedman Narcissus is given credit for her final punishment, and Claudius is depicted as ignorant and gullible, willing to hear the truth about Messalina only from his mistresses. Pona, however, looked to Juvenal rather than to Tacitus for details about Messalina's more depraved inner life. Her fantasies were so vivid by day, Pona reports, that they even infected her dreams:

The woman is dark, burning, holding on to her purposes beyond all belief. Messalina, tossing in the turbulence of her thoughts, did not sleep at night; and if she did sleep, Morpheus slept at her side, prompting stirrings in her, robing and disrobing a thousand images that her sexual fantasies during the day had suggested. The more filthy and loathsome they were, the more attentive she was.²⁵

Messalina's fantasies drove her to the acts of debauchery, which, as suggested by Juvenal and Dio Cassius, placed her among the ranks of the lowest *ruffiane*. In considerable detail, Pona describes the ways in which her need for pleasure became an unquenchable thirst that led her to discard her appearance of high birth in order to behave like the lowest prostitutes. In the most blatantly erotic portion of the *novella*, Pona tells us of Messalina's nocturnal visits to a brothel in the ruins of Lupanaria where she serviced upward of forty men a night, only to return to Claudius's bed, with—and he paraphrases Juvenal here—the “burning scent of the lamp on her cheeks.”²⁶

What is striking, however, about Pona's formulation concerning Messalina is his joining of eroticism and moral posturing. On the one hand, his book clearly lies within that blurry territory somewhere between eroticism and pornography. It is easy to see why it was not only one of the most popular but also one of the more frequently banned books of the century.²⁷ On the other hand, the work claims to be a warning to women of the consequences of an overly libidinous nature. The opening makes repeated reference to this presumed audience, urging that women readers learn the lesson from Messalina's fate.

Stop audacious hand; do not touch that which the charmed eye gazes upon. The beauty that dazzles you is ghostly. She that seems to you to be alive, and beckons to talk to you, and to move, is a dead woman. The thunder of unchastity has touched her; and having consumed the entrails of Honesty, has left the face untouched. . . . She is Messalina. . . . Draw near, young maidens: do not flee. Come chaste matrons; and hasten you unwary victim of unclean love, women enveloped in the filth of sensuality. A glance at this face can show you how deformed promiscuity is.²⁸

Pona justifies the eroticism of *Messalina* by explaining it as a work of high moral intent. He argues that only those who are already corrupted will be tempted by Messalina's depravity; those who are pure and chaste will simply be urged by her example to flee such debaucheries. Indeed, for Pona, as for Tacitus, these crimes were but a prelude to that ultimate sin—the public humiliation of Claudius through the marriage with Silius. The crimes of the body may be both arousing and reprehensible, but Messalina's action in marrying Silius while still wed to Claudius threatened the stability of government and society in a way that was irrevocable. As Pona points out in his closing words, Messalina's death at the end of the *novella* was an inevitable result of her unacceptable behavior and provides an important lesson:

Look at her, corrupt world, examine her, o fragile sex, and comport yourself according to the opposite rules; live in a different manner than hers so that you also die differently.²⁹

Pona's book emphasized several issues that were of critical importance to the subsequent representations of Messalina in Venice. First, she was the

personification of the lascivious woman, with unfettered sexuality, who led other women similarly astray. Second, Pona's *Messalina* demonstrates the ways in which the private sins of a woman can profoundly affect the flow of public history. Her sexual appetite—the daydreams that inflamed her dreams—had the power not only to humiliate Claudius on the domestic level, but to undermine fundamentally his political power. This was particularly meaningful for the Venetians. Messalina thus incites the most basic sort of fear—that a woman will deprive a man of his place not only in bed but also in his public role in society. This is an ideal example of the dichotomy of the Baroque, in which the erotic could be used both to arouse and to provide moral instruction.

MESSALINA AS THEATER

In our discussion of Messalina's daughter Ottavia in chapter 4, we touched on the first explicitly dramatic treatment of Messalina in Venice with *La Messalina*, the first of two surviving plays (out of a planned trilogy) written by Pietro Zaguri. Like Pona's *novella*, Zaguri's play is based primarily on Tacitus's historical account. The special nature of Messalina's presence, however, is apparent in the context of this narrative concerned with the political ambition of Agrippina the Younger and the consequences of *ragione di stato*.³⁰ Zaguri's letter to the reader testifies to Messalina's potency as a theatrical figure:

Here is Messalina, who, against my will as usual, carried by her natural inclinations, made a demonstration of herself, although the black of my ink has rendered her so deformed that she should (as is usual for women) seek to hide herself and fear to let herself be seen in public. In the end, all institutions and all teachings are unable to restrain the natural impulses of one who develops from birth a soul that is completely dedicated to pleasure and lasciviousness. Readers, excuse her failings; and if she lives with shamelessness let her enjoy it, for after a violent death she will return to light.³¹

As noted in chapter 4, Zaguri's prose plays provided a kind of pseudo-op-eratic treatment of pivotal historical events concerning the Julio-Claudians, combining many of the conventions familiar from opera (sleep scenes, laments, comic servants, and the like) with the more abstract political philosophizing possible only in prose. Here, the conflation of varied generic types reveals much about Messalina's unique nature. On the one hand, there is the absence of the *lieto fine*: Zaguri's *La Messalina* is a tragedy—Messalina and her lover Gaius Silius both die at the end.³² On the other hand, it careens toward that tragic ending by means of dramatic and spectacular strategies borrowed from opera—a genre in which the happy ending is a requirement in the seventeenth century. Thus, the catastrophic circumstances of Messalina's death are contained within a seemingly inappropriate

frame. For example, in the context of the tragic conclusion, there is something oddly ironic about the conventional allegorical prologue in which Honor and Lasciviousness debate the possibility of Messalina's return to virtue. More striking still is the important structural role accorded Messalina's pageboy Nino—a misogynist servant with decidedly operatic roots—who concludes the first and second acts with a speech and a canzonetta such as the following: "O the unhappiness of married men, who like snails can never abandon their homes; for if they even dare once in a while to place only their heads outside, they will quickly see themselves sprout horns."³³

Moreover, as suggested in the letter to the reader, Zaguri's construction of the heroine is particularly sensitive to the theatrical implications of the historical and satirical writings about Messalina. In Zaguri's play, it is Messalina only who dreams up the wedding—proposing that she and Silius "join together the title of husband with that of lover." (When Silius asks how she can consider depriving Claudius of his power, she takes an oddly anti-imperial stance and replies that Claudius himself is a usurper and, as such, his power cannot last.) Zaguri saves the unveiling of Messalina's adultery for the infamous public wedding celebration. At the climax of the play, Messalina calls for dinner, wine, dance, and music, with Nino's canzonetta as the primary entertainment. It is at that moment that Narcissus brings Claudius in to observe the wedding feast—and presumably the public lovemaking of Messalina and Silius. In that moment of illicit public display, Claudius not only *sees* the undeniable reality of Messalina's infidelity, but also *hears* the truth about women from Nino's canzonetta: women, he declaims, will never be faithful, because they follow desire rather than faith. Who, he asks, can prevent a woman who does not wish to abstain from loving more than one man? "Ah," he sings, taking on the woman's voice, "the law that gives me only one husband is too difficult to follow. I wish to follow my nature, which makes me love more than one!"³⁴

Claudius, recognizing the truth of the accusations, calls for Messalina's execution; however, as in Tacitus's report, the death sentence is actually carried out by Narcissus. Claudius, obtuse to the end, not only fails to take appropriate action himself, but also actually regrets the loss of Messalina. The page Nino brings everything to a close, declaring the entire proceeding "una scena di funebre spettacolo," and he pessimistically concludes that in life "only death is a certainty."

Nino's canzonetta brings us full circle back to Loredano's pronouncement on the nature of women as expressed in *Le bizzarrie accademiche*. In the midst of this Incogniti discourse on women and *ragione di stato*, Zaguri has provided his audience with a representation of another familiar female model, and recalled Loredano's discourse on the relative chastity of a woman who has one lover. And by finally bringing her to the stage, Zaguri was among the first to capitalize on the implicit theatricality of Messalina's sexual nature.

MESSALINA AS OPERA

By the time the opera *Messalina* (music by Carlo Pallavicino and text by Francesco Mario Piccioli) was presented at the Teatro San Salvatore on 30 December 1679, opera audiences ought to have been ready for a heroine of her nature. We have already seen with *La Semiramide* the extent to which opera increasingly allowed for a more blatant exploration of sexually dangerous women; moreover, Messalina was only one of several erotic women to grace the operatic stage during these years. Nevertheless, the transformation of so notorious a woman as Messalina into an operatic heroine was still difficult. In Zaguri's play, the possibility of a tragic ending allowed for a clearer expression of the moral, despite the profusion of operatic antics: the anti-female position argued in Nino's canzonetta finds realization in the final exposure of Messalina's adultery and her subsequent death. In opera, however, such a moral is more difficult to convey. The requirements of the genre—the happy ending and sympathetic, lamenting women—seem to preclude the appropriate treatment of a woman with Messalina's unambiguous history and reputation.

Perhaps more importantly, there is a musical dilemma that has to do with the handling of Messalina's seductive voice—a problem that is bound up with the stylistic shifts in the operatic genre that were to hold sway for another hundred years. Unlike the rather old-fashioned Pietro Ziani, Carlo Pallavicino belonged to the third generation of Venetian opera composers, in whose works the switch of affective focus from recitative to aria is evident. Pallavicino's characters express themselves almost entirely in *da capo* arias, many of which are highly florid. Given the age-old association of licentiousness with ornate song, the question remains how a character with Messalina's reputation for unfettered sexuality should be represented musically. Her emphatic licentiousness could scarcely be compromised like Semiramide's by unfeminine longings for militaristic glory. Nor, given the stylistic shifts, would her erotic vocalisms be counteracted by more powerful (and essentially chaste) recitative from a virtuous counterpart. Women must be instructed not to comport themselves like Messalina; men must be taught not to allow themselves to be duped like Claudius. Yet, given the constraints of the genre, Messalina could not die tragically nor be denied the inherently seductive power of song. What remains to be seen is how opera contained and manipulated the threatening sexuality of a Messalina.³⁵

In his *argomento* to the opera, the librettist Piccioli provides some clues to the way in which he negotiates the problem of Messalina's historical-literary tradition:

The waves of the Tiber boast in the singularity of their parts of having washed the cradle of the most lascivious Venuses. Among these women, famous for their dissoluteness, is Messalina, who, although the wife of Claudio, emperor of Rome, commonly burned to the flame of the most licentious loves, in which

the public brothels saw her spend the whole night. She loved with distinct affection Caio, her favorite, but with such crafty art she was always able to deceive the credulity of her husband, for it was not difficult to hide the deformity of her own delinquency from him under the appearance of honesty. On this historical foundation (omitting the most scandalous series of facts) is built the poetic invention.³⁶

Piccioli's *argomento* scarcely underplays the amoral aspects of Messalina's reputation. Indeed, his clever play of words—"La culla" (meaning cradle) and its inevitable association with "culo" (anus/ass)—goes well beyond the implicit moral boundaries of the genre. While he insists that the "most scandalous details" must be omitted, at the same time he recounts what is perhaps the most notorious of all Messalina's debaucheries—the infamous night in the public brothel, first mentioned by Juvenal and described with such enthusiastic detail by Francesco Pona. Thus, after having reminded the reader of Messalina's reputation, he establishes a more acceptable area of focus: her crafty ability to deceive the credulous Claudio with the "appearance of honesty."

Yet, regardless of Piccioli's claims—that opera can scarcely depict Messalina's debaucheries in all their glory—the licentiousness inherent in her historical legacy is explored throughout the opera by innuendo and implication. This is accomplished in part by means of highly suggestive settings that both play with the boundaries between public and private and allow for the sensual activity with which so much of the opera is preoccupied. In act 1, for example, we first see Messalina in a candlelit room entertaining her lover; act 2 places the heroine in a delightfully erotic garden rotunda, which Piccioli enriches by adding movable beds, thus allowing for an even more blatant show of erotic intent.³⁷ Perhaps even more striking are the settings for the second and third scene complexes of act 2. First, we have the room used by the court ladies, which is placed directly under the bedroom where Messalina meets with her lover Caio Silio. Both levels are visible to the audience, allowing for various pairs of men and women to interact with each other simultaneously and consecutively, alternating between loving embraces and jealous outrage. A similar strategy is employed for the next set of scenes, placed provocatively enough in the women's baths. In this case, the two areas of focus are adjacent to each other: the action takes place both within the baths themselves and in the adjoining corridor in which the ladies habitually dressed. The baths, as might be imagined, are by no means safe from the infiltration of the presumably morally outraged Emperor Claudio and his aide Tullio: each enters the baths in pursuit of the other's wife. Tullio even does so in female disguise. Moreover, it should be noted that all this transpires amid a carnivalesque atmosphere, which finds its way from the streets of Venice onto the opera stage, even allowing Messalina and Claudio themselves to take part in the masquerade procession.

The other participants in this sexual play are not taken from history, but

rather—as in countless other operas of the period—were invented by the librettist Piccioli, as noted in the *argomento* to the first edition:

We pretend in addition that in that time in the kingdom there lived a courtier named Tergisto, Prince of Syria, who fled his country after having violated the princess Erginda, who then pursued him in male clothing under the name of Alindo, revealing herself only to Floralba her cousin, wife of Tullio, a Roman knight.³⁸

While ignoring many of the critical details associated with Messalina's activities, Piccioli weaves the secondary characters into the sexual intrigue in a variety of ways. During the carnival procession the Roman knight Tullio sees his wife Floralba embracing her cross-dressed cousin and wrongly accuses her of adultery. Later in the opera, Claudio attempts to seduce Floralba, finally resorting to abduction and attempted rape; in response, Tullio attempts to seduce Messalina. These characters, however, do more than simply provide secondary plot lines and additional intrigues. They supply a foil for Messalina's adulterous acts, playing a central role in a complex discourse about sexuality. Through attempted rapes, cross-dressings, and unsatisfied illicit desires, they create a continuous sense of gender instability, a scrambling of the norms of male and female behavior that places Messalina's unambiguously licentious behavior in sharp relief. More important, their relationships all resolve appropriately. By the end of the opera, Floralba is happily united with a repentant Tullio, and Alindo discards her male disguise and is reunited with her former violator, Tergisto. The women, in particular, accomplish that which is impossible for Messalina—they present examples of proper moral behavior and feminine restraint.

THE SEDUCTIVE VOICE

An essential part of the discourse concerning Messalina has to do with the inappropriate mix of public and private realms. We recall, for example, Tacitus's apparent shock at Messalina's public marriage, the civic and religious rites performed in the service of an adulterous and treasonous relationship, as well as the highly visible way in which she celebrated the union. Juvenal, too, emphasized the pageantry associated with the marriage, hinting at the public consummation on the purple bed. And in Zaguri's play, as we recall, the unveiling of Messalina's crimes took place in the midst of the wedding party in which her sins—and those of all women—were celebrated in song.

Piccioli's libretto uses the opera's opening scene to explore that same strand of Messalina's history. Unlike so many operas from earlier decades in which the suspense resolves around the possibility of marital infidelity, *Messalina* begins with the adultery in progress in a highly public fashion.³⁹ Messalina is shown in the arms of her lover Caio (the infamous Gaius Silius) surrounded by all the trappings associated with the Venetian courtes-

Messalina:

Non ho — mag - gior — con ten - to, Che di fis -

5

sar - mi in te, che di fis - sar - mi in te, E sol mo-rir mi

Messalina: I have no greater happiness / than to fix my gaze on you.

EXAMPLE 38. Carlo Pallavicino, *Messalina* (1680), ACT 1, SCENE 1: Messalina: “Non ho maggior contento” (I-Vnm, It. IV, 437 [= 9961], fol. 2r).

san: music, drinks, and gaming equipment. The love scene is witnessed not only by the audience, but also by the ladies and knights of the Roman court as well as the page Alindo, who, as we have noted, is really the abandoned Erginda in male disguise.

The opera begins with a pair of arias, the first sung by Messalina and the second by her lover Caio. They both express the two lovers’ pleasure in the moment and the pain of separation. Messalina, however, does not speak of love, but desire, and the pleasure of gazing at his face and the pain she would feel if he were to vanish. For Caio, however, the possibility of absence seems more imminent; Messalina’s love provides the only cure for his pain, and he begs her not to leave.

Pallavicino’s setting of these two arias does much to emphasize the relative inequities in this relationship. Neither aria is particularly remarkable. Rather, what is noteworthy here is the consequences of their juxtaposition: unlike many of the slower-paced and more musically expansive arias in this score, these miniatures allow for a relatively rapid shift from one affect to another, without the emotional leisure that will typify *opera seria*. Messalina’s aria is a brief through-composed minuet, with a relatively neutral affect, simple and mostly unadorned (see ex. 38). There is a light increase of intensity at the only substantive internal text repetition—the phrase “che di fissarmi in te” (mm. 4–8)—in which the extra emphasis on the dominant for the extension of the first phrase adds a touch of asymmetry and strength-

ens the force of Messalina's gaze. Despite the protestations that his absence would cause her pain, there is nonetheless little in the musical setting that suggests any genuine fear of abandonment.

As compared with Messalina's almost "style galant" minuet, Caio's A-minor da capo aria is far more impassioned, with great contrapuntal, rhythmic, and tonal complexity (see ex. 39). In the A section, for example, the intensity of his pleas are represented by the increasing lengths of the phrases, from his first, fragmented utterance (m. 1), imitated by the continuo, to its repetition, extended by sustained notes (mm. 2–3), the three-measure continuation (mm. 3–5), lengthened by the reiterations of "no, no, no." The A section is concluded with a rhythmically intricate four-measure phrase, intensified by the pair of 7–6 suspensions, leading to the ornamented cadence for the word *care* in measure 9. In the B section, the sudden shift from C major (the balm of Messalina's love) to C minor (mm. 13–16) is particularly unexpected, illustrating the bitterness in his heart that Messalina's love is unlikely to cure. She may rejoice in his gaze and the pleasure of the moment, but it is Caio, as the commentators on Tacitus continually reiterated, who has the most to lose.

Yet, what is striking in this scene is that the rhetorical power belongs to neither of these two protagonists. It is Alindo, the virtuous woman disguised as a man, righteously indignant over her violation and subsequent abandonment by Tergisto, whose musical presence is most strongly felt.⁴⁰ She is also the "singer," seated with her musical instrument ready to perform in response to Messalina's request. Alindo's "performed" aria—the song within the opera—forms the centerpiece of this scene: a full-fledged da capo aria, in a modern tonal style, with instrumental *ritornelli* (see ex. 40).

Alindo's aria is far more elaborate than anything Messalina will sing in the course of the opera. The gentle opening melisma only hints at the more elaborate coloratura that will permeate both the A and B sections, illustrating the two words essential for understanding her character: "speranza" (hope) in the A section and "costanza" (constancy) in the B section, the powers that will shield her heart from the blows of sorrow. Alindo's "costanza" is also given literal representation in the extraordinary tonal stasis of the aria, which scarcely moves away from C major. The aria must be understood on two different planes: Alindo's genuine expression of sorrow at her abandonment by Tergisto provides the entertainment for Caio and Messalina. Provocatively, her performance charms Messalina, initiating her attraction for this young "man" that will culminate in a transvestite seduction scene near the conclusion of the opera. Alindo's presence and eloquence in this scene undercuts Messalina, reducing her to a silent observer in this work in which she, presumably, is the protagonist. Moreover, as a musician, the virtuous Alindo—not Messalina—becomes the seductive siren through the medium of song, demonstrating the musical skills famously

Caio:

Non par-ti - te, non par-ti - te, no dal sen Gio-ie mie

ca - re no, no, no, no, no, non par-ti - te dal [7-6]

sen gio - ie mie ca - re, ca - re, ca - re: [7-6]

Con bal-sa-mo d'a - mor Voi sa-na - te del

C minor: cor Le pe - ne a - ma - re, le pe -

ne a - ma - re. Non par - ti - te

Caio: Do not leave my breast, no, no, / my dearest joy. / With the balm of love / you cure / the bitter pain of my heart.

EXAMPLE 39. Pallavicino, *Messalina*, ACT 1, SCENE 1: Caio: "Non partite" (fols. 2v-3r).

[Ritornello]

Alindo/Erginda:

Tor - na-mi, tor - na-mi, ca-ra, ca-ra,

ca-ra in sen, Dol-ce, dol-ce spe - ran - za, dol -

- ce spe - ran

za, dol -

Alindo/Erginda: Return to my breast, / O dear sweet hope.

EXAMPLE 40. Pallavicino, *Messalina*, ACT 1, SCENE 1: Alindo: “Tornami, cara,” opening (fols. 3v–4r).

employed by the Venetian courtesans. The gender reversal that is explicitly carried out in *Messalina*’s attempted seduction of Alindo later in the opera is also implicit here: Alindo enchants with song, whereas *Messalina* takes on the role of the sexual aggressor. At the same time, the song with which she entertains Caio and *Messalina* in this illicit public scene is one that reinforces her position as the lamenting woman. She is abandoned and self-righteous, protecting her chastity—or so she assumes—with a male disguise. She will go on to consolidate her rhetorical power with a second

large-scale da capo aria in the following scene; in act 1, scene 6 she will eloquently expound on her suffering in an intricate C-minor recitative lament with elegant chromatic inflections that contrasts strikingly with the tonal stasis of first aria (see ex. 41). This is our view of Erginda “undisguised,” expressing herself freely without the benefit of a male costume.

Moreover, if Alindo’s example were not sufficient, Piccioli has provided us with a second virtuous woman, Floralba, the rejected wife of Tullio, who bemoans her shabby treatment and confirms her virtue in a series of similarly expressive arias.⁴¹ By means of their various abandonments and subsequent lamentations, both Alindo/Erginda and Floralba demonstrate their essential differences from Messalina: they are virtuous women, who reject illicit sexual advances. And, in so doing, they are appropriately rewarded with the ability to express themselves powerfully in music.

Yet, all of this leaves Messalina with a somewhat restricted palette of affects. As a woman who does not lament, she is barred from such conventional female emotions as longing, hope, or mourning. At the same time, she is neither a sorceress nor warrior, nor is she permitted the kind of rhetoric given to the men in the opera: frustration, vengeance, desire, or the expression of anti-female sentiments. Rather, her primary mode of singing and speaking reflects her historical legacy as an emblem of illicit sexuality, a familiar figure from the sixteenth-century satires about courtesans. Her moments of self-revelation deal with pleasure, as in the garden aria in act 2, scene 1: “I want to enjoy every hour” rather than repent lost pleasures.⁴² This is scarcely an original sentiment in Venetian opera. In our consideration of Ottavia’s nurse, for example, we have already noted how such texts are indebted to the tradition of courtesan dialogues—the elderly and sometimes lascivious nurses who advise their young charges about the fleeting nature of beauty and suggest that they enjoy love while they can. Messalina, however, is an empress at the height of her power; her sexual threat, thus, is in the present rather than past. Nonetheless, this aria reminds audiences of something that will be made explicit by the end of the opera: that Messalina contains within herself the potential to become the older woman: she will lose her beauty, her sexual viability, and will use language to seduce men and lure women into the life of pleasure. Notably, this is yet another aria remarkable for its relative brevity and its simplicity of melodic style and harmonic language. Even in those instances when Pallavicino gives her an aria on a somewhat larger scale, with obbligato instruments, Messalina still maintains a relatively simple, diatonic mode of expression. In act 2, scene 12, for example, she has an aria of anticipation while she waits for her lover seated on the bed. With the short phrases, Pallavicino captures something of her breathless anticipation of the act of love, echoed by brief instrumental interjections. Nonetheless, what is striking here are the lost opportunities for musical expansion. There is no opening *ritornello* of the scale we have seen

Alindo/Erginda:

Mi-se-ra Er-gin-da, e do-ve Ti con-du-ce a pe - nar sor - te spie -

ta-ta? — Nel-l'o-nor ol-trag - gia-ta, Dal-l'a - man-te tra-di - ta,

La-sci la pa - tria, e il pa - dre, Men-ti-sci, e no-me, e

sta-to, Scher-zo d'a - mor del - la for-tu-na, e 'l fa - to. —

Che sa - rà? che più pen-si? che far pen-si? che ten-ti? Chie-di-lo

Alindo/Erginda: Miserable Erginda, and where / are you going to suffer such a cruel fate? / Your honor insulted, / betrayed by a lover, / you left your country / your father, / you lie about your name and your position, / a joke of love, of fortune, and of fate. / What will happen? What more are you thinking? What will you do? What will you try?

EXAMPLE 41. Pallavicino, *Messalina*, ACT 1, SCENE 6: Alindo: "Misera Erginda," mm. 1–17 (fol. 12v).

with Alindo/Erginda's first aria; the declamation is largely syllabic, with stepwise motion; and Pallavicino ignores the many opportunities for virtuosic display suggested by such words as "ride," "scherza," or "gioia."

Thus, we see one of the important ways in which Pallavicino manages Messalina's overwhelming sexual presence. Throughout the opera, her threat is minimized by her relatively limited mode of expression as compared with the other characters. She may rejoice in the pleasures of sensuality; however, Pallavicino provides her with a vocalism that restricts her seductive powers by suppressing her eloquence, which is, instead, usurped by lamenting, virtuous women: the presentation of women has come almost full circle in the forty-year period since Cavalli's *La Didone*. Once opera was forced to contend with the use of song as the primary mode of expression, it was no longer possible to allow virtuosity to retain its former association with badly behaved women. The eloquence of the opera heroine was thus to become the nearly exclusive property of chaste, abandoned, and lamenting women.

THE ART OF DECEPTION

As Piccioli suggested in his *argomento*, Messalina could not have devoted her life so entirely to pleasure had she not succeeded in completely duping the gullible Claudio. With the exception of her occasional expression of her desire for Caio or other pleasurable indulgences, the majority of her efforts in the opera are directed at preventing Claudio from learning the truth about her adulterous activities. Her continued access to pleasure depends upon her ability to persuade. In so doing, Messalina engages a familiar trope from both the courtesan literature and Tacitist political thinking. In his *Retorica delle puttane*, for example, the Incognito writer Ferrante Pallavicino had created an entire female rhetoric for the purpose of engaging and deceiving the male customer, thus creating, as Tondi eloquently called it, a "tragico teatro." Such maneuvers, however, were equally important in the realm of politics; the writings on empire and *ragione di stato*, derived largely from the study of Tacitus by such authors as Machiavelli and Boccalini, continually reiterate the importance of pretense as a tool for princes.

In opera, such deceptive practices require similarly devious strategies on the part of the composer and the librettist: the audience must be aware of information and emotional content of which the other actors are unaware. This can happen solely on dramatic terms, or the sense of a dual reality can be signaled to a lesser or greater degree in the music itself. What is striking about Messalina's deceptions, however, is the extent to which she manages to persuade Claudio while still maintaining the essential simplicity of her mode of expression. In act 1, scene 4, for example, Messalina has just caught Claudio cavorting rather innocently with a group of Roman noblewomen. In an effort to divert him from her own adulterous activities, she

feigns indignant jealousy and tears. Fooled by her act, Claudio takes out a handkerchief to wipe her eyes, singing an aria in which he pleads with her not to cry (see ex. 43 below).

In response, Messalina feigns hurt and indignation, while insisting melodramatically that Claudio either return to her or slay her. Indeed, if taken seriously, her predicament would appear to be no different from Alindo's or Floralba's. Messalina claims to have suffered rejection by an unfaithful lover. Yet, the aria that Pallavicino and Piccioli assign her at this moment has little in common with those of typical lamenting women. Let us consider the text in full:

Se credessi che dicessi	If I were to believe that you said
D'adorar con verità,	You adored me truthfully,
Quanto più t'amerei, ma chi lo sa.	How much more would I love you, but who knows.
Se pensassi che mi amassi	If I were to think that you loved me
Da dover senza mentir	Dutifully, without lying,
Quanto più t'amerei, ma ch'il può dir.	How much more would I love you, but who can say.

Messalina's use of the subjunctive here reveals the multiple levels of reality explored in this scene. Ostensibly she is telling Claudio that if she truly could believe in the sincerity of his love, she would love him all the more. The audience knows that the entire proposition is false; her accusations of infidelity are but a mere distraction. They have already seen Messalina with her lover, and they know that Claudio is guilty only of being duped. This is implicit in her use of the imperfect subjunctive to open both strophes, thus suggesting either the first- or second-person singular: the passage could mean exactly the opposite, for example, "if you believed that which I said." Only in the final two lines of each strophe, however, the move to the indicative more truthfully conveys Messalina's genuine position with regard to love, honesty, and lying: "Who can say? Who knows?"

Again, the juxtaposition of contrasting affects and compositional strategies is revealing. Messalina, who only feigns tears (as noted in the stage directions), sings with an almost childlike simplicity: square rhythm, a limited vocal range, syllabic text setting, and limited harmonic vocabulary (see ex. 42). With highly controlled, deliberate quarter-note accents, she proceeds in stepwise motion, lingering within the first three degrees of the scale, giving no more than is necessary to persuade and cajole the gullible Claudio. Underneath, a constant eighth-note serpentine bass suggests the complexity of the reality that lurks beneath the calm surface. Only at the conclusion of the strophe does Messalina's more playful, more seductive personality emerge in modest pairs of ascending eighth notes that decorate the cadence.

Compare this, however, with Claudio's sincere pleading in "Cara, cara"

Messalina:

Se cre - des - si che di - ces - si D'a - do - rar con

4
ve - ri - tà, Quan-to più t'a - me - rei, quan-to più t'a - me-rei.

EXAMPLE 42. Pallavicino, *Messalina*, ACT 1, SCENE 4: Messalina: “Se credessi” (fol. gr).

(ex. 43). Again, the juxtaposition of contrasting affects and compositional strategies is revealing. The lilting pair of descending fifths that open the aria are touchingly echoed by the accompanying strings; his pleas that she not cry are set over gentle melismas that are likewise punctuated by instrumental echoes. The persistent F $\sharp$ s in a G mode give the aria a Mixolydian quality that is particularly moving. Claudio is in this instance much as Ferrante Pallavicino described: he is the man with the “sweet nature,” whose glory was trampled on by the likes of a Messalina.

Messalina follows the same strategy with Claudio throughout the opera: she deceives and manipulates him with an easy vocalism, a vivid demonstration of the Tacitist suspicion of appearances. Moreover, Claudio allows himself to be deceived, all the while expressing his jealousy through virtuosic displays of anger, as in the burst of sixteenth notes in voice and obbligatedo basso continuo in the aria “Lasciami gelosia” (see ex. 44).

It is not so much that Claudio is morally superior to his wife; despite his continual jealousy he is equally tempted by the lure of adulterous relationships. What compromises Claudio’s heroic stature is precisely that which damaged his reputation in the historical sources and the commentaries on Tacitus: his utter ignorance of Messalina’s intrigues, his vulnerability to her persuasions, and his apparent inability to carry out his own intrigues (in no small part due to the immovable chastity of Floralba, the object of his amorous intentions). The extent of Claudio’s and Messalina’s mutual deception is vividly demonstrated in their scene of reconciliation in act 1, scene 13. As they climb together into bed singing consecutive strophes—rather than

Claudio:

Ca-ra, ca-ra, ca-ra, ca-ra, non la-cri-mar, ___

non la - cri - mar

Claudio: Dear one, don't cry . . .

EXAMPLE 43. Pallavicino, *Messalina*, ACT 1, SCENE 4: Claudio: "Cara, cara," mm. 1–13 (fol. 8r–v).

joining their voices in a duet—in the same diatonic style, Claudio swears that he will no longer be jealous and Messalina swears that she will be faithful forever. Both claims, of course, are patently false, as the audience well knows. The absolute simplicity and transparency of their musical expression contradicts the complexity of the plotting and the duplicity of their deeds. Indeed, the falseness of appearances—the sham of Messalina and Claudio's love as both an amorous and a political bond—is manifest in opulent operatic spectacle. As the two lovers falsely declare their love and fidelity, the *ritornello* is heard once again, and in a spectacular gesture the stage machinery raises the garden bed slowly into the air.

6 6 6 # 6

3 Claudio:
La-scia-mi ge - lo - si - a,

5 la-scia-mi ge-lo - si - a, Non tor - men - tar -

7 mi il sen

Claudio: Leave me, jealousy, / do not torture my breast . . .

EXAMPLE 44. Pallavicino, *Messalina*, ACT 1, SCENE 13: Claudio: "Lasciami gelosia," mm. 1–8 (fol. 24r).

THE CHASTENING OF MESSALINA

The moral lesson in *Messalina* is not only expressed by the eloquent example of virtue provided by Alindo and Floralba, but it is also reinforced throughout the opera by continual anti-female commentary on the part of the other characters. As we have already seen, the expression of misogynistic sentiments is by no means unusual in Venetian opera, particularly from the mouths of servants, as well as in the almost structural role played by the misogynist pageboy Nino in Zaguri's play. In *Messalina*, however, all of

the male characters participate in the anti-female discourse. Moreover, they do it throughout the opera, thus creating a counterbalance—a reality check—for each of Messalina's successful deceptions of Claudio. The first act alone features no fewer than six blatantly anti-female arias. For example, after Messalina's first attempt to persuade Claudio of her fidelity in scene 5, he is torn between his desire to believe her and the evidence of his eyes and ears: "I believe her as a wife / but not as a woman. / I know that heaven has shown us inconstancy / in the guise of a woman."⁴³ This is the ideal compromise for the emperor: he cheerfully persists in his belief in Messalina's fidelity as a wife, while at the same time condemning the female sex as heaven's model of inconstancy. Tullio responds with a far more exaggerated display of vocal prowess, prefiguring Verdi's duke (*Rigoletto*) with the Virgilian commonplace about women's mutability and instability: "The waves of the sea are as changeable as the faith and love of an unstable woman." Similar sentiments follow. In the second act, Tullio tries to calm Claudio's exploding jealousy, urging him to place no faith in a woman if he does not wish to cry. Claudio, summarizing his newly acquired views about women, laments his loss of liberty and advises men who have not yet done so to refrain from taking wives—perhaps a subtle allusion to the advice offered in Juvenal's Satire 6. And, of course, Claudio's and Tullio's points of view are echoed loudly by the servant Lismeno, who attempts to console them with an aria that may bring to mind familiar anti-female sentiments from a later century: "Don't be unhappy no, no, / Because they all do that" (*Non ti doler non, non, / Che tutte fan così*). The most telling condemnation, however, comes in act 2, scene 19 from Tullio, who has donned women's clothing to enter the baths in pursuit of Messalina. His aria presents a familiar mixture of sexual desire and anti-female sentiments. Although he may condemn the female sex, by dressing in female attire he himself is practicing the art of deception in order to seduce Messalina. Artfully, however, he passes the blame to Messalina and all womankind. By dressing as a woman, his deceptions are suddenly transformed into those practiced by every woman: fraud, deceit, and betrayal (see ex. 45).

What is particularly striking, however, is that while Tullio may emulate Messalina's behavior, his aria bears little resemblance to her unadorned manner of expression. It is highly ornate, with extended melismas on three critical words: "imparerò" (I will learn) (mm. 3–4), "apprenderò" (I will apprehend) (mm. 7–8), and "frodi" (frauds) (mm. 9–10). Like a woman's clothing or her laughter, such elaborate ornamentation seduces, persuades, and deceives. Yet, while Tullio may adopt this manner of expression when emulating the deceptive woman, Messalina herself is never endowed with this sort of power. Like Nino, the cross-dressed Tullio usurps female eloquence in women's clothing. Ironically, he uses that eloquence to condemn the female sex.

Tullio:

Dal co-stu - me d'o - gni don - na, a men - tir im - pa - re -

rò, im - pa - re -

rò, E con l'u - so del - la gon - na, mil - le

fro - di ap - pren - de - rò,

mil - le fro - di ap - pren - de - rò,

mil - le fro - di ap - pren - de - rò.

Tullio: From any woman's clothing, / I will learn how to lie, / and by wearing a skirt, / I will apprehend a thousand frauds.

EXAMPLE 45. Pallavicino, *Messalina*, ACT 2, SCENE 19: Tullio (in women's clothing): "Dal costume d'ogni donna" (fol. 59r).

FEMININITY UNVEILED

This constant criticism of Messalina—and women—finds eventual justification in the penultimate scene in the opera. Messalina's legendary longing for new erotic adventures culminates in her attempt to seduce Alindo, the young woman disguised as an attractive young man whom Messalina had first spied in the opening scene of the opera. As we have seen with *La Semiramide* and *La Calisto*, this play with same-sex love scenes was not uncommon, particularly in the operas of the latter part of the century. On the most basic level, it was symptomatic of a fundamental anxiety about the instability of biological sex and the sexual construction of gender. At the same time, it provided a relatively "safe" erotic outlet: sexual tensions could be heightened in a manner that veered toward the fictional, all the while providing a subtle means of expressing homoerotic desires and anxieties.

In the context of Messalina's acknowledged sexual excess, however, cross-dressing assumes an added function within the plot. It provides a means whereby characters behave in a manner more appropriate for the opposite gender, avoiding the liabilities of their biological state, thus heightening the audience awareness of Messalina's unique sensibilities and extreme behaviors. By wearing a dress, Tullio "assumes" a female guise, becoming a sham woman whose skill at the art of deception outstrips Messalina's own. In male disguise, Alindo/Erginda acquires male virtues that protect her from the conventional condemnations of women expressed by the men in the opera. And, as a result of Alindo's disguise, Messalina once again escapes discovery. Claudio, who finally assumes that he has caught Messalina in a blatant act of adultery, enters unexpectedly and attacks Alindo, only to uncover her breasts and thus reveal her true sex. His attempts to expose Messalina's adulteries have failed; the implication, of course, is that since the object of her desire is actually a woman she remains innocent of any genuine adulterous acts. Messalina, always the sexual adventuress, is less shocked than relieved. Unlike Claudio and Tullio, who are continually thwarted in their adulterous activities by virtuous females, Messalina successfully eludes discovery, having made love to a woman with arguably greater success than the men.

With the revelations of Alindo's womanhood, the opera concludes with a tentative *lieto fine*. Alindo/Erginda is reunited with a repentant Tergisto, and Floralba is united with a similarly penitent Tullio. Both women demonstrate by example the rewards of fidelity and chastity, the most important female virtues.

Yet, while the accident of Alindo's true sex saves Messalina from the death sentence to which her historical model was subjected, Messalina remains a model to the end. The scene following the unveiling of Alindo's breasts (3.17) belongs entirely to Messalina, linking her unambiguously with the courtesans after whom she is modeled. Noting with surprise the constancy with which the god of love had adorned Alindo, she states her

own view on love: “O mad lovers, if sometimes you love without constancy, do it at least for trade.”⁴⁴

After a playful *ritornello* in F major, Messalina addresses her final aria to all lovers in the audience—but most particularly to the men—commenting on the lessons in deceit that one can learn from unfaithful women:

Dalle donne infidi amanti	From women, unfaithful lovers,
Imparate ad adorar.	Learn to love.
Se d'amor talor mostrate	If you sometimes pretend to love,
Vi sforzate	Make an effort
A sospirar,	To sigh,
Ma i sospiri, e i vostri pianti	But your sighs and complaints
Sempre sogliono ingannar.	Will always lead to deceit.

The extent to which Messalina herself has learned the lesson is unclear. Alindo's example of fidelity notwithstanding, it is a woman's tears and sighs, cries, and complaints that are the tools of deception, which Pallavicino illustrates with sigh motives within the context of an otherwise cheerful aria. As Messalina herself demonstrates throughout the opera, it is women who best know how to deceive in love. And it is perhaps not surprising that her own eloquence should be used to express this apparent truth.

Thus, by addressing the audience, Messalina relinquishes her role in the opera, avoiding the bloody death of her historical model, and gives us instead an inappropriate happy ending with her husband Claudio. Assuming the sort of authority and rhetorical power adopted by Ottavia's Nutrice, Messalina steps away from history to impart a lesson about the nature of the female sex, deception, and fidelity. Her loss of self is by no means accidental; rather, it is the reflection of her treatment throughout the work. Unlike the other women in the opera, Messalina has no inner life, no capacity for introspection beyond her own desire for pleasure, primarily because librettist and composer could not imagine one for such a woman. She is instead a cardboard exemplum, about to become a member of the “third sex,” embodying that which men fear most: beauty, sexuality, and the power to deceive. As in Pona's *novella*, eroticism and moral instruction are joined together in a single body. Like the genre of opera in Venice in the seventeenth century, Messalina may entice and seduce; yet she also serves to reinforce an essential lesson about the dangers of female sexuality.

Conclusions

Seventeenth-century Venetian opera presented to its public an extraordinarily diverse group of heroines who embodied in both sound and deed those qualities most admired and feared in the female sex. Created in the ancient world and refashioned in early modern times to suit a variety of political and social purposes, these women are our witnesses to the enduring significance of ancient texts and images in opera, that most dramatic and baroque manifestation of the humanist project. These were not frozen, static images to be treated with reverence and caution; rather, like the many classical statues whose broken appendages were imaginatively completed by early modern sculptors, the women of Ovid, Tacitus, and Virgil were an endless source of fantasy and creativity, absorbing contemporary attitudes with surprising ease. Constructed and reconstructed in countless subtle variations, our heroines could support or challenge authority, they could teach virtue or inspire erotic fantasies, and through word, song, and deed could express an astounding variety of moral, political, or artistic perspectives. They thus brought to the operatic stage complex literary, artistic, and historical traditions with which to testify about early modern Venice, opera, and women, both on and off the stage.

An important part of this testimony concerned conceptions of female virtue and the female body, which had been inherited from such authorities as Aristotle and Galen and subtly reconfigured to accommodate the political and social realities of the early modern world. From Didone, Ottavia, and Messalina we learn about the incompatibility of female power and sexual autonomy, and hear demonstrated the apparent conflict between female chastity and vocal eloquence. Semiramide's exchange of identities with her son demonstrates the importance accorded speech and sound in the social construction of gender. The operatic treatment of Calisto serves as a cautionary tale about the relative biological instability of the human

body, the possibilities and limits of female pleasure, enduring faith in male potency, and the fluidity between the genders that is apparent in so much Renaissance theater.

These women also tell stories about the Republic of Venice. As opera became one of the primary ways of celebrating Venice's glory, operatic women became inextricably linked with Venice's own self-image, each one reflecting a single element of the mosaic that comprised the Venus/Virgin icon that stood for Venice herself. Like the women on her stages, Venice was regarded as variously chaste, heroic, or alluring. She could still seduce and attract; but, like the many prostitutes who beckoned from balconies or floated down the canals, she could succumb to purely mercenary concerns by selling entrance into the nobility or luring visitors with her carnivalesque charms. And as Venice became increasingly aware of her own vulnerability, the women of her opera acknowledged the changing notions of femininity. The contrast between Didone in 1640 and Messalina in 1680—between the guilty widow and the unrepentant adulteress—reflects Venice's own dual nature, and her susceptibility to decay and change. Indeed, this is almost perfectly represented at mid-century in Cavalli's *La Calisto*, in which Diana's chastity is challenged: first, by the nymph Calisto, who discovers the secret of female pleasure and, second, by the astrologer Endimione, who—like Galileo—may well have been tempted to view the moon through his own telescope.¹

In addition, our operatic women tell us a story about the genre itself and the unexpected role of Venice in the emergence of a female rhetoric both on and off the stage. It is scarcely coincidental that operatic women gained their rhetorical power on the stage precisely as Venice's women became a compelling presence in the literary world. Venetian opera gave women a newfound power on the stage, which further influenced both male and female writers and was reflected in their elegantly theatrical, albeit ambivalent narratives about femininity. For the members of the *Accademia degli Incogniti*, opera was an ideal arena in which to express an almost obsessive concern with female sexuality, a place in which literary, political, and prurient interests could meet with unexpected coherence. Indeed, it is not surprising that so many *Incogniti* writers lavished ironic praise on female singers, fascinated by their power to move with their voices and bodies. In this context, the medium of song posed particular challenges and opportunities. As opera began to invent rhetoric for its women, the inherent eloquence of song was something that could be both embraced and rejected. Song could represent sexual availability or vulnerability, an expression of licentiousness or desire, or it could provide aural evidence of female virtue or vice, heightening rather than diminishing the power or perceived threat of the women to whom it was given. For Didone and Arianna, music itself was more powerful than the curses that they had presumably leveled at the men who abandoned them. For Monteverdi's *Ottavia*, it was the absence of tuneful-

ness that sang of musical and physical exile, an aural manifestation of her lack of desirability that drove Nerone into Poppea's arms. Finally, as song became the primary vehicle for expression in opera, the genre learned to accommodate both the requirements of virtue and the demands of music, finding ways to endow its women with song while still controlling female speech. This was achieved with surprising skill in a work such as Pietro Ziani's *La Semiramide*, which also exploited the asymmetrical mechanisms of transvestism that were so much a part of the carnivalesque ritual of Renaissance theater. We conclude with Messalina, the most alluring and sexually threatening of all women, whose eloquence was neatly neutralized by composer and librettist in what was essentially an operatic representation of Venetian carnival.

But perhaps what is most astounding is the enormous strength, vitality, and complexity with which these operatic women were constructed in Venice. Under the influence of today's gender politics, it is all too easy to be distracted by the ostensibly misogynist discourses that underlie so many early modern works, and to fail to recognize the extent to which seventeenth-century opera explored and even celebrated women and femininity. As we have seen, librettists and composers confronted the "problem of female eloquence" with surprising originality and inclusiveness, using any number of creative musical and dramatic strategies that permitted audiences to consider female pleasure and vocality from multiple perspectives and generic contexts. Season after season, audiences in seventeenth-century Venice both saw and heard an extraordinary parade of operatic heroines—a catalog of women in sound: ruling widows and unfaithful empresses, goddesses, warriors, nymphs, servants, and courtesans; there were widows and virgins, mothers, daughters, and sisters, and even an occasional bear. Courageous, seductive, loyal, chaste, vengeful, or threatening, these women were extolled for heroism or praised for beauty, and they were not always punished for sins. In response, they were given voices with glittering musical and dramatic color, and the power to sing about every conceivable passion and pain. With brilliant coloratura, static recitative, or moving lyricism, they provided advice on love or war, they spoke of pleasures given or received, and they repented their passion or charged furies to seek vengeance. Moreover, they did this in a world that is strange to modern eyes and ears—in which the boundaries between the genders remained porous, and in which men, so often eclipsed by these same women, were easily seduced by femininity and female concerns. Echoing the preoccupations and pleasures of its audience, Venetian opera repeatedly asked whether men might actually turn into women, and then, with countless plots dealing with transvestism, mistaken identity, and homoerotic innuendo, reveled in all of the various ramifications of this seemingly outlandish and dangerous possibility.

A striking example of opera's celebration of femininity can be seen in a work that reflects many of the themes considered in this book. In 1643, the

same year in which *L'incoronazione di Poppea* was premiered, Niccolò Bartolini and Francesco Sacrati presented an opera titled *Venere gelosa* at the Teatro Novissimo, presumably one of the most lavish and successful works of the period. Unfortunately, Sacrati's score has not survived; but Bartolini's libretto (and extensive preface on operatic aesthetics) testifies to the extraordinary power of female vocality and sexuality in the opera of seventeenth-century Venice. This is one of several Venetian operas to focus on Venus herself, that most important icon of Venetian beauty and allure.² The basic theme—Venus's jealousy—was by no means new; Bartolini and Sacrati may well have taken their inspiration from another Incognito opera from the previous season, Francesco Cavalli's *Amore innamorato*, a somewhat satirical variation of Apuleius's oft-depicted tale of the rivalry between Venus and Psyche over Cupid.³ But Bartolini based his libretto on a far more obscure and sexually suggestive mythological strand: the union of Bacco (Bacchus) and Venere (Venus) that would eventually produce the phallic god Priapus.

Bartolini endows Venere with a familiar set of female vices and virtues, creating the usual set of complications that precede the happy ending: the double union between Venere and Bacco and the shepherd and shepherdess (who had inspired the desires of Venere and Bacco, respectively). In an unmistakable parody of *Orfeo*, a jealous Venere implores Prosperina and her furies to send the shepherdess to the underworld; Venere is only further enraged when the ghost of Adone (Adonis) expresses his appreciation of the new arrival. Even Bacco is not adverse to a bit of cross-dressing, assuming the disguise of a high priestess in order to pursue his own amorous goals. The sexual license of contemporary Venice is invoked with the appearance of a courtesan (ironically called Montanina—mountainous one!) along with a buffoon-poet who woos her with satirical verses. In a single evening, Venetian audiences could thus witness an operatic re-creation of their own carnival as a Bacchanalia, featuring their beloved goddess Venus surrounded by almost every imaginable type of woman: a virtuous shepherdess, a licentious courtesan, a cross-dressed god—all cheered on by a bevy of drunken nymphs and satyrs. Moreover, all are assembled to glorify the union of Bacco and Venere. The fertility of the genre in these early years could have received no better endorsement.

This was not the path that opera would follow in the next century. By the early 1700s, opera would begin to forget the Bacchanalian excess, the forbidden pleasures, and the interest in female sexuality that been such a part of Venice's carnival and her self-representation. Under the influence of Enlightenment ideologies, so-called serious Italian opera was reformed, ordered, and disciplined in a manner that would have a profound influence on the musical and dramatic representation of its women. Castrati became more celebrated than women singers, presenting one solution to the problem of female vocality in opera. Scientific discoveries about sexual difference changed popular notions about the importance of female pleasure.

Venice, which had long been the most prolific producer and exporter of operas, was gradually supplanted by such centers as Rome, Vienna, and Naples. As opera became increasingly “Europeanized,” it was adjusted to suit the political and social will of any number of absolutist regimes, culminating in the elegantly structured and homogenized librettos of Metastasio. Moreover, these changes became an essential part of operatic aesthetics. The structural elements of the many so-called reforms—the elimination of comedy, the simplification of complex plots, the ordering of scenes, and the regularization of character types that preoccupied the members of Rome’s Arcadian Academy—accompanied a concern with the dignity of poetic expression and a new emphasis on the theater as a vehicle for moral instruction. The heated rhetoric of some of opera’s most virulent critics (Lodovico Muratori, Giovanni Crescimbeni, Gianvincenzo Gravina, Scipione Maffei) masked a profound anxiety about opera’s sexual content that was often expressed as “operatic effeminacy,” a critical category that encompassed many of the most beloved features of seicento opera with which this book has been concerned.⁴

Thus, in the eighteenth century many of our women tell a different story. For some of our heroines, this change would have an ennobling, redemptive effect. Both Metastasio’s *Didone abbandonata* and *Semiramide riconosciuta*, for example, only dimly recall the satirical discourses about false chastity, incest, and uncontrollable libido that were integral to the Venetian presentation of these infamous women. Didone’s noble suicide presents an elegantly Stoic compromise between duty and love; Semiramide had become sufficiently admirable to be used repeatedly by Empress Maria Theresa as an emblem of female heroism.⁵ But some of our women were less fortunate. Messalina was all but ignored by eighteenth-century librettists, as her lasciviousness was so difficult to accommodate in music. The debaucheries of Nero’s Rome—explored with such zest in *L’incoronazione di Poppea* and *La Messalina*—were replaced by operatic considerations of more magnanimous or heroic rulers such as Titus or Hadrian. Even the chaste encounters of Endymion and Diana were subject to new scrutiny. Gravina’s treatise on Arcadian aesthetics, *Discorso sopra L’Endimione* (1692), praises Alessandro Guidi’s play on the two lovers for overcoming the inherent plot defects that might have permitted Diana and Endymion to go beyond the boundaries of propriety and openly express their passion.⁶ By the eighteenth century, as Gravina observes, love actually has a positive rather than a debilitating effect on Endymion, inspiring him with “unusual spirit” that makes him “greater than himself,” awakening in him a new light of generosity, valor, and wisdom.⁷ Diana, on the other hand, is to be praised for hiding her passion in a “womanly” fashion and rejecting Endymion with the strength of purpose and gentleness appropriate to her position. In this far more innocent Arcadia, virgins are safe from Jove’s sexual appetite and Pan and his satyrs are rarely seen or heard.

But perhaps most revealing is the operatic destiny of Venus herself in this, the second century of opera's existence. Venus had always stood so defiantly for Venice's most beloved virtues and vices. She was the alluring female body that housed the masculine soul of the Venetian Republic, and was both extolled and condemned in painting, poetry, prose, and song. She was also an operatic heroine in her own right: it was this same jealous, vengeful, and passionate beauty whose union with Bacchus was celebrated with such fervor on the stage of the Teatro Novissimo to the applause of both Arcadians and Venetians. It is thus all the more ironic that she, too, would all but disappear from the Venetian operatic stage in the eighteenth century. This may well have been the price of Enlightenment: after extolling countless women for over a half century, even the most glorious and free Republic of Venice was compelled to silence her most seductive self.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. On the myth of Venice, see Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 13–61; Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Ellen Rosand, "Music in the Myth of Venice," *RQ* 30 (1977): 511–37; David Rosand, *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State* (Chapel Hill, N.C. and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
2. Sperling, *Convents*, 75.
3. Ian Maclean (*Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature 1610–1652* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977]) links the surge in pro-feminist writings in the 1630s to the regency of Queen Anne of Austria, but also identifies a rise in misogynist literature in the first decades of the seventeenth century. For an extensive bibliography on the imagery associated with Elizabeth I and her manipulation of her own image, see Margaret King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 158. On female rule in seventeenth-century Florence, see Kelley Harness, "La Flora and the End of Female Rule in Tuscany," *JAMS* 51 (1998): 437–76.
4. On the image of Venus in the sixteenth century, see D. Rosand, *Myths of Venice*, 188–90.
5. Sperling, *Convents*, 84.
6. Cited by William Bouwsma, "Venice and the Political Education of Europe," in *A Usable Past*, 266–91 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 280.
7. Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 286.
8. Quoted in William Bouwsma, "Political Education of Europe," 279.
9. See, for example, Thomas Coryate, *Coryat's Crudities Hastily Gobbled Up in Five Months Travels in France, Savoy, Italy . . .* (London: W. S., 1611), 264.
10. On marriage practices in Venice in the early Renaissance, see Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univer-

- sity Press, 2000), especially “Kinship Ties and Young Patricians in Fifteenth-Century Venice,” and “Subaltern Patriarchs: Patrician Bachelors.”
11. Ibid., 31.
 12. Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); see also Sperling, *Convents*; Romano Canosa, *Il velo e il cappuccio: monacazioni forzate e sessualità nei conventi femminili in Italia tra Quattrocento e Settecento* (Rome: Sapere 2000, 1991); Francesca Medioli, *L’“inferno monacale” di Arcangela Tarabotti* (Turin: Rosenberg & Seiler, 1990), 111–92. On courtesans and sexuality in sixteenth-century Venice, see Margaret Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
 13. Bouwsma, “Political Education,” 283–85.
 14. Ibid. See also Brown, *Venice and Antiquity*, 11–29.
 15. On the anti-myth, see Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 49–55.
 16. Bouwsma, “Political Education of Europe,” 280.
 17. Sperling, *Convents*, 108–14.
 18. The decline could be understood in terms of both the economy and the nature of the nobility itself. See James Cushman Davis, *The Decline of the Venetian Nobility* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962); Brian Pullan, *Crisis and Change in the Venetian Economy* (London: Methuen, 1968); on the impact of economic difficulties on the Venetian marriage market see also Sperling, *Convents*, 52–58.
 19. Cristoforo Ivanovich, *Memorie teatrali di Venezia*, ed. Norbert Dubowy with introduction (Venice, 1687; repr. Lucca: LIM Editrice, 1993).
 20. On Ivanovich’s errors, see Thomas Walker, “Gli errori di ‘Minerva al Tavolino’,” in *Venezia e il melodramma nel Seicento*, ed. Maria Teresa Muraro (Florence: Olschki, 1976), 7–20. On libretto collecting, see Irene Alm, *Catalog of Venetian Librettos at the University of California at Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), xi–xv.
 21. As Norbert Dubowy notes in his introduction to *Memorie teatrali*: “*Memorie teatrali* is not simply a description of the economical mechanisms of a city in which public opera is only one source of business. Venice is not treated merely as a geographical term; it also stands for the role of opera and the theatre within a community” (p. lv).
 22. Sperling, *Convents*, 95.
 23. Cited *ibid.*, 97.
 24. Eugene J. Johnson, “Jacopo Sansovino, Giacomo Torelli, and the Theatricality of the Piazzetta in Venice,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural History* 59 (2000): 436–53.
 25. There is an extensive literature on carnival both from a theoretical and a historical perspective, much of which reacts to the formulation in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). For a discussion of the Venetian carnival and a summary of these issues, see Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 156–81.
 26. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 30–32.
 27. Victor Witter Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 167–78. Peter Stally-

- brass and Allen White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).
28. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 34.
 29. Michael Bristol, "Carnival and the Institutions of Theater in Elizabethan England," *ELH* 50 (1983): 637.
 30. *Ibid.*
 31. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).
 32. *Ibid.*, 25–32.
 33. *Ibid.*, 28–29. On Aristotle's view of women, see also Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), especially chap. 2, "Who's who in the Polis," 37–56.
 34. On the longevity of Galen's views, see Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 25–28 and 62; but see also Katherine Park, "The Rediscovery of the Clitoris: French Medicine and the Tribade, 1570–1620," in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 170–93.
 35. Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 49.
 36. Park, "Rediscovery of the Clitoris," 175–79.
 37. *Ibid.*, 172.
 38. *Ibid.*, 178.
 39. Ann Rosland Jones and Peter Stallybrass, "Fetishizing Gender: Constructing the Hermaphrodite in Renaissance Europe," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 105.
 40. *Ibid.*, 184–85.
 41. Park, "Rediscovery of the Clitoris," 84–86.
 42. On the question of moral virtue in the Renaissance, see Ian Maclean, *Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortune of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 47–67. For an explicitly Neoplatonic work dealing with women, see Agnola Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, trans. Konrad Eisenbichler and Jacqueline Murray (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).
 43. *Politics* 1.13 [1260^a20], *Politics* 3.4 [1227^b20], cited by Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 54.
 44. Torquato Tasso, *Discorso della virtù femminile e donnesca*, ed. Maria Luisa Doglio (Palermo: Cellario, 1997).
 45. *Ibid.*, 60: "Fermaremo, dunque, questa conclusione: che l'uomo per la viltà e la donna per la impudicizia sia disonorata, perché quella è proprio vizio dell'uomo, e questa della donna. Non niego nondimeno che la fortezza non sia virtù femminile ancora, ma non l'assoluta fortezza, ma la fortezza a ch'ubidisce, come dice Aristotele. Molti di quelli atti, nondimeno, che sono atti di fortezza nelle donne, non sarebbero atti di fortezza negli uomini, e all'incontro, molti azioni nella donna, azioni di temperanza sarebbero giudicate, che negl'uomini a niuna intemperanza si possono ridurre."
 46. *Ibid.*, 5–6: "Non negherò, nondimeno, che maggior lode Semiramis e Cleopatra non avessero meritato, se state non fossero impudiche. Ma Cesare anco, e Troiano e Alessandro di maggior laude sarebbon degni se temperati fossero

stati; e se per la virtù della temperanza merita Zenobia o Artemesia d'esser a Semiramis, o a Cleopatro anteposta; per la medesima virtù Scipione a Camillo, a Cesare, e ad Alessandro è preferito." Tasso finds a further means to deal with the lack of chastity among heroic women by recognizing a difference between those deeds inspired by love and those inspired through habitual vice. How, he asks, can we condemn Dido for submitting to Aeneas, when she truly loved him? In order to explain such a love, he adds a third category to Aristotle's formulation of benevolent and sexual love, one that is a mixture of the two and as such is permissible for the heroic woman.

47. Coryate, *Crudities*, 264.
48. *Ibid.*, 265.
49. Antonio Barzaghi, *Donne o cortigiane? La prostituzione a Venezia: documenti di costume dal XVI al XVIII secolo* (Verona: Bertani, 1980), includes a set of prints from the late seventeenth century that depicts the moral downfall of a young Venetian woman through her inappropriate contact with prostitutes and men.
50. Control of the dowries gave them the right to dispose of funds and property as they saw fit in their wills; in terms of daily life, however, this power was more theoretical, as financial control and management were in the hands of the husband until his death. See Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice*, 132–52. On the financial autonomy of female singers, see Beth Glixon, "Private Lives of Public Women: Prime Donne in Mid-Seventeenth Century Venice," *ML* 76 (1995): 509–31, and "Scenes from the Life of Silvia Gailarti Manni, a Seventeenth-Century Virtuosa," *EMH* 15 (1996): 97–146. In the middle of the seventeenth century, the Venetian nun Arcangela Tarabotti, who maintained contact with several prominent French libertines, observed how little freedom Venetian women possessed as compared with their counterparts in France. On Tarabotti, see chap. 2.
51. On the controversies concerning female luxuries, see chap. 2.
52. On satires of the courtesan in sixteenth-century Venice, see Rosenthal, *Honest Courtesan*.
53. Lynne Lawner, *Lives of the Courtesans: Portraits of the Renaissance* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 14–35.
54. *Ibid.*, 19.
55. See the illustrations in Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo* (Venice: Damian Zenaro, 1590).
56. Francesco Pona, *La lucerna*, ed. Giorgio Fulco (Rome: Salerno, 1973), 104. Pona devotes the entire second evening to the life of a Venetian courtesan, and is particularly informative about attitudes toward prostitution during this period. On Pona, see below, chaps. 4 and 7.
57. Rosenthal, *Honest Courtesan*, 153–203.
58. Paula Findlen, "Humanism, Politics and Pornography in Renaissance Italy," in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800*, ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: Zone Books, 1996), 75.
59. See, for example, Wayne A. Rebhorn, *The Emperor of Men's Minds: Literature and Renaissance Discourse of Rhetoric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), especially chap. 3, "Circe's Garden, Mercury's Rod."
60. Pona, *La lucerna*, 108: "Fra l'altre reti ch'io tesi agli uomini fu questa delle più forti: la musica."

61. Coryate, *Crudities*, 267.
62. Giovanna Ferrara, "Public Anatomy Lessons and the Carnival: The Anatomy Theater of Bologna," *Past and Present* 117 (1987): 50–106.
63. On the performance of gender, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
64. Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 18.
65. Roger Freitas, "Un atto d'ingegno: A Castrato in the Seventeenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1998); see also Joke Dame, "Unveiled Voices: Sexual Difference and the Castrato," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Gary Thomas, and Elizabeth Wood (New York: Routledge, 1994), 139–53.
66. Judith Butler describes this phenomenon with clarity: "If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance" (*Gender Trouble*, 137).
67. On Italian versification and recitative in Venetian librettos, see Beth L. Glixon, "Recitative in Seventeenth-Century Venetian Opera: Its Dramatic Function and Musical Language" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1985); on the relationship between librettists and composers, see Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 199–220.
68. On operatic verisimilitude, see Nino Pirrotta, "Early Opera and Aria," in Pirrotta and Elena Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, trans. Karen Eales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), esp. 275–80, and Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 40–45.
69. *The Letters of Claudio Monteverdi*, trans. Denis Stevens, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 110.
70. Eric Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language* (New York: Schirmer, 1996).
71. Beth L. and Jonathan Glixon, "Marco Faustini and Venetian Opera Production in the 1650s: Recent Archival Discoveries," *JM* 10 (1992): 48–73.
72. See below, chap. 6.

CHAPTER 1. THE EMBLEMATIC WOMAN

1. Lodovico Dolce, *Dialogo della institutione delle donne* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1547), 23r–24v: "Perciocché all'uomo sono insieme necessarie molte cose: come sarebbe a dire prudenza, eloquenza, perizia di governar repubblica, ingegno, memoria, arte e industria di regger la vita, giustizia, liberalità, magnanimità, e altre parti, le quali sarebbe troppo lungo a raccontar tutte. . . . Ma nella donna non si ricerca o profonda eloquenza, o sottile ingegno, o esquisita prudenza, o arte di vivere, o amminstrazione di repubblica, o giustizia, o altro, fuori che la castità . . . Deh, disse Lucrezia, quale cosa può esser salva, quando è perduta la castità? E tuttavia, nel corpo corrotto avea casto l'animo."
2. For a recent consideration of writings about women with an extensive bibliography, see Margaret King and Albert Rabil, Jr., "The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: Introduction to the Series," in Lucrezia Marinella, *The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men*, ed. and trans. Anne Dunhill

- with introduction by Letizia Panizza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), vii–xxvi.
3. It is interesting, for example, to compare the rise of the female voice in Venice with the somewhat earlier phenomenon in courts such as Ferrara. See Anthony Newcomb, “Courtesans, Music, or Musicians? Professional Women Musicians in Sixteenth-Century Italy,” in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Judith Tick and Jane Bowers (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 90–115. On the association of the rise of female singers with actresses on the stage, see Anne MacNeil, “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman,” *Musical Quarterly* 83 (1999): 247–79, and ead., *Music and Women of the Commedia dell’Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
 4. For a list of pre-Renaissance catalogs, see Glenda McLeod, *Virtue and Venom: Catalogs of Women from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).
 5. For a study of female heroes in art, see Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
 6. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, ed. and trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2001). *De claris mulieribus* was best known in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in vernacular editions with commentary by Giuseppe Betussi, *Libro di M. Giovanni Boccaccio, Delle donne illustri tradutto di Latino in volgare per M. Giuseppe Betussi* (Florence: Filippo Giunti, 1596).
 7. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 9.
 8. *Ibid.*, xix–xx.
 9. *Ibid.*, 233.
 10. *Ibid.*, 241 (emphasis added).
 11. *Ibid.*, 241, 243.
 12. *Ibid.*, 23 (emphasis added).
 13. Dolce, *Dialogo*. On Dolce, see also Roskill, *Dolce’s “Aretino” and Venetian Art History of the Cinquecento* (New York: College Art Association of America by New York University Press, 1968).
 14. Roskill, *Dolce’s “Aretino,”* 2–7.
 15. For example, Dolce’s *Didone tragedia* was very likely an important source for Busenello’s *La Didone* (see chap. 3).
 16. Roskill, *Dolce’s “Aretino,”* 7.
 17. Cited in Daniela Frigo, “Dal caos all’ordine: Sulla questione del ‘prender moglie’ nella trattatistica del sedicesimo secolo,” in *Nel cerchio della luna*, ed. Marina Zancan (Venice: Marsilio, 1984), 57–94.
 18. Dolce, *Dialogo*, 10v.
 19. *Ibid.*, 11v.
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. On sodomy in Venice, see Gabriele Martini, *Il “vitio nefando” nella Venezia del Seicento: Aspetti sociali e repressione di giustizia* (Rome: Jouvence, 1989); Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*.
 22. On this and other writings for and against marriage see Frigo, “Dal caos all’ordine”; also Brian Richardson, “‘Amore Maritale’: Advice on Love and Marriage

- in the Second Half of the Cinquecento,” in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 194–208.
23. On the early seventeenth-century polemic about women, see Adriana Chemello, “La donna, il modello, l’immaginario: Moderata Fonte e Lucrezia Marinella,” in *Nel cerchio della luna*, ed. Marina Zancan (Venice: Marsilio, 1984), 95–170; Ginevra Conte Odoroso, *Donna e società nel Seicento: Lucrezia Marinelli e Arcangela Tarabotti* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1979); Emilio Zanette, *Suor Arcangela monaca del Seicento veneziano* (Venice and Rome: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1960). Adriana Chemello names Padua as the epicenter of the anti-female movement, which extended beyond the Venetian Republic; she cites in particular the work of a certain Onofrio Filarco (pseudonym) entitled *Vera narrazione delle operationi delle donne* (Padua, 1586) as particularly influential in this increase of misogynist thought. See also Letizia Panizza, “Introduction to the Translation,” in Marinella, *Nobility and Excellence*.
 24. Giuseppe Passi, *I donneschi difetti* (Venice: Jacopo Antonio Somascho, 1599). All references are to this edition unless otherwise indicated. On Passi, see Frigo, “Dal caos all’ordine,” 73 n. In his biographies of Ravennese writers, *Memorie storico-critiche degli scrittori ravennati* (Faenza: Archi, 1796), 2: 145, Pietro Paolo Ginanni attributes Passi’s abrupt conversion to the controversies surrounding the publication of *I donneschi difetti*. Nevertheless, Passi’s name continued to be associated with *I donneschi difetti*, which is mentioned by a number of subsequent writers, including Cristoforo Bronzini (*Della dignità, e nobiltà delle donne: Dialogo* [Florence: Zanobi Pignoni, 1622]), who mentions the furor that the work caused among the Ravennese women and in Arcangela Tarabotti’s *Semplicità ingannata*, published posthumously in 1654.
 25. Passi indicates in the opening chapter that by the word “donna” he is referring to women who are no longer virgins. It is perhaps in this way that he places himself above the criticism that he is unfairly condemning the pure daughters of his colleagues or patron.
 26. Passi, *I donneschi difetti*, letter of dedication: “I giovani, fra tanto, leggano il libro, e da quello imparino a schifare gl’inganni delle femine, e del tutto abbiano solo obbligo a lei.”
 27. Ibid., letter to the reader: “E se noi, dunque, vorremo ben considerare, e discorrere gl’infiniti casi che sono occorsi agli uomini per cagione di donne, potremo prima le stelle ad una ad una, o del mare l’innumerabile sua arena, annoverare; e siccome queste due cose non si possono fare, così sarà impossibile gl’infiniti mali delle malvagie donne raccontare . . .”
 28. Ibid., 3. On Passi, see also Panizza, “Introduction to the Translation,” in Marinella, *Nobility and Excellence*, 14–19.
 29. Passi, *I donneschi difetti*. On Semiramis as an exemplum of ambition, see p. 60. Chapters dealing with uncontrollable sexuality include “Delle donne adultere e vagabonde”; “Delle donne da partito meretrici, puttane, e esfacciate”; “Delle donne ruffiane”; “Delle donne lussuose, e dei loro disordinati appetiti nelle lussurie.”
 30. See ibid., 85. Passi himself denies making any claims about Penelope’s virtue, but cites several authors, including Angelus Sabinus and Pausanias, who presumably doubted her chastity.

31. Giuseppe Passi, *Dello stato maritale* (Venice: Jacopo Antonio Somascho, 1602).
32. In the dedication to Giulio Spreti, Passi claims that the book grew out of a conversation with the dedicatee and other gentlemen of Bologna on the state of marriage, in which a Signor Pietro Grossi, somewhat in jest, praised solitary existence. Because of his reputation as being knowledgeable about women, Passi was asked to formulate a response, which resulted in this book.
33. Passi, *Dello stato*, 1: “molti degl’antichi filosofi l’ebbero per cosa difficilissima e infelicissima; e questo fu credo io perché le donne, per il più, sono di mala natura e cattive.”
34. Passi, *Dello stato*, 115. On Messalina and Claudius, see chap. 7.
35. Boccaccio’s respondent, for example, was the Italian-born Christine di Pizan, the daughter of the astrologer to Charles V. She was widowed at an early age, and most unusually became a writer at the French court. See McLeod, *Virtue and Venom*, and also Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan’s Cité des Dames* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).
36. On Giovanni Marinello, see Panizza, “Introduction to the Translation,” in Marinella, *Nobility and Excellence*.
37. Lucrezia Marinella, *Essortationi alle donne e gli altri se farano loro a grado* (Venice: Valvasense, 1645).
38. On Lucrezia Marinella’s writings see Françoise Lavocat, “Introduzione e note,” in Lucrezia Marinella, *Arcadia felice* (Florence: Olschki, 1998); Panizza, “Introduction to the Translation”; Chemello, “La donna, il modello, l’immaginario”; and ead., “The Rhetoric of Eulogy in Lucrezia Marinella’s *La nobiltà et l’eccellenza delle donne*,” in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Panizza, 463–77. See also Ann Dunhill’s translation of *La nobiltà, the Nobility and Excellence of Women*.
39. Marinella, *La nobiltà*, 135: “Avendo io apertamente, con invincibil ragione e esempi, manifestata la nobiltà delle donne, senza dubbio esser, come per le comparizioni si può vedere, a quella degli uomini superiore; ma ne passo a’ difetti de’ maschi, i quali vi prego di paragonar co’ difetti donneschi descritti dal Passi, acciocché in tutto e per tutto restiate (ostinatelli) vinti e superati. Parlo con coloro che hanno poco sale in zucca, che se ne vanno alla cieca.”
40. Ibid., 137–38: “Con ragioni, adunque, io credo di aver manifestato che gli uomini sono più viziosi delle donne. Ma non però nego che non ci siano donne di mala vita e pessime; ma però, a comparazione degli uomini ribaldi e pessimi, si possono chiamar ottime. Anzi io credo, che se noi accoppiassimo insieme tutte le donne che furono, che sono e che saranno mai pessime e cattive, non si potrebbero in alcun modo agguagliare allo scelerato Nerone, che godeva del male altrui facendo abbruciare una gran parte di Roma. . . . Uccisa sua madre e ammazzò Poppea, sua moglie, con un calcio, la quale era anche gravida, per leggerissime cagioni. Era sfrenato e incontinente; spesso si ubriacava, e se ne stava la notte e i giorni interi giocando e cantando ne’ conviti.”
41. Ibid., 129–30: “Ma chi negherà che non siano state molte donne, ne’ governi militari e pacifici, prudentissime? Leggasi il capitolo delle donne prudenti. E chi negherà che la donna non dimostri una somma prudenza nel governo di casa? Niuno a giudizio mio. Il qual governo a lei sola pur s’appartiene, e non al marito, come nell’Economia si legge. Oltre a quello, se colui è ornato di principal prudenza che governa e impera, seguirebbe che tutti i sudditi sarebbero

- prudenti di prudenza ubbidiente, e sarebbero secondo questa opinione tali a rispetto del principe, quali sono le donne a rispetto del marito?”
42. *Ibid.*, 47. For a detailed discussion of the various versions of the Dido story, see chap. 3.
 43. Marinella, *La nobiltà*, 33: “O Dio volesse, che a questi nostri tempi fosse lecito alle donne l’esercitarsi nelle armi e nelle lettere, che si vedrebbero cose meravigliose, e non più udite nel conservare i regni e nell’ampliarli. E chi sarebbe più pronto di fare scudo con l’intrepido petto in difesa della patria delle donne? E con quanta prontezza e ardore si vedrebbero versare il sangue e la vita insieme indifese de’ maschi. Sono adunque, come ho provato, le donne più nobili nelle operazioni, che gli uomini non sono . . . Io vorrei che questi tali facessero questa esperienza: che esercitassero un putto e una fanciulla d’una medesima età, e ambedue di buona natura, e ingegno nelle lettere, e nelle armi, che vedrebbero, in quanto minor tempo più peritamente sarebbe istruita la fanciulla del fanciullo. E anzi lo vincerebbe di gran lunga, la qual cosa lasciò scritto Moderata Fonte.”
 44. Moderata Fonte, *Il merito delle donne ove chiaramente si scuopre quanto siano elle degne e più perfette de’ gli huomini* (Venice: Domenico Imberti, 1600), 35. Two recent modern editions include one by Adriana Chemello (*Il merito delle donne* [Venice: Editrice Eidos, 1988]) as well as an English translation by Virginia Cox (*The Worth of Women: Wherein is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Superiority to Men* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997]), from which the citations below are taken. On Fonte, see also Adriana Chemello, “Gioco e dissimulazione in Moderata Fonte,” preface to her edition of *Il merito delle donne*, ix–lxiii; and Virginia Cox, “Moderata Fonte and *The Worth of Women*,” introductory essay to her translation, *Worth of Women*.
 45. For a somewhat critical view of the treatment of women in Castiglione, see Valeria Finucci, *The Lady Vanishes: Subjectivity and Representation in Castiglione and Ariosto* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), chap. 8, “Undressing the Warrior/Re-dressing the Woman: The Education of Bradamante,” 239–56. On the ways in which Castiglione’s women reflect the status of women in the Renaissance, see Joan Kelly-Gadol, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?,” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 139–64; see also Virginia Cox, “Seen but not Heard: The Role of Women Speakers in Cinquecento Literary Dialogues,” in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: European Humanities Research Center, 2000), 385–94.
 46. Fonte, *Worth of Women*, 111.
 47. Chemello, “La donna, il modello, l’immaginario,” 112–13.
 48. “Sometimes one of them, who was fond of music, taking up her lute or tempering her sweet voice with the the notes of a well-tuned harpsichord, would provide a charming entertainment for herself and her companions . . .”; Fonte, *Worth of Women*, 45.
 49. *Ibid.*, 51.
 50. *Ibid.*, 51–53.
 51. Chemello describes the allegorical meanings of the fountain as follows: The first, with the white *armellino* (ermine, a symbol of virginity) carrying the motto “Prima morta, che macchia, al corpo mio,” represents chastity; the second, with

a phoenix and the motto “Sola vivomi ogn’hor, muoio, e rinasco,” represents rebirth through solitude; the third, with the sun and the motto “Solo porgo a me stesso, e ad altri luce,” represents liberty; the fourth, with a lamp in whose light a small butterfly burns, with the motto “Vinta da bella vista, io stessa m’ardo,” represents the simplicity of the women deceived by men. The fifth, with a peach and the motto “Tropo diverso è da la lingua il core,” is a symbol of falseness; the sixth, with the crocodile motto “Io l’huomo uccido e poi lo piango morto,” represents male cruelty. Chemello, “La donna, il modello, l’immaginario,” 110–12.

52. Lucrezio Bursati, *Vittorie delle donne, nella quale si scopre la grandezza donnesca e la bassezza virile* (Venice: Evangelista, 1621), 124.
53. Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 120.
54. Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice*, 247.
55. Pietro Paolo Ribera, *Le glorie immortali di trionfi et heroiche imprese d’ottocento quarantacinque donne illustri antiche e moderne dotate di conditioni e scienze segnalate* (Venice: Evangelista Dericlinio, 1609).
56. Francesco Agostino Della Chiesa, *Theatro delle donne letterate con un breve discorso della preminenza e perfettione del sesso donnesco* (Mondovì: Giovanni Gislandi e Gio. Tom. Rossi, 1620), 1: “che i moderni scrittori mossi da invidia o altra passione, non sono degnati farne menzione ne’ loro scritti.”
57. *Ibid.*, 2: “dove comparischino non cavaglieri armati, non robusti gladiatori, non tigri, orsi, né leoni, né altre rabbiose fiere, per squarciarsi fra i loro membri, come solevano fare anticamente i Romani per dar sollazzo al popolo . . .”
58. *Ibid.*: “una lunghissima schiera di sante donne, valorose regine, e altre gran signore, le quali di sì alta virtù e sottil ingegno dotate, hanno con scritti e opere loro talmente illustrato il femminil sesso . . . non esser quello meno del nostro sufficiente ad apprendere le scienze e virtù liberali.”
59. *Ibid.*, 45: “poiché l’intenzione dell’autore non fu di parlar delle donne illustri per potenza di stato o nobiltà di sangue, ma solamente delle virtuose e letterate.”
60. *Ibid.*, 101.
61. *Ibid.*, 301.
62. Girolamo Ercolani, *Le eroine della solitudine sacra ovvero vite d’alcune romite sacre* (Venice: Baba, 1655); Paolo Botti, *La donna di poche parole commendata* (Padua: n.p., 1663).
63. Ercolani, *Le eroine*, dedication: “queste generose eroine, ch’anco tacendo, dottamente parlano; benché mute, saggiamente consigliano, e quantunque morte, dan vita all’anime, trasmettendo in esse le più vive idee delle Cristiane virtù.”
64. *Ibid.*, 103. Ercolani includes a lengthy discussion of the ways in which women are ruined by over-indulgent mothers.
65. Thais will also appear as an opera heroine in Aurelio Aureli and Marco Ziani’s *Alessandro Magno in Sidone* (Venice: Nicolini, 1679) as the “most fascinating and lecherous woman of her time.”
66. Ercolani, *Le eroine*, 106: “O Dio! quanto è vero che la vana bellezza non è altro che un amo del demonio, con cui adescia egli e fa preda dell’anime; una rete che tende innanzi al cielo, per impedire a’ mortali l’ingresso di quello; una Sirena ch’addormenta e uccide; una bevanda ch’inebria il senso e avvelena lo spirito; un fascino mortale dell’anime; un seme fecondo di pianti; una messe

doviziosa d'orrori e d'errori? . . . Ella ha fatto del mondo tutto un ospedale degli incurabili.”

67. *Ibid.*, 123: “Eva, quando pensò d’esser dea, divenne rea; e all hora, che stimossi immortale, videsi con danno universale pur troppo mortale. A che tanto vi vanta d’esser illustri, se tutto il vostro lustro avessi finalmente a terminare in un’ombra? . . . V’innalzi pure a sua posta superbo il fasto, e v’ingrandisca, ch’ad ogni modo, per molto v’innalzi e v’ingrandisca, sempre però sarete sotto il piede della morte. . . . Imparate dunque insieme con Taide ad umiliarvi, che solo questa è la scala di Giacobbe, per cui potrete ascendere alla vera gloria.”
68. Although Botti makes no specific mention of opera in his book, he was evidently more than familiar with the eloquence of the operatic woman. The libretto to Benedetto Ferrari’s *Armida* (Venice: Antonio Bariletti, 1639) includes a letter of praise from Botti to the poet-composer Ferrari.
69. Botti, *La donna di poche parole commendata*, 1: “La presente operetta, che ha per fine di persuadere al sesso femminile il poco parlare, ne deve contenere molte parole.”
70. *Ibid.*, 63: “Poppea Sabina, che seppe in poco tempo farsi padrono affetto e intenerire due cuori, l’uno d’Ottone, e l’altro più duro del marmo, che fu quello di Nerone, rare volte, dice Tacito, compariva in pubblico; forse perché la sua bellezza, quanto men veduta, fosse più venerata. Di più fu solita di portar un velo, che gli copriva la metà delle sue labbra, per necessitare se stessa a dedicar al silenzio una parte della sua bocca, riserbando l’altra per parlare, quando il bisogno lo richiedesse. Per parlar bene ad un Nerone, sì che cangi in affetto l’innata sua crudeltà, dicea a se stessa Poppea, ti converrà tacere mille e mille cose, e un milion di volte; dunque coprasi da un velo la tua lingua. Acciò questo principe, così bizzarro, s’invogli d’udire la tua voce, siccome non può saziarsi di vagheggiar la tua faccia, gli dirai sempre la metà di quanto brama; perciò mezza coperta terrai sempre la tua bocca.”

CHAPTER 2. BIZZARRIE FEMINILE

1. On the Venetian academies, see Michele Maylender, *Storia delle accademie d'Italia* (Bologna: Licinio Cappelli, 1926); Michele Battaglia, *Delle accademie veneziane: dissertazione storica* (Venice: Orlandelli, 1826). On the Accademia degli Incogniti in the context of seventeenth-century libertinism, see Giorgio Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini: La teoria dell'impostura delle religioni nel Seicento italiano* (Rome: Editrice Universale, 1950; 2d ed., Florence: Nuova Italia, 1983), 149–76. For more recent considerations of the Academy and, in particular, its founder Giovanni Francesco Loredano, see Monica Miato, *L'accademia degli Incogniti di Giovan Francesco Loredan: Venezia, 1630–1661* (Florence: Olschki, 1998); Tiziana Menegatti, *Ex ignoto notus: Bibliografia delle opere a stampa del principe degli Incogniti: Giovan Francesco Loredano* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2000).
2. On the relationships between the Incogniti and the Venetian opera industry, see Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 37–40 and 88–109; Lorenzo Bianconi and Thomas Walker, “Dalla ‘Finta pazza’ alla ‘Veremonda’: Storie di Febiarmonici,” *RIM* 10 (1975), particularly 410–24, and Lorenzo Bianconi, *Music in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. David Bryant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 188. On Incogniti philosophies in relation to *L'incoro-*

- nazione di *Poppea*, see Ellen Rosand, "Seneca and the Interpretation of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*," *JAMS* 38 (1985): 34–71; Iain Fenlon and Peter Miller, *The Song of the Soul: Understanding Poppea* (London: Royal Musical Association, 1992); but see also Robert R. Holzer's review of the latter in *COJ* 5 (1993): 79–92. For a consideration of the ideas put forth by Fenlon and Miller, see Wendy Heller, "Tacitus Incognito: Opera as History in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*," *JAMS* 52 (1999): 39–96.
3. For a more skeptical view of the extent of Incogniti financial involvement in the Teatro Novissimo see Beth L. and Jonathan Glixon, *Marco Faustini and Opera Production in Venice* (forthcoming).
 4. Beth Glixon, "Scenes from the Life." For a variety of poems directed toward singers, including Silvia Manni, see also Pietro Paolo Bissari, *Le scorse olimpiche* (Venice: Valvasense, 1655), 9; also 71.
 5. On the myth of Venice, see Introduction, above.
 6. On the decline of the Venetian Republic in the seventeenth century, see Pullan, *Crisis and Change in the Venetian Economy*; William Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 624–25; see also Menegatti, *Ex ignoto notus*, 24.
 7. On the sex industry in Venice, see Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*; Rosenthal, *Honest Courtesan*; on erotic writings in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice, including those by members of the Accademia degli Incogniti, see Paula Findlen, "Humanism, Politics and Pornography in Renaissance Italy," 49–108. See also Laura Coci's excellent introductory essays to her modern editions of books by two of the more notorious members of the Accademia degli Incogniti: Antonio Rocco, *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, ed. Laura Coci (Rome: Salerno, 1988); Ferrante Pallavicino, *La retorica delle puttane*, ed. Laura Coci (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 1992).
 8. On Giambattista Marino, see James V. Mirollo, *The Poet of the Marvelous: Giambattista Marino* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963). On some of the implications of Marinism in music and opera, see Mauro Calcagno, "Signifying Nothing: Debates on the Power of Voice in Seventeenth-Century Italy" (paper read at the Society for Seventeenth-Century Music, Seventh Annual Conference, Charlottesville, Va.); see also Gary Tomlinson, *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
 9. Charles B. Schmitt, "Aristotelianism in the Veneto and the Origins of Modern Science: Some Considerations on the Problems of Continuity," in *The Aristotelian Tradition and Renaissance Universities* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), 104–23. Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini* (p. 155) emphasizes the broad influence of Cremonini's philosophies on this entire generation of Venetians.
 10. For example, Ferrante Pallavicino escaped the monastery via Padua and Venice prior to his execution at the hands of the Inquisition at Avignon in 1644. On Pallavicino, see Coci, "Introduzione" to *La retorica delle puttane*.
 11. See Maria Assunta Del Torre, "La controversia con l'inquisizione," in *Studi su Cesare Cremonini: Cosmologia e logica nel tardo aristotelismo padovano* (Padua: Antenore, 1968), 54–88.
 12. *Ibid.*, 35–49.
 13. Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 156–58.
 14. *Ibid.*, 156. Many of his less scholarly, vernacular writings—pastoral poems and

- orations in honor of Venice—may have provided a model for his students of the ways in which the ostensibly frivolous might express subversive ideas. See, for example, *Le pompe funebri, ovvero Aminta e Clori, favola silvestre* (Ferrara: Vittorio Baldini, 1591); *Il nascimento di Venezia* (Bergamo: Valerio Ventura, 1617); *Il ritorno di Damone, ovvero la sampogna di Mirtillo, favola silvestre* (Venezia: Giovanni Battista Ciotti, 1622), and the elaborate disclaimers about blasphemy contained therein.
15. For a different view on the implications of the Incogniti philosophies, see Fenlon and Miller, *Song of the Soul*; also Heller, “Tacitus Incognito.”
 16. On female attendance at Academy meetings, see Ellen Rosand, “Barbara Strozzi, virtuosissima cantatrice: The Composer’s Voice,” *JAMS* 31 (1978): 245–52, who notes the fuss that seems to have been generated by her appearance, and argues that while it is evident that women could not become members, they may well have been welcome to attend Academy meetings. Barbara Strozzi’s presence at these meetings, as Rosand has described, probably “evoked the traditional association between music-making and sexual license” (p. 249). The links between women’s licentiousness, music, and the contradictory attitudes toward women are also reflected in a manuscript series of satires, *Satire, et altre raccolte per l’Accademia de gli Unisoni in casa di Giulio Strozzi* (I-Vnm, It. X, Cod. 115 [= 7193]). Several published discourses include disclaimers and apologies suggesting that the authors were concerned with women’s response to the anti-female tone. See, for example, Bissari, *Le scorse olimpiche* (1655). The most vivid account of an Academy evening appears in the publication *Veglia prima de’ Signori academici Unisoni havuta in Venetia in casa del Signor Giulio Strozzi* (Venice: Sarzina, 1638), which describes the gathering of the Accademia degli Unisoni, a subset of the Incogniti whose interests focused more directly on music.
 17. On Pona, see Giorgio Fulco, “Introduzione,” in Francesco Pona, *La lucerna* (Rome: Salerno, 1973). On Ferrante Pallavicino, see Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, and Laura Coci, “Introduzione,” in Pallavicino, *La retorica delle puttane*. On Angelico Aprosio, see Antonio Ida Fontana, “Il P. Aprosio e la morale del ‘600,” *Quaderno dell’Aprosiana: Miscellanea di studi* 1 (1981): 9–39.
 18. On the publishing history of *Bizzarrie academiche*, including foreign editions, see Menegatti, *Ex ignoto notus*. Menegatti proposes that the first part of the *Bizzarrie* was probably written in 1635 or 1636, but not published until 1638; the second part was published by Valvasense in 1646. An English edition of excerpts from the *Bizzarrie* was published as Giovanni Francesco Loredano, *Academical Discourses upon Several Choice and Pleasant Subjects* (London: Thomas Mabb, 1664). The citations below are all taken from Giovanni Francesco Loredano, *Bizzarrie academiche. Parte prima e parte seconda* (Venice: Guerigli, 1654), with my own translations. See also *Discorsi accademici de Signori Incogniti* (Venice: Sarzina, 1635).
 19. Loredano’s involvement in the creation of *Amore innamorato* is documented by Pietro Michiele in his *Rime . . . prime parte* (Venice: Guerigli, 1642), as cited by Bianconi and Walker, “Dalla ‘Finta pazza,’” 421 n. *Amore innamorato* presents an intriguingly ambivalent view of the story of Apuleius’s oft-told tale of Amor and Psyche, focusing on Venus’s jealousy. The cast even includes a “Ruffiana,” who tries to lead Psyche into a life of ill repute.
 20. Loredano, *Bizzarrie*, 1:61: “Il veleno uscito dagli occhi di bella donna avrà tolta la vita all’amante, e non vorremo dunque che sia nero il volto dell’amante uc-

- ciso dal veleno? Non vorremo dunque, ch'appariscano nel volto gl'indici della sua morte?"
21. Ibid., 63: "È troppo oppresso l'animo d'un amante per iscoprire allegrezza nel volto."
 22. Ibid., 61: "È obbligo dell'amante il procurare gl'onori dell'amata, ma qual maggior l'onore può far l'amante che per servir per ombra ai lumi delle bellezze di chi ama?"
 23. Ibid., 2:7: "Qual sia il maggior favore, che possa ricever un'amante da una donna d'onore."
 24. Ibid., 7: "La donna è un erario di tutti i tesori della natura; è un cielo amoroso che non sa influire che grazie, onde sono innumerabili i favori che per mancia da lei possono ricevere gli amante."
 25. Ibid., 9: "Il piede, per testimonio d'Aristotile, è il più freddo tra tutte l'altre membra . . . Ora non poteva maggiormente favorirmi la mia dama, che col premmermi un piede, mostrando che 'l mio amore l'ha riscaldata anche nell'estremità più lontane dal cuore, e perciò più agghiacciate."
 26. Ibid., 10: "Achille quell'eroe così glorioso che meritò la tromba d'Omero e l'invidia del grande Alessandro, poteva esser ferito solamente ne' piedi. Non debb'io dunque gloriarmi in estremo del favore fattomi dalla mia dama, già che avendo mille mezzi per soggettarmi ha voluto, per paragonarmi ad Achille, ferirmi solamente nei piedi?" Given Achilles' association with homosexuality (Stattius, *Achilleid*), as the lover of Patroclus, one might also wonder whether this is a veiled allusion to homosexual practices. On homosexuality and the Incogniti, see below; on homosexuality in seicento Venice, Martini, *Il "vitio nefando."*
 27. Girolamo Brusoni, *Trascorsi accademici* (Venice: Guerigli, 1656), 95.
 28. Loredano, *Bizzarrie*, 1:17: "Se i furti o i doni felicitino maggiormente l'amante."
 29. Ibid., 20: "L'attendere i doni e i favori dell'amata è un effetto di timore e di modestia; rapirli è un atto d'animosità, d'ardire; onde quanto più è degno in amore questo di quello, tanto è più felice l'amante che ruba, che quello che riceve in dono."
 30. Ibid., 2:49: "Perché si paghino le donne de' congressi amorosi."
 31. Ibid.
 32. Ibid., 146: "Che silenzio è il vero padre d'amore."
 33. Ibid., 150–51.
 34. Ibid., 139: "Qual cosa pregiuditi chi maggior menti alla bellezza del volta."
 35. Ibid., 141.
 36. Fenlon and Miller (*Song of the Soul*, 35–36) use this particular discourse to illustrate the Incogniti's suspicion of appearances and views concerning the nature of beauty that they associate with Tacitus. "For Loredano," they write, "the beauty of the human appearance was important solely because it reflected the internal beauty of the soul." This, however, fails to account for the fact that the concern here is specifically with the beauty of women, which they claim only disguises a soul that is necessarily wanton and unchaste. It is evident that the Incogniti not only differentiated between male and female virtue, but also male and female beauty.
 37. Loredano, *Bizzarrie*, 1:117: "Quando si ritroverà donna che uno solamente aggradisca, e che si contenti d'un uomo solo, si potrà chiamare castissima. Con-

ferma il mio pensiero Plauto, dicendo che la donna ch'è casta e buona si contenta d'un sol uomo."

38. Ibid., 149: "Se l'uomo è fedele alla donna non guadagna altro che un concetto da poco, quasi che non abbia ingegno di procurarsi nuovi amori. Se infedele non v'è pena, chi lo castighi. La donna all'incontro fedele è ammirata e lodata da tutti; infedele, è accompagnata da tutti i biasimi e da tutti gli impropri." Compare this with the Nurse's advice to Ottavia in act 1, scene 5 of *Poppea* (chap. 4).
39. Loredano, "In biasimo delle donne"; Loredano, *Bizzarrie*, 2:166.
40. Ibid., 166: "La donna, Illustrissimi e Virtuosissimi Accademici, è l'oggetto più bello e più amabile che possa ritrovarsi nel mondo, e 'l dono più grande e più prezioso fatto da Dio alla nostra umanità. Perché co 'l mezzo di questa lo spirito dell'uomo si solleva alla contemplazione, e la contemplazione porta il desiderio alla cognizione delle cose divine."
41. Ibid., 166–67: "E se tal'ora fissa gli occhi sopra un bellissimo volto, gli tremano le membra, e in un medesimo tempo prende qualità di fuoco e di ghiaccio, e a somiglianza di coloro che veggono all'improvviso qualche cosa divina si ritrova agitato e commosso a un furore celeste. Finalmente, quando riprende gli spiriti e viene restituito in sè medesimo, riverisce la donna co 'l pensiero, l'inchina con l'intelletto, e riconoscendo tutto quello ch'è dovuto ad una deità, s'offerisce sopra l'altare del core d'una dama, vittima e sacrificio."
42. Ibid., 167–68: "Eccomi dunque contro alle femine, le quale doveranno gloriarsi della loro fortuna; già che a rinvenire i loro biasimi s'accinge il più imperfetto tra tutti gli accademici. La donna, Virtuosissimi Signori, è un'animale imperfetto, un'errore della natura, e un mostro della nostra specie. S'è brutta è un tormento degli occhi, s'è bella è un affano del cuore. Se l'ami si fa tiranna, se la sprezzini inimica. Non conosce mezzo, non distingue ragione, e non sa cosa sia giustizia. Nei suoi pensieri è incostante, nei suoi desideri disordinata, e nei suoi sdegni implacabile. Il suo amore nasce dall'interesse, la sua fede dalla necessità, e la sua pudicizia dal timore. Se parla mentisce, se ride inganna, se piange tradisce. In bocca per ordinario tiene il miele delle lusinghe; ma nel petto il veleno dell'invidia. Con gli occhi affascina, con le braccia incatena, co' baci instupidisce, e con l'altre delizie ruba l'intelletto e la ragione, e cangia gl'uomini in bestie. Insomma le tempeste del mare, le furie de' torrenti, gli tempesti del fuoco, le miserie della povertà, e tutti gli altri mali, cedono in paragone della donna, ch'è un male così grande, che non si può descrivere."
43. Ibid., 170: "Io credo, Virtuosissimi Accademici, d'haver soddisfatto alla mia obbligazione. Mi perdoneranno le donne se fossero rimaste offese dalle mie parole; perché m'è convenuto ubbidire; dicendo male d'un sesso ch'è santo, e dal quale io riconosco me stesso. Ma ha detto nulla chi ha detto male; e non perde punto di lume il sole, tutto che venga bestemmiato dagli Etiopi."
44. On Loredano's cynical attitude directed toward a singer, see Glixon, "Scenes from the Life."
45. On Tarabotti, see Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, which remains the only monograph-length biographical study of her; Conte Odoroso, *Donna e società nel Seicento*; Tarabotti, *Che le donne siano della spezie degli uomini*; *Women are No Less Rational than Men*, ed. Letizia Panizza (London: Institute of Romance Studies, 1994); Nancy L. Canepa, "The Writing behind the Wall: Arcangela Tarabotti's *Inferno monacale* and Cloistral Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century," *FI* 30

- (1996): 1–23; Marcella Diberti-Leigh, “Suor Arcangela’s Inferno,” *Romance Languages Annual* 4 (1992): 238–42; Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*; Emilia Biga, *Una polemica antifemminista del ’600: “La maschera scoperta” di Angelico Aprosio* (Venticiglia: Civica Biblioteca Aprosiana, 1989). For a modern edition of a contemporary satire and Tarabotti’s response, see Buoninsegni and Tarabotti, *Satira e antisatira*, ed. Elissa Weaver (Rome: Salerno, 1998). For a consideration of Tarabotti in relation to forced monachization in Venice, see Sperling, *Convents*; also Wendy Heller, “‘O delle donne miserabil sesso’: Tarabotti, Ottavia, and *L’incoronazione di Poppea*,” *Il Saggiatore musicale* 8 (2000): 5–46.
46. Giovanni Francesco Loredano, *Lettere del Signor Gio. Francesco Loredano* (Venice: Guerigli, 1655), 243–44: “Ricevo da Vostra Sig. una satira, perché nell’Accademia, per ubbidienza, discorsi contro le femmine. Veramente è ingrattissimo il sesso donnesco. Dove io pretendeva ringraziamenti, mi capitano rimproveri. Tralasciai a bello studio la maggior parte de’ difetti delle donne, e pure Vostra Sig. nella sua lettera m’ha dato mille maledizioni. Tacei allora per creanza; mentre gli stimoli della coscienza m’obbligavano a dir tutto. Ma se incontro nuova occasione voglio far pentir Vostra Signoria d’aver provocato un suo servitore con la satira. In questo solo il mio peccato mi chiamo pentimento, perché appropriai alle donne molti difetti. In questo confesso l’errore, e ne chiedo perdono; mentre si sa che la donna è tutta un solo difetto. Signora Arcangela la donna è un mostro della nostra specie, per non dire quello che provano gl’eretici. Ella tiene la sua ragione nel senso, la sua onestà nella volontà dell’uomo, e la sua virtù nel nascondere il vizio. L’istessa Scrittura Sacra chiama la donna peggiore della morte. Così è Signora Arcangela mia. Bisogna accomodarsi alla pazienza, perché *Deus fecit nos, non ipsi nos*.” Letizia Panizza proposes that this letter is in response to Tarabotti’s *Antisatira* (discussed below); this is certainly possible, but it might well be a reference to any number of anti-female satires read at the Academy.
 47. On nuns and forced monachization, see Introduction, above.
 48. On Tarabotti’s lameness, see Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, 9, and Panizza, “Introductory Essay” in her edition of Tarabotti’s *Che le donne*, vii–ix. As Panizza notes, Tarabotti suggests in one of her letters (*Lettere familiari e di complimento* [Venice: Guerigli, 1651], 80–81) that her physical defect was inherited from her father, who, Tarabotti boldly states, is not only physically but morally deformed. At least one of her critics, Angelico Aprosio, used this against her (see below).
 49. Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 76.
 50. Weaver, “Introduzione” to *Satira e antisatira*, 7–28.
 51. Arcangela Tarabotti, *Semplicità ingannata* (Leida [i.e., Venice]: Gio. Sambi, 1654), 49.
 52. *Ibid.*, 92: “Se stimate che ’l numero grande di esse figliuole pregiudichino alla ragion di stato, poichè se si maritassero tutte troppo crescerebbe la nobiltà e s’impovirebbero le case, con lo sborso di tante doti, pigliate la compagnia che vi è stata destinata da Dio senza avidità di danari, che ad ogni modo a comperar schiave come fate voi le moglieri, sarebbe più decente che voi sborsaste l’oro, e non ch’esse profondessero tesori per comperarsi un padrone, e poichè nel far serragli di donne, e in altri barbari costumi imitate gli abusi de’ Traci, dovereste imitarli anche in uccider i parti maschi subito nati, conservandone un solo per famiglia, che saria molto minor peccato, che seppellir vive le vostre carni.”

53. Ibid., 14.
54. Ibid., 70.
55. Ibid., 82–83.
56. Despite Tarabotti's limited personal experience outside of Venice, she was well acquainted with numerous foreign visitors, from whom she would have gained a clear understanding of the position of women in other societies. Most prominent among these were the French ambassador De Gremonville and his wife—a frequent correspondent of Tarabotti's—whose daughters studied with her at the convent in Sant'Anna. On Tarabotti's contact with the De Gremonville family, see Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, 309–11.
57. It was during this period that Elena Piscopia, who attended the University of Padua, became the first woman to receive a doctoral degree from a university. On women in the university during the Seicento, see Patricia H. Labalme, *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1980); Francesco Ludovico Maschietto, *Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia, 1646–1684: Prima donna laureata nel mondo* (Padua: Antenore, 1978); see also Massimiliano Deza, *Vita di Helena Lucretia Cornara Piscopia descritta da Massimiliano Deza* (Venice: A. Bosio, 1686) and Antonio Lupis, *L'eroina veneta ouero la vita di Elena Lucretia Cornaro Piscopia* (Venice: Curti, 1689).
58. On Andreini as an exceptional young woman, see MacNeil, "Portrait of the Artist."
59. *Semplicità ingannata*, 102. Tarabotti cites a student of Seneca's who, having read Virgil continually for ten years, was questioned to see if he understood; he responded that he understood very well, but he still did not know whether Aeneas was a man or a woman.
60. *L'inferno monacale* not only includes references to and quotes from Dante's *L'inferno*, but also mentions her next project, entitled *Paradiso monacale*. The announcement concerning the middle installment, *Purgatorio delle mal maritate*, can be found in the letter to the reader in her *Antisatira* (Venice: Valvasense, 1644): "Ti prometto dunque, se le mie gravi indisposizioni lo permetteranno, di edificare in breve sui fondamenti delle riferitimi infelicità di queste misere, il *Purgatorio delle mal maritate*, già che ho fornito l'*Inferno monacale*." *Satira e anti-satira*, 59.
61. Tarabotti, *L'inferno monacale di Arcangela Tarabotti*, ed. Francesca Medioli (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990), 49.
62. Ibid., 50.
63. Ibid., 43–45.
64. On Loredano and Tarabotti, see Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, 241–51; Weaver, "Introduzione," 10–14.
65. "Quello con il canto levò dal Regno di Plutone la sua Euridice, e le linee di Vostra Eccellenza han forza di mitigar le passioni alle condannate nell'inferno de' viventi" (Tarabotti, *Lettere*, 228); the reference is to Giovanni Francesco Loredano, *De gli scherzi geniali* (Venice: Guerigli, 1632).
66. Tarabotti, *Lettere*, 279: "La bellissima Bradamante composta da lei ha fatto conoscere ad ognuno, ch'al suo divino intelletto di tanto sormonta quello del suo primo autore, chi l'ha formata, quanto il cielo è sovrano alla bassezza nostra." The libretto in question is Pietro Paolo Bissari, *La Bradamante* (Venice: Valvasense, 1650).

67. Bissari, *Le scorse olimpiche*, 201.
68. Tarabotti, *Satira e antisatira*, 84.
69. Tarabotti, *Semplicità*, 112.
70. *Ibid.*, 113–14.
71. *Ibid.*, 114.
72. *Ibid.*, 178–79. Giovanni Francesco Loredano, *L'Adamo* (Venice: Valvasense, 1640). See Ferrante Pallavicino's *Corriero svagliato* (1644), ed. Armando Marchi (Parma: University of Parma, 1984), published under a pseudonym with false imprint; Marchi's edition also includes Tarabotti's response to Pallavicino, published posthumously in *Semplicità ingannata*.
73. See Tarabotti, *Che le donne*. On the historical context of this treatise, see Maclean, *Renaissance Notion of Woman*, 12, and Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 220–25; on Loredano's dealings with the tract, see Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, 402.
74. On Dandalo's links with opera, see Glixon, "Scenes from the Life."
75. On Tarabotti's acquaintance with Busenello, see Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, 335–38. See also Heller, "'O delle donne miserabil sesso'."
76. This particular literary encounter has been treated in considerable detail by Daniela De Bellis in "Arcangela Tarabotti nella cultura veneziana del XVII secolo," *Annali del Dipartimento di Filosofia* (Università di Firenze) 6 (1990): 59–110. See also Weaver, "Introduzione," 7–28.
77. Francesco Buoninsegni, *Del lusso donnesco. Satira Menippea. Con l'Antisatira apologetica di G. B. Torretti* (Venice: Sarzini, 1638); published in 1644 along with Tarabotti's response as *Contro 'l lusso donnesco. Satira Menippea del Sig. Fran. Buoninsegni con l'Antisatira D.A.T. in risposta* (Venice: Valvasense, 1644), published in modern edition as *Satira e antisatira*, ed. Weaver.
78. On Aprosio, see Fontana, "Il P. Aprosio e la morale del '600."
79. A modern edition of *La maschera scoperta* can be found in Biga, *Una polemica antifemminista*, based on the original manuscript (I-Gu) and a second copy, revised and corrected by Aprosio, held at I-Fn.
80. Biga, *Una polemica*; also Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, 228–37 and 259–64.
81. Buoninsegni, *Satira e antisatira*, 39.
82. *Ibid.*, 41.
83. *Ibid.*, 40: "Ma è vanità il credere di dissuadere le donne la vanità del vestire, se prima non le spogliamo dell'ignoranza."
84. *Ibid.*, 42: "Quindi la donna altro non è che un verme che rode il cuore agli amanti, un vomito delicato della natura, ed un sepolcro indorato de' cuori umani."
85. *Ibid.*: "Sono la spoglia ricamata di Deianira, avvelenata col sangue del centauro. Questa sola è la differenza fra queste e quelle, che quella avvelenava solamente chi con essa si copriva, e queste non uccidono le donne che le portano (che saria manco male) ma i mariti che le fanno e gli amanti che le mirano." The story of Deianira's murder of Hercules is retold by Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 9.158–80.
86. On the height of women's shoes, Giacomo Franco, *Habiti delle donne venetiane* (Venice: Giacomo Franco, 1610; repr. Venice: Centro internazionale della grafica, 1990).
87. Buoninsegni, *Satira e antisatira*, 47.

88. Ibid., 55.
89. Tarabotti, *Satira e antisatira*, 103.
90. Ibid., 62.
91. Ibid., 61.
92. Ibid., 70: “Non mancano esempi infiniti d’uomini vani, lascivi, dediti alle cagigliature, ai belletti, agli odori, ai profumi, e a tutte quelle cose biasimate con tanta detestazione nelle donne dal nostro gentilissimo satirico.”
93. Ibid., 71.
94. Ibid., 94–95.
95. Daniela De Bellis, “Attacking Sumptuary Laws in Seicento Venice: Arcangela Tarabotti,” in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Panizza, 227–43.
96. Angelico Aprosio, *Lo scudo di Rinaldo* (Venice: Herz, 1646), introduction.
97. Ibid., introduction: “Sapendo io, che molte cose dovevano trattarsi da me che non hanno punto a far con la moda, dovendo dar titolo all’opera, non volsi intitolarla semplicemente *Scudo di Rinaldo*; mi volse farle l’aggiunta *Specchio del disinganno*. La moda si contiene lo scudo, le altre cose sotto lo specchio.”
98. Richard Wallace, “The Later Version of Nicholas Poussin’s Achilles in Scyros,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 9 (1962): 322–29; Wendy Heller, “Reforming Achilles: Gender, Opera Seria, and the Rhetoric of the Enlightened Hero,” *EM* 26 (1998): 562–81.
99. Wallace, “Poussin’s Achilles in Scyros,” 329.
100. Aprosio, *Lo scudo*, 34: “Sono veramente amanti delle lettere: ma di quelle che nelle monete d’oro e d’argento improntate si leggono.”
101. Ibid., 207.
102. The familiar comparison of a woman’s breasts to apples is reminiscent of Poppea’s comments to Nerone in *L’incoronazione di Poppea*.
103. Aprosio, *Lo scudo*, 211–15.
104. Deborah Laycock, “Shape-Shifting: Fashion, Gender, and Metamorphosis in Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Textual Bodies: Changing Boundaries of Literary Representation*, ed. Lori Hope Lefkowitz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 291.
105. Aprosio, *Lo scudo*, 135–36.
106. Ibid., 60: “Il vedere la gioventù d’oggi di cotanto effeminata, che nulla più mi fa dubitare se naturalmente si dia passaggio dal maschile nel sesso donnesco: o scambievolmente dalla donna nel maschio.”
107. Ibid., 66–69. Thomas Laqueur notes a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writings in which this anxiety about gender transformation is expressed. Castiglione’s misogynist, he notes, views music as a womanly pastime, and seems to view men as vulnerable to gender change due to “social perversion” (p. 125). Other citations include an account by Ambroise Paré, a doctor in the service of Charles IX, who reported clinical observations of a girl who sprouted a penis, and similar stories reported by Montaigne and Gaspar Bauhin, 123–25.
108. Aprosio, *Lo scudo*, 62.
109. Heller, “Reforming Achilles.” Strozzi and Saccati make much of the ambiguity of Achilles’ gender in female disguise, his delight in female clothing, and his

- skill at singing and dancing, and they juxtapose him with a eunuch who expresses anxiety about gender boundaries.
110. Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 12. For a summary of the publishing history of this volume, see Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 220–25. The first appearance was probably in Frankfurt, *Disputatio nova contra mulieres, qua probatur eas homines non esse* (1595). A defense was published by S. Gediccus, *Defensio sexus mulieris* (Frankfurt, 1595). The original and the defense were published together numerous times throughout the seventeenth century. The Venetian edition in question was published under the following: *Che le donne non siano della specie degli huomini, discorso piacevole, tradotto da Horatio Plata romano* (Lyon [fict.]: Gaspero Ventura [fict.], 1647). See also Tarabotti's response, *Che le donne*. On Loredano's relationship with the tract, see Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, 402.
 111. Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 221.
 112. On Valvasense, see Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, 395–406.
 113. Arcangela Tarabotti, *Che le donne siano della spetie degli huomini. Difesa delle donne* (Norimbergh [fict.]: Iuvan Cherchenbergher [fict.], 1650) [signed 1651].
 114. Filippo Maria Bonini, *La donna combattuta dall'empio e difesa* (Venice: Herz, 1667). The work was first published in 1651 (2d ed. in 1652), though it was apparently still of sufficient interest to be republished in 1667. The discussion below is based on the 1667 edition at I-Rn. Bonini's career (Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 222 n.) included service to Antonio Barbarini, Louis XIV, and Eleanor of Austria. He lived in Venice for a time, during which he maintained a friendship with Loredano. Loredano's published collection of letters includes one to Bonini (p. 101), praising him for a book—probably this one—which he read with “instruction and marvel, because I found it full of so much eloquence and doctrine . . .”
 115. Zanette, for example, argues that this is one of Tarabotti's less successful writings, as in this case she has found herself arguing in favor of the ecclesiastical establishment rather than against it. Zanette, *Suor Arcangela*, 412–13.
 116. Bonini, *La donna combattuta*, 10–11: “Se il sesso differenzia la specie, come dice quest'empio, porta la necessità d'affermare, o che un individuo sia contrario a se stesso o che, senza tante filosofie, si dia nella natura realmente la chimera. Faccia esempio l'Ermafrodito, che egualmente dell'uno e l'altro sesso partecipa, onde di lui potrà dirsi che sia uomo e animale, ragionevole, perché maschio, e non uomo ma bestia, perché femina: ovvero sarà nello stesso tempo uomo e non uomo, e potrassi affermare di lui nell'istesso tempo e secondo l'istessa ragione una proposizione contraddittoria.”
 117. Bonini, *La donna combattuta*, 11: “S'aggiunge, acciocché più chiaramente spicchino le perfide balordaggini di quest'eretico, che se il solo sesso è quello che costituisce e distingue le specie, si possa verificare che senza mutazione interna l'uomo faccia passaggio dall'esser uomo a non esser uomo: imperciocché attestano molte istorie, che alcuni vissuti molti anni in sesso donnesco, come in Genova in condizione in monaca non è molto tempo, che si è veduto uno passar da un sesso all'altro: e alcuni altri stati molti anni donna, variando indi poi sesso, invece di prender marito, vollero moglie.”
 118. Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 124.
 119. Ibid., 124–25.
 120. Scipione Errico, *Le rivolte di Parnaso*, ed. Giorgio Santangelo (Catania: Società

- di storia patria per la Sicilia orientale, 1974); Angelico Aprosio, *Del veratro: Apologia di Saprício Sapríci per risposta alla seconda censura dell'Adone del Cavalier Marino, fatta dal Cavalier Tommaso Stigliani* (Venice: Leni, 1645); Loredano's *Bizzarrie*, vol. 1, includes "Vita del Cavalier Marino," 395–430. He also published an edition of Marino's poetry with a commentary and biography, *La Lira: Rime del Cavalier Marino* (Venice: Cioni, 1621), which was reprinted numerous times throughout the seventeenth century.
121. Pona, *La lucerna*, 90: "Ti udirò più attento che non ascolto il Creminino alle scuole, ch'è stimato miratamente un altro Aristotile." For Pona's vision of prostitution in Venice, see *La lucerna*, 97–153. On Pona, see Giorgio Fulco, "Introduzione," in *La lucerna*. A Veronese doctor and reputedly a "strict disciple" of Cesare Cremonini, Pona gained enormous notoriety in Venice (and popularity among the writers who would eventually define themselves as the Accademia degli Incogniti) after the publication of *La lucerna* (Venice, 1628). While he spent much of his later life distancing himself from the book, his immediate reaction to his new fame was to dedicate his next work, *La Messalina*, to Loredano and to declare publicly his devotion to Christianity and the Church.
 122. Pallavicino, *La retorica delle puttane*, ed. Coci. His most explicit statement concerning man's right to sexual pleasure is included in the author's confession at the conclusion of the work (pp. 117–30, esp. 120–21).
 123. Francesco Pona, *Messalina* (Venice: n.p., 1633).
 124. On Pona's *Messalina*, see chap. 7.
 125. The ahistorical term "homosexual" is used here for convenience to describe any sort of desire or implication of sexual activity between men, including sodomy or any "unnatural vice." For an excellent summary of the problems inherent in using modern terminology to describe sexual relations between men in the early modern period, see Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendship: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10–16. On homosexual activity in Venice, see Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*; Patricia Labalme, "Sodomy and Venetian Justice in the Renaissance," *Legal History Review* 52 (1984): 217–54. For a study specifically devoted to the seventeenth century, see Martini, *Il "vitio nefando"*.
 126. I-Vmc, MSS Cicogna, 1083, fols. 143–48. See also James M. Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986).
 127. Rocco, *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, ed. Coci. On Antonio Rocco, see Laura Coci, "Nota introduttiva," in *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, 7–34; Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, 161–66; also Heller, "Tacitus Incognito," 49 n.
 128. Coci, "Nota introduttiva," 31. Cited by Coci and Spini, I-Vas (Santo Uffizio, Processi, busta 103).
 129. Alcibiades (born ca. 450 B.C.) was known both for his remarkable beauty and his dissolute behavior. His life is discussed by Thucydides, Plutarch, and Nepos. Rocco's portrayal of Alcibiades and Philotimus is a reversal of that found in Plato's *Symposium*, in which the former fails in his efforts to lure Socrates into a physical relationship. Rocco apparently shared his views about sexual pleasure with his fellow members of the Incogniti, as suggested by one of his discourses, "Amore è un puro interesse," published in *Discorsi accademici de Signori Incogniti*, 164: "Amore è un puro interesse. Per amore intendo con

- sana intelligenza un desiderio e compiacimento del bene; per interesse un utile, o diletto, che a sè stesso, non già alla cosa amata bramata.”
130. A sexual relationship involving an “active” adult male and a “passive” adolescent was also the most widely practiced—or prosecuted—form of sodomy in early modern Italy; see, for example, Martini, *Il “vitio nefando,”* and Rocke, *Forbidden Friendship*, 89–111.
 131. On ancient Greek attitudes toward sexuality, see Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1985), vol. 2; Kenneth James Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); see also Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Arguably, Roman values were equally, if not more, important in Venice.
 132. Rocco, *L’Alcibiade*, 69: “l’esser femina; e dalla prima volta in poi, che anco quella è piena di violenti rammarichi e gridi, non credo si trovi altra sostanza.”
 133. Ibid., 72: “Ma il dolce stesso che si prende da esse è amarissimo, per gl’escrementi focoli e venenosi del mestruo; sono cagione di putredine, di ulcere, di atroli, di piaghe e altri mali infiniti, che perciò li puttani son sempre infermi e infami.”
 134. Ibid., 71: “sa dir ch’era vergine sacrosanta, di buona stirpe, discese di sangue illustre sebben il casto repentino l’aveva in quel punto mostrata povera; che li è fedelissima, che lui solo la tocca, con tutto che spalanchi la sua bruttissima potta a tutti che hanno cazzo, alli cuochi, alli sguatter e alli staffieri; che non è neanche nata donzella, figlia di ruffiana sfregiata.”
 135. Ibid., 71–72: “fa che tra loro s’ammazzino gl’amanti; trofei ordinarii delle lor glorie, gl’incendi, le ruine, le desolazioni delle città e de’ regni, nascono dalla perfidia loro. . . . All’incontro, che si lamenta de’ putti? Che male fanno essi? Quali ruine, o qual oltraggi apportano giammai, se non fu per caso, se non per accidente stravagante? E come è miracolo nelle donne il non esser di ruina e di pena, così è raro l’esser tale nei putti.”
 136. Pallavicino, *La retorica delle puttane*, 89.
 137. Ibid.
 138. Rebhorn, *The Emperor of Men’s Minds*, 133–96. For example, he notes the quite sexual language used by Renaissance rhetoricians to describe their art, invoking variously images of effeminacy, rape, homosexual or sodomitic practices (possession and entering), as well as more explicitly feminine metaphors involving magic, sirens, and water imagery.
 139. Coci, “Nota introduttiva” to *L’Alcibiade*, 28.
 140. Rocco, *L’Alcibiade*, 41. “Ma la gioia inestimabile di questo tesoro era l’angelico della favella; egli con voce tanto soave esprimeva prontamente i caratteri delle parole, con pause così ordinate terminava i periodi del ragionare, che a guisa di sirena incantava gl’anime di dolcezza, non per privarli di vita, ma per tormentarli, vivendo, d’amore. All’aprirsi di quella bocca celeste, s’aprivano stupide e ammagliate le bocche de’ circostanti, esalavano l’anima per dargli più grato albergo con l’anima sua; l’umana favella di articolate note ha forze insuperabile di vincer anco le bestie e far sensati i sassi, come s’allude ingegnosamente d’Orfeo ed d’Anfione.”
 141. On Incogniti travesties of Tacitus, see chaps. 4 and 7.

142. See Loredano, *De gli scherzi geniali*, “Poppea supplichevole,” 123; also “Agrip-pina calunniata,” 23. Other *scherzi* include speeches from such figures as Achilles, Cicero, Lucretia, Mark Anthony, and Seneca. According to Menegatti, this is one of the most frequently published of Loredano’s works, first printed in 1632 by Sarzina, reprinted 27 times, the second part 24 times (p. 53). See also Ferrante Pallavicino, *Scena retorica* (Venice: Turini, 1654). Poppea’s speech is discussed by Fenlon and Miller, *The Song of the Soul*. On Pallavicino’s “Semiramide lascivia,” see below.
143. Francesco Pona, *La galleria delle donne celebri* (Bologna: Cavalieri, 1633).
144. See Arthur Livingston, *La vita veneziana nelle opere di Gian Francesco Busenello* (Venice: V. Callegari, 1913), 161–66. On Busenello’s poetry, see chap. 4. See also Heller, “‘O delle donne miserabil sesso’.”
145. Francesco Pona, *Cleopatra tragedia* (Venice: Sarzina, 1635). Note, for example, the lesson about women and lasciviousness in the chorus at the end of the work: “Ogni gran regi impari / Riverir d’onestate il santo nume: / E del suo bel candore al puro lume / Del lascivio desio, l’ombre rischiari. / Vegga, come prepari / A le colpe le pene il ciel possente; / Che sferza a l’ire al fine / La deità clemente. / Giove più non consente / Ch’ergan di nuovo ad oltraggiar le stelle, / Donna impura, uomo superbo, altro Babele.”
146. Pietro Angelo Zaguri, *La Messalina* (Venice: Guerigli, 1656) and *Le gelosie politiche e amorose* (Venice: Pinelli, 1657). On Zaguri’s *La Messalina*, see chap. 7; also Heller, “Tacitus Incognito,” 59–62.
147. It is not clear whether it was ever performed, or in what context. The possibility certainly exists that *La forza* could have been given at least in private performance, as with the Zaguri plays cited above. On the other hand, it may well be that Loredano never intended for it to be performed, that it was a sort of theoretical work, a commentary on contemporary libretto composition.
148. Loredano, *La forza d’amore* (Venice: Guerigli, 1662), 1.1: “Ma cieco è l’uomo, che a vane voglie in preda / Lasciando il fren della ragion, diventa fabbro de’ propri mali, audace e stolto.”
149. *Ibid.*, 1.1: “A che debole troppo / Ne diè forza natura / Contro gli allettamenti / Del senso lusinghiero / O quanti, O quanti / Fra lussi, e pompe, e feste, e suoni, e canti / Città, ville, giardin, boschi, acque et campi / A piè, man, seno, labbra, occhi, ed orecchi / Lacci soavi, e inevitabil tende, / Onde l’anima incauta alletta, e prende.” After Deadora’s interjection, Ardemia continues as follows: “Ma chi non brama d’esser preso, e gode / D’accrescere con arte inagannatrice / I doni di natura? Ecco: mirate / Mirabil misto di natura e d’arte / Pien di soavità, grazie, e vaghezza: / Gridi pur quanto sa ragion severa, / Che l’appetito a la ragione impera, / E in una sola stilla / Di presente piacere l’anima immensa / Ogni lontano affetto / Di temuto malor scaccio dal petto” (pp. 9–10).
150. *Ibid.*, 1.3 (p. 20).
151. *Ibid.*: “Più tosto, che marito / Voglio la morte.”
152. *Ibid.*, 25.
153. *Ibid.*, 1.7 (pp. 40–41).
154. *Ibid.*
155. *Ibid.*: “Senza dell’ uomo, anzi che donna, è un mostro / Inutile ad altrui, grave a te stessa.”

156. Ibid.: “Or che ’l mio lungo errore / Conosco, e me ne pento, e veggio, ch’io / Nacqui più, che a me stessa, al patrio regno” (p. 41).
 157. Ibid., 2.4 (p. 60).
 158. Ibid., 2.9 (p. 77). In *La forza*, the necessity of pairing off every character is made explicit by Loredano’s extra twist at the end, in which he must distort the dramatic logic by introducing mention of a new single female character in order to provide a mate for a dangling male character.

CHAPTER 3. DIDONE AND THE VOICE OF CHASTITY

1. Catullus, *The Poems of Catullus*, ed. Charles Martin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).
2. *Le Metamorfosi di Ovidio, ridotte da Giovanni Andrea dall’Anguillara in ottava rima . . . di nuovo dal proprio autore rivedute & corrette; con l’annotationi di M. Giuseppe Horologi; con postille, & con gli argomenti nel principio di ciascun libro di M. Francesco Turchi* (Venice: Francesco de’ Franceschi Sanese, 1575). On Rinuccini and Anguillara, see Bojan Bujic, “Rinuccini the Craftsman: A View of His *L’Arianna*,” *EMH* 19 (1999): 75–117; see also Suzanne Cusick, “‘There was no one lady who failed to shed a tear’: Arianna’s Lament and the Construction of Modern Womanhood,” *EM* 22 (1994): 21–41.
3. On the importance of Catullus to Ariadne and other lamenting women, see the discussion by Leofranc Holford-Strevens, “‘Her eyes became two spouts’: Classical Antecedents of Renaissance Laments,” *EM* 27 (1999): 379–93. On Renaissance sources of Catullus, see Charles Martin, “Introduction,” *The Poems of Catullus*, xx. Lodovico Dolce published his vernacular version in *Paraphrasi nella sesta satira di Giuvenale: nella quale si ragiona delle miserie de gli huomini maritati. Dialogo in cui si parla di che qualità si dee tor moglie, e del modi che vi si ha a tenere. Lo epithalamio di Ca. Catullo nelle nozze di Peleo e di Theti* (Venice: Nava e Fratelli, 1538).
4. There has been a substantial body of scholarship on Arianna’s lament and the 1608 Mantuan entertainments as an expression of early modern gender ideology. Much of the focus has been on the question of reception in the context of Federico Follino’s description of the events (*Compendio delle sontuose feste fatte l’anno MDCVIII nella città di Mantova* [Mantua: Aurelio and Lodovico Osanna, 1608], 29–65; published in A. Solerti, *Gli albori del melodramma* [Milan: R. Sandron, 1904; repr. Bologna: Forni, 1976], 2, 143–88; 205–40; 275; 283), and in particular the gendered implication of Follino’s description of women’s tears in response to Arianna’s lament. In 1994, Cusick (“‘There was no one lady’”) proposed that the women in the audience cried in sympathy with Arianna’s loss of self at the prospect of marriage, and thus the lament upholds a conventional (early modern) view of womanhood. Focusing on another Monteverdi work performed for the marriage, Bonnie Gordon (“Talking Back: The Female Voice in *Il ballo delle ingrate*,” *COJ* 11 [1999]: 1–30) links the women’s tears to an elaborate discourse involving female incontinence and bodily fluids. For Anne MacNeil (“Weeping at the Water’s Edge,” *EM* 27 [1999]: 406–17), the women’s weeping and associations with water engages a complex set of rituals involving marriage and death, but she is appropriately skeptical about taking Follino’s comments at face value. See also Tim Carter, “Lamenting Ari-

- adne?," *EM* 27 (1999): 395–405, and Suzanne Cusick's response to these essays, "Re-Voicing Arianna (and Laments): Two Women Respond," *EM* 27 (1999): 436–49.
5. The advice offered by Teseo's Consigliero is indicative of the multiple meanings conveyed by these well-known myths to early modern readers and audiences. Francesco Turchi's commentary on book 8 of *Metamorphoses* suggests that Ariadne's story might be understood as a lesson to women about overindulging in alcoholic beverages: Theseus abandoned Ariadne while she slept after having consumed too much wine. This, he adds, would explain why Bacchus was so taken with her.
 6. Teseo's abandonment of Arianna must also be understood in relation to the work's "happy ending"—the marriage of Ariadne to Bacchus, which would have been familiar to Mantuan audiences from any number of visual representations, including Giulio Romano's fresco *Bacco e Arianna* in the Camera di Ovidio e delle Metamorfosi at the Palazzo Te.
 7. Carter ("Lamenting Ariadne?") proposes that the lament might well have been an interpolation, inspired (and perhaps even co-written) by Virginia Andreini. Indeed, Carter's intriguing hypothesis reflects, in some respects, the literary function of the entire myth within the Catullus poem as a kind of ornament to a pre-existing tale.
 8. Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*, 164–85; see also Tomlinson, *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance*.
 9. Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*, 185.
 10. The two surviving librettos of Striggio and Monteverdi's *Orfeo* demonstrate the importance of gender ideology in the "censoring" of Orfeo's ultimate fate, although scholars have focused more attention on the "practical" reasons for altering the ending. See, for example, Iain Fenlon, "'The Mantuan 'Orfeo'," in *Claudio Monteverdi, Orfeo*, ed. John Whenham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). On Orpheus's associations with oratory in the Middle Ages, see Susan Boynton, "The Sources and Significance of the Orpheus Myth in *Musica Enchiridiadis* and Regino of Prüm's *Epistola de Harmonica Institutione*," *EMH* 18 (1999): 47–74.
 11. Beth Glixon, "Private Lives of Public Women" and "Scenes from the Life."
 12. Numerous editions of Ovid's *Heroides* were published in the vernacular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including *Epistole d'Ovidio di Remigio Fiorentino . . . Con le dichiarazioni in margine delle favole* (Venice: Giolito, 1569).
 13. See Holford-Strevens, "'Her eyes became two spouts.'"
 14. On the convention of the abandoned woman, see Lawrence Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
 15. This is discussed extensively in Craig Kallendorf, *Virgil and the Myth of Venice: Books and Readers in the Italian Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
 16. The sources for the historical Dido include the fragments attributed to the Greek historian Timaeus of Tauromenium (ca. 356–260 B.C.) and the Augustan historian Pompeius Trogus, whose version is transmitted through Justin. Post-Virgilian writers aware of the dual tradition include Macrobius, Augustine, Tertullian, and Jerome. For an enlightening discussion on the "historical Dido," see Marilyn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 24–33, and Mary Louise

- Lord, "Dido as an Example of Chastity: The Influence of the Example Literature," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 17 (1969): 22–44; 216–32.
17. See Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*.
 18. Busenello, *La Didone* (Venice: Giuliani, 1656); translated by Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 60–61.
 19. On librettists' disclaimers, see Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 40–59.
 20. This image of Busenello's "open books" is indebted to Roger Savage's elegant formulation ("Dido Dies Again," in *A Woman Scorn'd: Responses to the Dido Myth*, ed. Michael Burden [London: Faber and Faber, 1998], 22).
 21. See, for example, Michael Putnam, *Virgil's Aeneid: Interpretation and Influence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Philip R. Hardie, *Virgil's "Aeneid": Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). For a succinct discussion of the issues, with ample bibliography, see the editor's introduction to *Reading Vergil's Aeneid: An Interpretive Guide*, ed. Christine Perkell (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 3–28.
 22. See Richard C. Monti, *The Dido Episode and the Aeneid: Roman Social and Political Values in the Epic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981); also *Reading Vergil's Aeneid: An Interpretive Guide*, ed. Perkell, 7–10.
 23. Monti, *The Dido Episode*, 50–59; see also J. P. Sullivan, "Dido and the Representation of Women in Vergil's *Aeneid*," in *The Two Worlds of the Poet: New Perspectives on Vergil*, ed. Robert M. Wilhelm and Howard Jones (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 64–74, particularly 65–66; Sarah Spence, "Varium et Mutabile: Voices of Authority in *Aeneid* 4," in *Reading Vergil's Aeneid*, ed. Perkell, 80–95.
 24. Sullivan, "Dido and the Representation of Women in Vergil's *Aeneid*," 72.
 25. S. Georgia Nugent, "The Women of the *Aeneid*: Vanishing Bodies, Lingering Voices," in *Reading Vergil's Aeneid*, ed. Perkell, 252.
 26. Petrarch comments on Dido in *Seniles* 4.5: "And why indeed did the most learned and excellent poet of all invent this—for it is well known that he invented it—when it had been permitted by his own rule to choose any other out of a number of heroines or to form a new one; why did he choose one . . . whom he knew died out of zeal for chastity and the preservation of widowhood and make her yield to a wanton love?" Cited by Marilyn Desmond, *Reading Dido*, 23.
 27. On Boccaccio's Didos, see Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 171–73; Craig Kallendorf, "Boccaccio's Two Didos: Virgil, Petrarch and 'Il Più Grande Discepolo'," in *In Praise of Aeneas: Virgil and Epideictic Rhetoric in the Early Italian Renaissance* (Hanover, N.H. and London: University Press of New England, 1989), 58–66.
 28. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 179.
 29. Boccaccio, *Genealogie*, 2.721; cited and translated by Kallendorf, "Boccaccio's Two Didos," 74.
 30. Ovid, *Tristia*, trans. L. R. Lind (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1975), 51.
 31. Barbara Bono, *Literary Transvaluation from Vergilian Epic to Shakespearean Tragicomedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 41–42. The Ovidian-Virgilian opposition suggested here has received considerable attention in the literature. While a number of commentators have pointed out the differences between Virgil's Dido and the one depicted in Ovid's *Heroides*, there is consid-

erably less consensus about the relationship between the *Metamorphoses* and the *Aeneid*, and their relationship to Augustan ideology. See, for example, Karl G. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 14–25 and chap. 5. Galinsky in particular disputes a formulation that views Ovid and Virgil as binary opposites: “The *Aeneid* is an epic and ‘Augustan’ in both the literary and patriotic sense of the word, but this does not simply make the *Metamorphoses* into an ‘anti-epic’ or ‘anti-Augustan,’” 15. See also Philip R. Hardie, “Ovid’s Theban History: The First ‘Anti-Aeneid,’” *Classical Quarterly* 40 (1990): 224–35. For those who question the *Aeneid*’s unambiguous endorsement of a pro-Augustan program, the relationship between Ovid and Virgil—and the differing constructions of Dido—is still more complex. On the differences between the two Didos, see also John Watkins, *The Specter of Dido: Spenser and Virgilian Epic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 31–38. The question here, however, is not only how *we* might view the two Didos, but how they were understood and conflated in the early modern period.

32. Marilyn Desmond, “When Dido Reads Vergil: Gender and Intertextuality in Ovid’s *Heroides* 7,” *Helios* 20 (1993): 56–68.
33. Watkins, *The Specter of Dido*, 31.
34. Desmond, “When Dido Reads,” 56; Kallendorf, *Virgil and the Myth of Venice*, esp. chap. 2.
35. On the marginalia, see Kallendorf, *Virgil and the Myth of Venice*, 55–61; on the “uncritical” view of Aeneas, 77–81.
36. Lodovico Dolce, *L’Achille et l’Enea* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari, 1572), 347.
37. Passi, *I donneschi difetti*, 73. As an example of Dido’s cruelty, Passi cites the passage in Virgil in which she regrets not having served Ascanius up for dinner. He also mentions her suicide as an example of a woman’s tendencies toward excessive love (p. 292).
38. Marinella, *La nobiltà*, 47: “this [woman] was truly the brightest image of honesty and fidelity; Virgil, however, followed by Passi, pretended that she killed herself for love of Aeneas; however, this was false, and Petrarch censured him for this opinion” (“e questa veramente è stata un chiarissimo specchio di onestà e di fedeltà; benchè Virgilio finga, il quale seguitò il Passi, che si uccidesse per amore di Enea, la qual cosa è falsa, e il Petrarca biasima una tal opinione”).
39. “Queen Dido was most generous toward everyone, but toward the Trojans one hears of the greatest courtesy, about which one reads in the first book of Virgil’s *Aeneid* . . . This was a very great liberality and courtesy; and one cannot say she did this for the love of Aeneas, because she had not yet seen him; and in order not to be too lengthy, I will not recount the sacrifices she made and the gifts she sent to Aeneas’s companions, and the sumptuous meals” (“Liberalissima era la regina Dido verso ognuno, ma verso i Troiani si può sentire la più gran cortesia di quelle che si legge di lei nel primo libro dell’Eneida di Virgilio. . . . E questa fu una liberalità e cortesia grandissima, e questo non si può dire, ch’ella si facesse per amore di Enea; perché ancora non l’avea veduto, per non esser lunga non voglio raccontare i sacrifici che ella fece, i doni che mandò ai compagni d’Enea, e i sontuosi conviti”); *ibid.*, 73.
40. Kallendorf, *Virgil and the Myth of Venice*, 81–90.

41. Pietro Aretino, *Aretino's Dialogues*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (Venice: Marsilio, 1994), 247.
42. Ludovico Dolce, *Didone Tragedia* (Venice: Aldus, 1547); Diane Purkiss, "The Queen on Stage: Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and the Representation of Elizabeth I," in *A Woman Scorn'd*, ed. Burden, 151–67.
43. For example, Aeneas cites Mercury's command to him in act 2: "Ei ti comanda, che veloce sgombri di questi liti, ove t'ha fatto nido pien di lascivia, effeminato, e molle" ("And he commands you to quickly leave these shores where she has made you a home full of lasciviousness, effeminate and soft"). There are no such references to softness and effeminacy in Virgil.
44. In book 1 of the *Aeneid*, Virgil deals with Aeneas's arrival in Carthage following the violent ocean storm created by Juno because of her enmity for Troy and Aeneas, as well as her desire to protect Carthage. Venus, who desired to protect Aeneas from Juno's machinations, orders Love to impersonate Aeneas's young son and inflame the heart of Dido. In book 2, Aeneas recounts the tale of the fall of Troy to the assembled at Carthage: the death of the heroes, his flight from Troy, the loss of his wife Creusa. Book 3 deals with the disastrous ocean voyage to Carthage, which receives somewhat scanty treatment in the libretto. It is in book 4 that Virgil treats the major portion of the Dido and Aeneas drama: Dido's obsessive love for Aeneas, her sister Anna's advice that she follow her heart and seek union with him; Juno's storm in which Dido and Aeneas consummate their relationship; Mercury's visit to Aeneas and the hero's subsequent decision to depart; Dido's confrontation with Aeneas and his departure; her despair, madness, and desire for vengeance, and suicide.
45. Notably, Ovid's Dido recognizes the similarity between her predicament and that of Creusa. With the benefit of hindsight, Dido recognizes that Aeneas is a man who would abandon two wives. This is a point that could be emphasized in a production of *La Didone*, as Creusa and Didone could certainly be played by the same singer.
46. The stage directions read as follows: "Here Creusa goes into the house. Having taken some jewels, as she is following the others, she is seen by the Greeks and killed" ("Qui Creusa entrata in casa, e pigliate alcune gioie, seguendo gli altri veduta da Greci vien uccisa").
47. On the descending tetrachord, see Ellen Rosand, "The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament," *MQ* 65 (1979): 346–59; see also Heller, "Tacitus Incognito" and "A Present for the Ladies": Ovid, Montaigne, and the Redemption of Purcell's Dido," *ML* 84 (2003): 189–208.
48. In addition to the portrayal of Cassandra included in Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*, Busenello would also have had access to a number of other sources on Cassandra, such as Homer's *Iliad* and the two plays *The Trojan Women* by Seneca and Euripides, both of which were available in translations by Lodovico Dolce.
49. Like Dido, both Hecuba and Cassandra were featured as exceptional women in Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*. He describes Hecuba as a "true example of misery and a great illustration of how prosperity perishes," noting some descriptions of her insanity: "some say that because of these many great sorrows she became mad and went howling like a dog through the Thracian fields" (*Famous Women*, 137).
50. On the association of *sdrucchioli* and the conventions of the invocation, see Ro-

- sand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 268–69. See also Paolo Fabbri, *Il secolo cantante: Per una storia del libretto d'opera nel Seicento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 118–20.
51. On the meaning of the quadro sign in early and mid-seventeenth-century music, see Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*, 361–70.
 52. That Busenello was more than aware of the impact of this juxtaposition is evident from the fact that he apparently experimented with the placement of this scene; in the manuscript version of the libretto (I-Vnm, It. IX, Cod. 465 [= 6386]), Sinon the Greek appears in an even more blatantly ironic position, immediately following Creusa's cries "son morta." The inference was thus that Sinon's joy was specifically brought about by the murder of Creusa, suggesting a kind of brutality that Busenello may well have been persuaded to change.
 53. Iarbas's complaints to Jove, however, apparently provided a tempting opportunity for expansion. Giovanni Lalli's *L'Eneide travestita* (Venice: S. Curti, 1675) features three strophes for his complaint (p. 142) in which he condemns Didone as a "femina errante e ribalduna."
 54. Northrop Frye, "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," in *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 163. On genre difficulties in this repertoire, see Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*; see also Beatrice Corrigan, "All Happy Endings: Libretti of the Late Seicento," *FI* 7 (1973): 250–67.
 55. For a transcription of this aria, see Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 496.
 56. The issue of Iarba's madness is complicated due to the discrepancies in the sources. As Ellen Rosand has discussed, the printed *argomento* and *scenario* from 1641 make no mention of it. The manuscript libretto, printed libretto, and score, however, include three additional scenes for him, all of which make reference to his actual insanity after his rejection by Didone. As Rosand has also noted, these additions correspond to those portions of the manuscript score that were notated by a different scribe. See Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 122–23; also ead., "The Opera Scenario, 1638–1655: A Preliminary Survey," in *In cantu et in sermone: For Nino Pirrotta on His 80th Birthday*, ed. Fabrizio della Seta and Franco Piperno (Florence: Olschki, 1989), 335–46.
 57. Monti, *The Dido Episode*, 37, breaks the process of the abandoned woman as depicted in the Medea story in Apollonius's *Argonautica* and Ariadne in Catullus's poem 64 into three categories: first, she complains of the faithlessness of the lover and contrasts this with her many services to him; second, she becomes alienated; finally, she curses the deserter. My categories are merely an expansion of these.
 58. Sarah Spence, *Rhetorics of Reason and Desire: Vergil, Augustine, and the Troubadours* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 30–37. She notes that at the start Virgil offers us an invincible Dido, who is slowly transformed over the course of book 4 into a woman who "subverts the system." Her transformation, Spence notes, can be charted through her speeches, in which she loses her ability to finish speeches or put her feelings into words. "Even when she does speak, it is a speech that begins with eyes askance, a sign that she is unable to summon the rational powers necessary to combat Aeneas" (p. 31).
 59. Robert C. Ketterer, "The Perils of Dido: Sorcery and Melodrama in Vergil's *Aeneid* IV and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*," in *Melodrama. Themes in Drama*, vol. 14

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 31–37. On the political aspects of the Dido–Aeneas relationship, see Monti, *The Dido Episode*, 59–61. Monti notes that it is really the political outrage more than the personal one that inspires Dido’s curse, a fact that differentiates her from Medea and Ariadne.

60. Busenello may well have borrowed the idea of the appearance of Sicheo from a similar scene in Dolce’s *Didone tragedia*, 2.1.
61. The libretto has “ludibro.”
62. The libretto has “infame.”
63. The libretto has “Sgorghi il sangue, esca il fiato.”

CHAPTER 4. “DISPREZZATA REGINA”

1. Busenello, *Delle hore ociose* (Venice: Giuliani, 1656), sig. a3^r: “Nerone innamorato di Poppea, ch’era moglie di Ottone, lo mandò sotto pretesto d’ambasciaria in Lusitania per godersi la cara diletta, così rappresenta Cornelio Tacito. Ma qui si rappresenta il fatto diverso. Ottone disperato nel vedersi privo di Poppea, dà nei deliri e nelle esclamazioni. Ottavia moglie di Nerone ordina ad Ottone che sveni Poppea. Ottone promette [di] farlo: ma non bastandogli l’animo di levar la vita all’adorata Poppea, si traveste con l’abito di Drusilla, ch’era innamorata di lui; così travestito entra nel giardino di Poppea. Amore disturba, ed impedisce quella morte. Nerone ripudia Ottavia, nonstante i consigli di Seneca, e prende per moglie Poppea. Seneca muore, e Ottavia vien discacciata da Roma.”
2. Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. Michael Grant (London: Penguin, 1956), 7–28. The Roman sources present slightly different versions of the relationship between Otho and Poppaea. Tacitus’s scenario suggests that Nero “took” Poppaea from Otho. Both Suetonius and Dio Cassius are inclined to view Otho’s marriage to Poppaea as a convenience contrived by Nero to cover his own relationship with her. Busenello may have borrowed the idea of Otho’s desperation regarding Poppaea from Suetonius’s biography of Otho (*The Twelve Caesars*).
3. In this instance even Busenello’s *argomento* plays a bit loose with the substance of the libretto. The *argomento* suggests that the female disguise was motivated solely by Ottone’s lack of courage; however, it is Ottavia who orders Ottone to murder Poppea in women’s clothing.
4. See Loredano’s discourse “Se i furti, o i doni felicitino maggiormente l’amante,” cited above, chap. 2.
5. This topic is treated at length in Heller, “Tacitus Incognito.”
6. For a more detailed consideration of the relationship between Ottavia and Arcangela Tarabotti, see Heller, “O delle donne miserabil sesso’.”
7. This chapter deals with Ottavia’s character as represented in the Venice score (I-Vnm, It. IV, 439 [= 9963]). The Naples score (I-Nc, Rari 6.4.1) contains extra scenes for Ottavia that present a somewhat different view of her character. My omission of the material from the Naples score in this discussion is based on the presumption that these scenes were probably not written by Monteverdi or—at the very least—that they are not consistent with the characterization of Ottavia presented in the Venice score. Obviously this argument is potentially circular; nonetheless, I would propose that both scores present viable—but different—versions of her character, only one of which is treated here. Moreover, it might well be argued that the Naples score, which includes more melismatic and con-

- ventional scenes for Ottavia, might well have “solved” some of the idiosyncrasies of the character in the Venice score. On the authenticity problems regarding *Poppea*, see Alan Curtis, “*La Poppea Impasticiata* or, Who Wrote the Music to *L’Incoronazione* (1643)?” *JAMS* 42 (1989): 23–54; Walker, “Gli errori di ‘Minerva al tavolino’”; on authenticity in the context of tonal allegory, see also Chafe, *Monteverdi’s Tonal Language*. On the various versions of the libretto, see also Paolo Fabbri, “New Sources for ‘Poppea,’” *ML* 74 (1993): 16–23. Notably, no questions have ever been raised about the authenticity of Ottavia’s two monologues (1.5 and 3.6). On Ottavia in the Naples score, see Tim Carter, *Monteverdi’s Musical Theatre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 286–96.
8. On the relationship between Busenello’s libretto and the Roman sources, see Rosand, “Seneca,” 34–37; see also Heller, “Tacitus Incognito,” 65–66.
 9. The history of Tiberius is lacking two years and much of Caligula is missing, as is Claudius and the concluding years of Nero’s reign.
 10. Ronald Mellor, *Tacitus* (London: Routledge, 1993), 33, observes that similarities between Suetonius and Dio Cassius certainly show evidence of common sources; however, he also notes that “his [Tacitus] result is so different that we must attribute the final product to his own craft and intelligence rather than to his raw material.”
 11. All translations are taken from Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. Grant.
 12. Several Incogniti writers provide realizations of this speech. See Loredano, *Scherzi geniali*; and id., “Poppea supplichevole,” 146, also discussed in Fenlon and Miller, *Song of the Soul*, 48–49.
 13. Cassius Dio Cocceianus, *Dio’s Roman History*, trans. Ernest Cary, on the basis of the version of Herbert Baldwin Foster, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955).
 14. On the relationship between the libretto and the play, see Francesco Degrada, “Gian Francesco Busenello e il libretto dell’*Incoronazione di Poppea*,” in *Congresso internazionale sul tema “Claudio Monteverdi e il suo tempo,”* ed. Raffaello Montorosso (Cremona: Athenaeum Cremonese, 1969), 81–102; also Rosand, “Seneca.” For a different view that discounts the influence of the *Octavia* on Busenello’s libretto, see Fenlon and Miller, 16.
 15. Joe Park Poe, “Octavia Praetexta and Its Senecan Model,” *American Journal of Philology* 110 (1989): 456–59.
 16. J. P. Sullivan, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nero* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 72.
 17. Poe, “Octavia Praetexta,” 446–47.
 18. Seneca, *Four Tragedies and Octavia*, trans. E. G. Watling (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966), 260–61.
 19. Ibid., 265, 266.
 20. Poe, “Octavia Praetexta,” 446.
 21. This is another area in which, according to Poe, the author of the *Octavia* contradicted the usual structure of a Senecan tragedy: the audience is never directly told either via messenger or similar device of the lurid cruelty of her death, as reported by Tacitus.
 22. Mellor, *Tacitus*, 46. See also Michael Grant, introduction to Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome* (p. 10), who emphasizes the closeness between the Greek concept of history and that of epic poetry and tragic drama.

23. Mellor, *Tacitus*, 30–31.
24. Peter Burke, “Tacitism,” in *Tacitus*, ed. T. A. Dorey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 149–72, esp. 152–53.
25. Cited in *ibid.*, 154. Girolamo Canini (d. 1626) translated Tacitus from Spanish into Italian; numerous editions of Canini’s translations were published in Venice throughout the first half of the seventeenth century.
26. On Neostoicism and Lipsius, see Mark Morford, “Tacitean *Prudentia* and the Doctrine of Justus Lipsius,” in *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, ed. T. J. Luce and A. J. Woodman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 129–51, and Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, ed. Brigitta Oestreich and H. G. Koenigsberger, trans. David McLintock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
27. Cited and translated by Burke, “Tacitism,” 163.
28. Mellor, *Tacitus*, 145; Giorgio Spini, “Historiography: The Art of History in the Italian Counter-Reformation,” in *The Late Italian Renaissance, 1525–1630*, ed. Eric Cochrane (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 118–20.
29. Traiano Boccalini, *Ragguagli di Parnaso e pietra del paragone politico*, ed. Giuseppe Rua (Bari: Gius. Laterza, 1934). See also Heller, “Tacitus Incognito,” 53–55.
30. These include: Pona, *La Messalina* (Venice: n.p., 1628); Federico Malipiero, *L'imperatrice ambiziosa* (Venice: Surian, 1642); Ferrante Pallavicino, *Le due Agrippine* (Venice: Guerigli, 1642); Zaguri, *La Messalina* (1656); and *id.*, *Le gelosie politiche e amorose* (1657). See table 2.
31. On Ferrante Pallavicino, see Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*; Laura Coci, “Introduzione,” in Pallavicino, *La retorica delle puttane*. Ellen Rosand (“Seneca”) was the first to note the similarities between the subject matter of Malipiero’s *novelle* and Monteverdi’s final operas.
32. Pallavicino, *Le due Agrippine*, 418: “Fu lasciva, ma con tal’arte, che dimostrando in apparenza il lustro della pudicizia, faceva meno abominevoli le sue libidini. Viveva ritirata, e se talora usciva in pubblico, tenendo il volto mezzo coperto, sospendeva con apparente modestia la dissolutezza di chi la vagheggiava. Col non permettere in tal guisa che si saziassero gli sguardi degli amanti, promuoveva l’appetito al cercarla, ove più libero fosse il goderne la vista. La vaga scena di quel viso, accreditavasi maggiormente con quella cortina, e tormentando la curiosità degli spettatori, dava loro speranza d’avere il principio d’una dilettevole comedia, quando fosse loro concesso di mirare la prospettiva.” Compare with Botti’s description, above, chap. 1, n. 70.
33. Malipiero, *L'imperatrice ambiziosa*, 159. This passage is also cited by Rosand, “Seneca,” 50.
34. Malipiero, *L'imperatrice ambiziosa*, 159.
35. As we shall see below, in Busenello and Monteverdi’s opera, it is precisely this point about Ottavia that emerges in the dialogue with her nurse, 1.5.
36. Malipiero, *L'imperatrice ambiziosa*, 148.
37. Pallavicino, *Le due Agrippine*, 359.
38. *Ibid.*, 294; Malipiero, *L'imperatrice ambiziosa*, 25. In yet another amplification of Tacitus’s text, Malipiero presents Claudius as one in a long line of ill-fated heroes who are destroyed by beautiful women.
39. Malipiero, *L'imperatrice ambiziosa*, 30–31: “Assicuratasi intanto questa gran

donna del matrimonio del principe, cominciò (deposte le debolezze donnesche) vestirsi l'animo de' pensieri maschi, e virili."

40. Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.7: "From this moment the country was transformed. Complete obedience was accorded to a woman—and not a woman like Messalina who toyed with national affairs to satisfy her appetites. This was a rigorous, almost masculine despotism. In public, Agrippina was austere and often arrogant. Her private life was chaste—unless power was to be gained."
41. Malipiero, *L'imperatrice ambiziosa*, 52–53: "Ma in fine le cose illecitamente fatte non servono che a rovina dell'equità e a corruzione degl'ottimi costumi delle repubbliche perché non può giustamente dominare, chi per vie indirette ascende al trono. Così dunque coperta co 'l manto di matrimonio ogni libidine d'Agrippina, fattasi ella una Iole sopra Claudio, lo consegnò (per così dire) tra le ancelle con la connocchia, ed essa prendendone lo scettro, di primo lancio fece provar a Roma una novella forma di governo. Costei tutte le cose reggeva, tutte le materie di stato ordinava, non già con fine di lascivia come fece Messalina, che sprezzò (per lussureggiare) l'impero romano, ma con una severità ambiziosa mutati li donneschi costumi in virili, teneva 'l dominio non solo sopra le pubbliche cure, ma rigidamente imperava a liberti di casa, e spesse volte superbamente lasciavasi vedere ne' fori, essendo nelle altre cose della vita sua un'esempio di castità, non avvalendosi mai di tratto veruno lascivo, se non quanto le era ispediente per dominare." The reference to Iole is an allusion to the Hercules myth; here, however, he has confused Iole with Omphale.
42. Venice regarded herself as invulnerable to the ills that beset ancient Rome in part because she had a political system designed to prevent any individual from attaining excessive power through improper channels. In Traiano Boccalini ("Centuria Prima: Ragguaglio V: La contesa nata tra molti letterati, quale nella floridissima repubblica di Vinegia sia la più preclara legge politica . . .," in *Ragguagli di Parnaso*, ed. Rua, 21–31), a gentleman argues before the personification of Venetian Liberty that Venice's superiority to Rome could be found in her system of conferring nobility: not by "skips and leaps," but by gradations, and that anyone aspiring to high office must begin in youth from the lowliest of positions.
43. Malipiero, *L'imperatrice ambiziosa*, 31: "Appena ella entrò nel palazzo di Cesare, che la prima notte che si coricò nel letto nuziale (per dire secondo 'l proverbio) si vesti con gl'abiti dell'imperatore."
44. *Ibid.*, 87: "Basta però, ch'Agrippina inaffiata di superbia in tutte le cose più imperiali, d'animo, di vestimenti, e di dominio . . ."
45. *Ibid.*, 56.
46. *Ibid.*, 64.
47. Unlike Malipiero, Tacitus is hesitant to charge Agrippina directly with incest. Using a technique that he commonly employs to distance himself from things unpleasant, he attributes this claim to other writers: "According to one author, Cluvius Rufus, Agrippina's passion to retain power carried her so far that at midday, the time when food and drink were beginning to raise Nero's temperature, she several times appeared before her inebriated son all decked out and ready for incest" (*Annals*, 14.2). He goes on to tell us that Seneca brought Acte back in to distract Nero and warn him that Agrippina would hurt his reputation by telling all of his sacrilegious acts. Tacitus also cites Fabius Rusticus, who credits

- Acte with stopping the incestuous relationship, but describes Nero as the aggressor. Regardless, it is after this point that Nero reaches the decision to murder his mother.
48. Malipiero, *L'imperatrice ambiziosa*, 130: "Amate o Nerone isfogare gl'appetiti con altra donna, che con Ottavia vostra moglie? S'io v'ho saputo partorire a questo gran trono, sarò anche materia capace per servire a vostri compiacimenti. Forse meglio, figliuolo, impossessarvi della mia camera, e del mio letto imperiale, che di quello meschino d'una sozza serva. Così gl'affetti e gli appetiti della vostra giovinezza coperti staranno."
 49. Ibid., 131: "Maledetta ambizione, che per regnare induce questa disonestissima madre ad offerir se stessa concubina del figlio."
 50. Ibid., 131–32: "Io ho una madre terribile in ogni azione, e falsa in ogni trattamento, madre che per oggetto d'ogni sua azione ha il solo proprio interesse, e che per dominare distruggerebbe la stessa figliuolanza." In this, Malipiero remarks that Nero demonstrates "great sense and sensibility."
 51. Zaguri, *La Messalina*, 1.1 (p. 2): "Ardire, mio cuore, che vacilla la sicurezza di quel governo, che teme le leggi della coscienza. Il principe non riconosce che se stesso. Darebbe indizio di mutilata autorità, se le sue forze non rompersero gli argini che trattengono le proprie compiacenze."
 52. Zaguri, *Le gelosie*, 3.3 (pp. 27–28): "L'azioni de' principi non soccombono al giudizio de' sudditi, che per lo più restano delusi dall'apparenze. La giustizia tiene le bilance nella sinistra facile a vacillare, nella destra imbrandisce il ferro. Fa più stima della forza che della ponderazione dell'equità. . . . Il principe non riconosce per superiore che il capriccio, e il suo desiderio per legge."
 53. Ibid., 2.5 (p. 64): "I peccati impuniti fomentano nuovi errori. Maggior delitto si commette talvolta nell'assoluzione che nel castigo. E quando anche la sentenza apparisca ingiusta, per non pubblicarsi appassionato o inesperto, così richiede la politica. L'arte di regnare non s'inviluppa tra puntigli della ragione. Tutte le linee d'un ben stabilito impero si riducono a questo solo punto."
 54. Tim Carter, "'In Love's harmonious consort'? Penelope and the Interpretation of *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*," *COJ* 5 (1993): 1–13.
 55. Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*. On Ottavia's use of the *durus* hexachord in terms of the tonal-allegorical framework of the entire opera, see pp. 317–22; see also pp. 342–48.
 56. This voice-leading, it must be noted, is by no means unusual in Monteverdi's oeuvre; he uses it in the opening of the book 4 madrigal "Si ch'io vorrei morire" in a context that signifies both death and passion (temporarily) denied; Iro in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse* similarly ends his suicide scene with an unresolved leading tone. Notably, for Ottavia this device is associated with womanhood, death, and a passionless existence.
 57. On the centrality of Seneca's death scene, see Rosand, "Seneca"; Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*, 314–15; Tim Carter, "Re-Reading *Poppea*: Some Thoughts on Music and Meaning in Monteverdi's Last Opera," *JRMA* 122 (1997): 173–204; see also Robert C. Ketterer, "Neoplatonic Light and Dramatic Genre in Busenello's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* and Noris's *Il ripudio d'Ottavia*," *ML* 80 (1999): 1–22; Heller, "Tacitus Incognito."
 58. Findlen, "Humanism, Politics and Pornography in Renaissance Italy."
 59. Monteverdi sets up the same contrast in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse* between Penelope and

- Melanto. See Ellen Rosand, "The Bow of Ulysses: Monteverdi, Badoaro and *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse*," *JM* 12 (1994): 376–95.
60. "Se non ci fosse né l'onor, né Dio / Sarei nume a me stessa, e i falli miei / Con la mia stessa man castigherei / E però lunge dagli errori intanto / Divido il cor tra l'innocenza e 'l pianto."
 61. Fenlon and Miller, *Song of the Soul*, 90.
 62. Rosand, "Seneca," 46–47, notes the ineffective, oppressive tone of Seneca's advice to Ottavia, arguing strongly against a Stoic viewpoint on the part of the librettist.
 63. Susan McClary, "Constructions of Gender in Monteverdi's Dramatic Music," in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991), 49. Monteverdi's setting of the passage (and the Valetto's subsequent comments about Seneca's "golden maxims" as "mere inventions") is strikingly similar to Quintilian's criticisms of the "corrupt style," associated with Seneca: "[It] exults in the license of words or runs riot with childish epigrams . . . or swells with unrestrained pomposity or rages with empty commonplaces or glitters with ornamentation that will fall to the ground if lightly shaken, or regards extravagance as sublimity or raves under the pretext of free speech." Quoted and translated by William J. Dominik, "The Style is the Man: Seneca, Tacitus and Quintilian's Canon," in *Roman Eloquence: Rhetoric in Society and Literature*, ed. William J. Dominik (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 55.
 64. For a different reading of the melisma, see Fenlon and Miller, *Song of the Soul*, 64–65; also Heller, "Tacitus Incognito," 67 n.
 65. Dio Cassius (*Dio's Roman History*, 61.9.2–4) presents the most critical view of Seneca, accusing him of having had an illicit relationship with Agrippina.
 66. On Monteverdi's use of ostinato bass patterns, see Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*, 323.
 67. This is yet another reference to *L'Adamo* (Venice, 1640), and the association of the serpent with a woman. See above, chap. 2.
 68. By placing Ottavia's final appearance in the opera on the ship bound for exile, Busenello once again demonstrates the intertwining of Agrippina's history in his construction of Ottavia. In Tacitus (*Annals*, 14.63), Octavia was indeed sent into exile prior to her death; yet it was Agrippina whom Nero tricked into boarding a ship so that he could attempt her murder.
 69. "Anna Renzi chiede luogo in Parnaso, e non viene ricevuta," *Bizzarrie*, 1:196–203.
 70. *Le glorie della Signora Anna Renzi romana*, 28. Cited and translated by Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 385.
 71. *Le glorie della Signora Anna Renzi romana*, 31: "L'ingiusto imperator, il fier Nerone / La consegna del mar all'onde a mare / Acciò perda del vivere ogni speme. / Ma non s'avvede il misero fellone; / Che' ella non può perirvi, essendo il mare / Una vera magion delle Sirene."
 72. *Ibid.*, 51.

CHAPTER 5. THE NYMPH CALISTO AND THE MYTH OF FEMALE PLEASURE

1. Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. James George Frazer, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 79.

2. On Arcadia and Pan's world, see Philippe Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan in Ancient Greece*, trans. Kathleen Atlass and James Redfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 4–5; John Boardman, *The Great God Pan: The Survival of an Image* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 26–43.
3. Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan*, 4–5.
4. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*; also Denis Feeney, "Mea Tempora: Patterns of Time in the *Metamorphoses*," in *Ovidian Transformations: Essays on the Metamorphoses and Its Reception*, ed. Alessandro Barchiesi, Philip Hardie, and Stephen Hinds (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1999), 13–30. On the chronological distortions specifically in book 2, see Andrew Zissos and Ingo Gildenhard, "Problem of Time in *Metamorphoses* 2," in *ibid.*, 31–47, who argue that such distortions were very much a part of Ovid's "deliberate and self-conscious" effort (p. 31).
5. Feeney, "Mea Tempora," 18.
6. Glixon and Glixon, "Marco Faustini."
7. On Pan's sexuality, see Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan*, esp. chap. 4. On the myths of Echo and Syrinx, see pp. 79–83.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Francesco Cavalli, *La Calisto* (I-Vnm, It. IV, 353 [= 9877]); Giovanni Faustini, *La Calisto* (Venice: Giuliani, 1651). *La Calisto* was produced at the Teatro Sant'Apollinare, where Giovanni Faustini, brother to the opera impresario Marco Faustini, had become a "house" librettist. On Faustini as a librettist, see Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 169–75; also Rosand, "'Ormindo travestito' in *Erismena*," *JAMS* 28 (1975): 268–91. On Marco Faustini, see Beth L. and Jonathan Glixon, *Marco Faustini and Opera Production in Venice* (forthcoming). See also Jane Glover, "The Teatro Sant'Apollinare and the Development of Seventeenth-Century Venetian Opera" (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1975); *ead.*, *Cavalli* (London: St Martin's Press, 1978). For a study of characterization in four Cavalli-Faustini collaborations, including *La Calisto*, see Christopher John Mossey, "'Human after All': Character and Self-Understanding in Operas by Giovanni Faustini and Francesco Cavalli, 1644–1652" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1999). See also Cavalli, *La Calisto*, ed. Jennifer Williams Brown (Madison: A-R Editions, forthcoming).
10. Faustini, *La Calisto*, sig. A4^r: "Noto è l'ardire magnanimo di Fetonte, e come mal sapendo reggere i paterni destrieri, divenne per la salvezza del mondo ardente segno del fulmine. Giove intento alla conservazione delle cose prodotte, vedute intatte le sfere dalle fiamme solari, scende con il nepote Mercurio in terra, l'una deposto il folgore, e l'altro con la verga i tallari, per ristorarla dei torti ricevuti. Il primo suolo che calca è il Pelasgio, frequentato da Diana per la copia delle fonti, per il numero dell selve ripiene di fiere, ma più per il suo bello Endimione amato da lei con affetti secreti. Era il decoro dello stuolo delle vergini faretrate, seguaci della dea cacciatrice, Calisto, figliuola del Re Licaone, di quel Licaone, che ridendosi de' miracoli di Giove, quando altra volta sceso dall'Olimpo, sconosciuto andava peregrinando il mondo, per notare la scellerataggine umana, provocandosi contro l'ira di quella maestà, con orribili conviti, vide tutta foco la reggia, e egli, atterrito nella fuga, trasformarsi in un lupo. Questa fanciulla tenera e semplice, abbandonati i lussi reali e datasi alle selve,

votò la verginità a Cintia; quasi che 'l fato la spingesse ne' boschi, fatti nidi del padre transmigrato per innalzarla alle stelle."

11. Zissos and Gildenhard, "Problem of Time," 40.
12. The story of Callisto is reported in a number of ancient sources. The earliest is the brief report in Hesiod's *Astronomy* 3 in the eighth century B.C., followed by a report in the *Library* attributed to Apollodorus (3.8.1–2), culminating in the long poetic exposition by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* (2.401–530), the slightly varied and briefer exposition by Ovid in the *Fasti* (2.155–92), which was followed in the second century by Pausanias's somewhat more anthropological description (8.3.6–7). Early modern readers would also have learned about Callisto from the *Poetica astronomica* and *Fabulae* attributed to Hyginus, thought to have been written no later than the third century, and published in what was certainly a corrupted form in the sixteenth century. See the introduction to *The Myths of Hyginus*, ed. Mary Grant (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Publications, 1960), 1–24. On the various versions of the myth see Kathleen Wall, *The Callisto Myth from Ovid to Atwood: Initiation and Rape in Literature* (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), chap. 1; on the importance of the myth in the lineage of Arcadia, see Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan*, chap. 2.
13. Shawn O'Bryhim, "Ovid's Version of Callisto's Punishment," *Hermes-Zeitschrift für klassische Philologie* 18 (1990): 75–80.
14. Barbara E. Stirrup, "Techniques of Rape: Variety of Wit in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Greece and Rome* 24 (1977): 170–84; W. R. Johnson, "The Rapes of Callisto: Readings of Ovid's Versions in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*," *Classical Journal* 92 (1996): 9–24.
15. Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan*, 32.
16. Wall, *The Callisto Myth*, 13–15.
17. John Heath, "Diana's Understanding of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Classical Journal* 86 (1991): 233–43.
18. *Ibid.*, 238–39.
19. *Ibid.*, 237.
20. O'Bryhim, "Ovid's Version of Callisto's Punishment," 78–80.
21. For a list of other paintings treating this topic, see Andor Pigler, *Barockthemen: Eine Auswahl von Verzeichnissen zur Ikonographie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, 2d rev. ed. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974), 73–74. Among the best known are Titian's *Diana and Callisto* (Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland) and Rubens, *Diana and Callisto* (Madrid, Museo del Prado). Julius Held's comparison of the two paintings reveals the different ways in which Diana's relationship to Callisto might be depicted. In Titian's painting, Callisto is isolated from the others, and an "immaculate and imperious" Diana banishes her coldly. In the Rubens painting, "Diana . . . acts less like the cool, distant, and merciless goddess than like an unhappy friend, stretching out her arms towards her former companion. Callisto, standing with lowered eyes but with great dignity before her mistress . . . is more visibly punished by her own sense of shame. One cannot help feeling that for Rubens she is the true heroine . . ." Julian Held, "Rubens and Titian," in *Titian: His World and His Legacy*, ed. David Rosand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 324.
22. Johnson, "Rapes of Callisto," 17.

23. O'Bryhim, "Ovid's Version of Callisto's Punishment," 78.
24. On the narrator, see Johnson, "Rapes of Callisto," 20–21.
25. Hesiod and Apollodorus report that she was the daughter of Hyperion and the sister of Helios (the sun) and Eos (the dawn).
26. Giovanni Argoli, *L'Endimione*, ed. Marzio Pieri (Venice: Guerrier, 1626; Parma: Archivio barocco, 1986). On the Neoplatonic implications, see the "Introduzione" by Pieri.
27. Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman, rev. G. P. Goold, Loeb Classical Library Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), 371.
28. Lucian, *Dialogues of the Gods*, 19.2, trans. M. D. Macleod, Loeb Classical Library Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 331.
29. Virgil, *Georgics*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1918), 183.
30. Giovanni Boccaccio and Giuseppe Betussi, *Della genealogia de gli dei* (Venice: Compagnia degli Uniti, 1585), 64.
31. Vincenzo Cartari, *Le immagini de i dei de gli antichi*, ed. Federica Martignano, Ginetta Auzzas, Manlio Pastore Stocchi, and Paolo Rigo (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1996), 109: "le favole finsero che la Luna s'innamorasse di Endimione pastore e l'addormentasse sopra certo monte solo per baciarlo a suo piacere. Ma, come riferisce Pausania, altro vi fu che basci fra loro, perché dicono alcuni che ei ne ebbe cinquanta figliuole. E leggesi ancora che non per amore solamente fece la Luna copia di sé ad Endimione, ovvero a Pan, dio dell'Arcadia, come canta Virgilio, ma per avere da lui un gregge di belle pecore bianche. E tutte sono favole, ma che hanno però qualche sentimento di verità; perché Plinio scrive che Endimione fu il primo che intendesse la natura della Luna e che perciò fu finto che fossero innamorati insieme."
32. For a list, see Pigler, *Barockthemen*, 88–92.
33. They might be shown without touching, as in the painting by Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) at the National Gallery of Art in Washington: here Diana appears in full eighteenth-century dress, arms outstretched toward Endymion, who sleeps sitting with his head resting on his hand. An earlier image by Luca Giordano (1634–1705), also at the National Gallery, is somewhat more suggestive: Diana hovers directly above a more exposed and vulnerable Endymion, with one hand outstretched behind his neck, as if to pull him closer for a kiss. Still another seventeenth-century image by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (Il Guercino) at the Galleria Doria Pamphili in Rome omits Diana altogether: Endymion sleeps while sitting with a telescope in his lap, prepared for a scientific rather than a sexual adventure.
34. On the Carracci paintings in the Farnese and differing interpretations, see Donald Posner, *Annibale Carracci: A Study in the Reform of Italian Painting around 1590* (London: Phaidon, 1971); Charles Dempsey, *Annibale Carracci: The Farnese Gallery, Rome* (New York: George Braziller, 1995); John Rupert Martin, *The Farnese Gallery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); see also Silvia Ginzberg Carignani, *Annibale Carracci a Roma: Gli affreschi di Palazzo Farnese* (Rome: Donzelli, 2000). Engravings of the Farnese frescoes circulated extensively in the mid-seventeenth century; this was probably the way in which many outside of Rome would have become familiar with these images. The French printers Nicolas Mignard (1636) and Jacques Belly (1641) were the first to print entire sets

- of the Farnese frescoes; Carlo Cesio's prints were probably slightly later; it is unclear whether they would have predated *La Calisto*. See Eviliana Borea and Ginevra Mariana, *Annibale Carracci e i suoi incisori*, ed. André Chastel (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1986), 112–30. As Beth and Jonathan Glixon have documented, Faustini was also the grandson on the maternal side of Cesare Vecellio, a distant relative of Titian, who was a well-known engraver and costume illustrator. Faustini would probably have been familiar with contemporary artistic trends, and may well have had access to drawings and engravings of the most famous images. See Thomas Walker, rev. Beth and Jonathan Glixon, "Faustini, Giovanni," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2d ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: MacMillan, 2001), 8:607–8.
35. Glover, "The Teatro Sant'Apollinare," 205. She notes that it is always unclear which of the two plots is more important. Faustini, she remarks, was "incapable of moulding the dramatic ingredients into his own familiar libretto pattern. The result was an unevenly constructed text in which his normal fluency was lacking."
 36. Charles Dempsey, "'Et nos cedamus amori': Observations on the Farnese Gallery," *Art Bulletin* 1 (1968): 363–74.
 37. On water as a purifying element, see Marica Mercalli and Simonetta Tozzi, "Il mito di Callisto," in *Giorgione e la cultura Veneta tra '400 e '500: Mito, allegoria, analisi iconologica* (Rome: De Luca, 1981), 155–60. As in Faustini's libretto, however, Anguillara's popular edition of *Le metamorfosi* (p. 138) actually places the seduction by a fountain, in which Callisto bathes herself prior to the approach of Jove.
 38. Mercalli and Tozzi, "Il mito di Callisto," 156. They demonstrate how the myth uses water primarily as a purifying element, the coldness of which calms the "excessive heat produced by the body." The bath provides a moment in which the equilibrium between body and psyche "permits access to the contemplative state," particularly through its association with Diana. Faustini's libretto, however, continually uses the fountain itself as the seat of desire: it may quench Callisto's thirst, but it nearly always leads to greater physical arousal through the power of Jove.
 39. Luigi Groto, *La Calisto favola: pastorale* (Venice: Turino, 1612): "Mi son vestito di Diana propria / E cangiato ho le chiome, il volto, l'abito, / I gesti, i passi, la favella, e fattomi / Tal, che in quel chiaro fonte ora specchiandomi / O temei d'esser totalmente in femmina / Mutato, o ingannar quasi me medesimo / Potrei, di me non avendo notizia. / E che ne par a te, figliuola?"
 40. Park, "The Rediscovery of the Clitoris," 177.
 41. *Ibid.*, 178.
 42. Johnson, "Rapes of Callisto," 10–11; see also Amy Richlin, "Reading Ovid's Rapes," in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. Amy Richlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 158–80.
 43. Philipp P. Fehl, "The Rape of Europa and Related Ovidian Pictures by Titian (I and II)," *Fenway Court* (1980): 2–19; W. Busch, "The Chaste and Unchaste Vision—Rembrandt 'Diana, Acteon and Callisto'," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 52 (1989): 257–77; see also Mercalli and Tozzi, "Il mito di Callisto."
 44. Cavalli, *La Calisto*, directed by René Jacobs, Harmonia Mundi: HMC 901515.
 45. See, for example, Orgel, *Impersonations*; Dymphna Callaghan, *Shakespeare without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (New York: Rout-

- ledge, 2000). Callaghan notes the importance of voice and pitch level in the reception of transvestite theater, in particular the vulnerability of the broken male voice and the difficulty (at least in England) that male spectators had with castratos, whose objective was “to be male impersonators rather than actors whose objective was to impersonate femininity” (p. 73).
46. The same contradiction can even be “seen” in the Palazzo Farnese. The two large frescoes of Diana with Pan and Endymion might well alter the way in which we view the small medallions depicting Callisto’s story.
 47. Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Le vite de’ pittori, scultori et architetti moderni* (Rome: Mascardi, 1672).
 48. It is worth noting that Nicolas Poussin’s painting of Diana and Endymion (1630) also shows Endymion awake; the two converse in a manner that is even closer to the operatic representation.
 49. Johnson, “Rapes of Callisto,” 13.
 50. Susan McClary, “Gender Ambiguities and Erotic Excess in Seventeenth-Century Venetian Opera,” in *Acting on the Past: Historical Performance across the Discipline*, ed. Mark Franko and Anne Richards (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 177–200.
 51. *Ibid.*, 198–200.
 52. *Ibid.*, 177–200. McClary makes a similar point about the Christian implications of both music and text in the duet between Giove and Calisto. I would add that as in many other instances in early modern art and music, the expression of the ecstatic here is both sacred and secular—that is, this rapturous moment conflates images and musical devices that are associated with both corporeal and divine love. The result is that the denial of physical pleasure produces one of the opera’s most “sensuous” moments.

CHAPTER 6. SEMIRAMIDE AND MUSICAL TRANSVESTISM

1. On Theseus and the amazons, see Page duBois, *Centaur and Amazons: Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 25–42; Elaine Fantham, Helene Peet Foley, et al., *Women in the Classical World: Image and Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 128–35; William Blake Tyrell, *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984). Theseus and Hippolyta are both featured in one of the more obviously amoral—and controversial—librettos of the period, Francesco Piccioli’s *L’incostanza triomphante* (Venice: Giuliani, 1657). On problems surrounding the production of this opera, see Glixon and Glixon, “Marco Faustini and Venetian Opera Production,” 72–73.
2. See Abby Wettan Kleinbaum, *The War against the Amazons* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983). The story of the attack on Athens by formidable warrior women is an excellent example of how the Greeks, especially the Athenians, used the idea of combat with amazons to enhance their self-image and to reinforce their perception of themselves as historically significant. Kleinbaum notes (pp. 11–12), “it was only because they [the Greeks] had been so daring that the Amazons had chosen to attack them. . . . Any plucky mortal could kill a Persian, but it takes a hero to triumph over an Amazon.”
3. Kleinbaum, *ibid.*, 41, observes, for instance, that the Christian reinterpretation

- tions of the amazon myths rarely emphasized their virginity, but rather their unrestrained sexuality. However, the pain and suffering that a hero had to endure to resist or conquer the amazon were well in keeping with Christian precepts.
4. Alison Taufer, "The Only Good Amazon is a Converted Amazon: The Woman Warrior and Christianity in the *Amadis* Cycle," in *Playing with Gender: A Renaissance Pursuit*, ed. Jean R. Brink, Maryanne C. Horowitz, and Allison P. Coudert (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 35–52.
 5. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 131.
 6. Tarabotti, *Semplicità*, 98: "Temete forse della molteplicità delle femine del mondo? Siete pusillanimi. Non sono più i tempi di quelle valorose amazzoni che prudentissime uccidevano i maschi, per non esser a loro soggette."
 7. On Tarabotti and Bissari, see chap. 2. For Tarabotti, the opera was evidence that Bissari's intellect outshone even that of the "original" author.
 8. Heller, "Chastity, Heroism, and Allure," chap. 5.
 9. See Delio's act 1, scene 8 aria "Gran tormento è l'esser bello." Veremonda's most eloquent expression of female rhetorical gestures is in her act 2, scene 3 aria "Finga, finga, d'amare." For transcriptions, see Heller, "Chastity, Heroism, and Allure."
 10. There are a striking number of parallels in the treatment of Agrippina and Semiramis—political skill, murder of a husband, attempted incest with a son—to suggest that Roman historians may well have borrowed from the well-known legend of Semiramis in shaping their condemnations of Agrippina the Younger.
 11. Moniglia's libretto had originally been written for a Medici–Hapsburg wedding in 1665 in Innsbruck. Due to the untimely death of the groom, Sigmund Franz, the work was never performed but traveled with the composer Antonio Cesti to Vienna, where it was produced for the emperor's birthday in 1667. The version printed for the Vienna production, *La Semirami* (Vienna: Mattèo Comserovio, 1667), includes a final ballet and chorus in which the Catholic faith defends the integrity of the empire. It is this libretto that most closely matches the only extant copy of Cesti's score (A-Wn). A somewhat longer version of the text, minus the ballet, is included in volume 2 of *Delle poesie drammatiche di Gio. Andrea Moniglia* (Florence: Cesare e Francesco Bindi, 1690), under the title *La Semiramide*. Moniglia's preface indicates that this was the version originally intended for the canceled Innsbruck performance. Noris's version of the libretto was published in two almost identical editions, both from December of 1670. The preface by the Venetian publisher Nicolini mentions Moniglia as the author of the original work, but fails to name Matteo Noris as the reviser. This attribution is found in Ivanovich's chronological listing of the repertory of the Venetian stage in his *Memorie teatrali*, 439. Noris apparently used the 1667 Vienna libretto as the basis of his revision, as none of his borrowings draws on material that is unique to the later Florentine print of the earlier version.
 12. Wendy Heller, "The Queen as King: Refashioning Semiramide for Seicento Venice," *COJ* 5 (1993): 93–114.
 13. Ellen Rosand notes the extent to which this period is marked by a hardening of a variety of operatic conventions that in time had become far less spontaneous. On the "decline of operatic standards," see *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 391–95.
 14. Wendy Heller, "Reforming Achilles," 562–81. See also Joseph Kerman, *Opera*

- as *Drama*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 41. Kerman's view of Venetian opera echoes charges made by numerous critics from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. Most notable among the eighteenth-century critics are the oft-cited comments by Giovanni Maria Crescimbeni, Roman poet, historian, and co-founder of the Arcadian Academy, who credits Cicognini's [and Cavalli's] *Giasone* as the most "perfect drama," bringing about the "end of acting," "true comedy as well as tragedy." See Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 275; also Robert S. Freeman, *Opera without Drama: Currents of Change in Italian Opera, 1675–1725* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1981), 13.
15. On Ziani, see Theophil Antonicek, "Die Damira-Opern der beiden Ziani," *AM* 14 (1976): 176–207; Hellmuth Christian Wolff, *Die venezianische Oper in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Elsner, 1937); Beth L. Glixon, "Recitative in Seventeenth-Century Venetian Opera," and Glixon and Glixon, "Marco Faustini and Venetian Opera Production." On Ziani's speed as a composer, see Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 212–13.
 16. Unlike some of his younger contemporaries, Ziani used both da capo or tripartite arias (ABA) along with the more old-fashioned bipartite arias (ABB'). Often, but not always, these two schemes resulted in quite different uses of tonality. Not surprisingly, the da capo arias tended to use a more modern tonal style: a tonally closed A section allowed for an emphasis on the tonic both internally and at the conclusion of the aria, usually articulated by a subdominant and dominant, and cadences in closely related keys. In the bipartite arias, tonal closure was achieved by the transposition or varied transformation of the B section. This allowed for the possibility of an open-ended A section, with no internal confirmation of the tonic. The result could be an aria in which a series of cadence points follow one after the other, and in which—at least theoretically—the tonic might be confirmed only at the beginning and the end. Ziani tended to reserve full-blown da capo arias for powerful characters and aggressive sentiments. Briefer ABA arias—those that avoided tonal closure at the end of the A section—were particularly useful for expressing doubt, insecurity, or perplexity. In ABB' or bipartite arias, the usual lack of tonal closure at the end of the A section invoked an entirely different kind of affect, which Ziani used for less empowered characters, shifts in mood, or emotional progress. Susan McClary (*Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000], 72–73) notes the way in which composers before the "advent of opera seria often delighted in defying closure," "infusing the second presentation of B materials with unexpected energies, flirting with the possibility that excess feeling might overwhelm anticipated structural bounds—of guaranteeing musical reason" (p. 72).
 17. On Ziani's use of recitative, see Beth L. Glixon, "Recitative," 228–31; 248–51. While a full discussion of Ziani's use of tonality is not possible here, certain features can be summarized. It is quite clear, for instance, that some vestiges of what Chafe has described as the modal-hexachordal system were still operational and that he recognized the dramatic implications of the more extreme keys (Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*, particularly chap. 2). For example, in *La Semiramide*, the majority of the arias are set in the "simpler" keys: C (11), G (5), F (6), a (9), d (4), with the more unusual keys on either side of the flat–

- sharp spectrum being used far less frequently: B $\flat$ (2), c (1), g (3); D (2), e (3), A (2). Sharper keys tend to be reserved for more extreme situations, as we shall see below; both D-major arias involve vengeance; the two in A major occur where the cross-dressing situation is particularly pronounced. Indeed, as we have seen with Nino's and Semiramide's arias, for Ziani dramatic use of tonality may not only involve the choice of key, but also the tonal style, which could vary considerably from one aria to the next. Within recitative monologues or dialogues, he uses a somewhat wider range of keys, often moving from one end of the tonal spectrum to the other in a manner that parallels the dramatic action.
18. Ziani's approach to text setting may well be almost too literal. In a letter to the opera producer Marco Faustini, he complains of his inability to set a text that he does not understand. This may reveal his tendency to focus more on the imitative potential of individual words or phrases than on the affect as a whole. Such a procedure may have inspired the kind of limitations that several authors have pointed out with respect to his projection of affect. See, for example, Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 295 n.
 19. The myth of Semiramis was derived from a historical figure, Sammuramat, who was regent for her son Adad-Nirai III from 810 to 805 B.C. For further details on the ancient and modern sources of the Semiramis legend, see Anna Maria Capomacchia, *Semiramide: Una femminilità ribaltata* (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1986); Gwynne Edwards, "La hija del aire in the Light of Its Sources," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 43 (1966): 177–96; Lienhard Bergel, "Semiramis in the Italian and Spanish Baroque," *FI* 7 (1973): 227–49; and Cesare Questa, *Semiramide redenta: Archetipi, fonti classiche, censure antropologiche nel melodramma* (Urbino: Quattroventi, 1989). *Diodorus of Sicily*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library Edition (New York: Putnam, 1933). The Greek historian Diodorus's *Library of History* was probably written between the years 56 and 30 B.C. (see Introduction to *Diodorus of Sicily*, vii–xii). The material on Semiramis, which consumes the first 21 chapters of book 2, was based largely on material from Ctesias of Cnidus, who was presumably a physician to the Persian king Artaxerxes and the author of *Persica*, a portion of which dealt with Assyrian history. As Oldfather indicates in his introduction (p. xxvii), it is unclear whether Diodorus consulted Ctesias directly or through intermediary sources. As noted below, Diodorus also had access to another set of materials with regard to Semiramis, including the alternate version of her ascension to the throne that he attributed to an author Athenaeus, about whom nothing is known.
 20. On Derceto and Semiramis, see Capomacchia, *Semiramide*, 19–21. Derceto is also cited in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4.45.
 21. Ninus wins over Semiramis from her first husband Onnes by threatening to blind him; as he is still in love with her, he commits suicide in response. The report implicitly condemns Semiramis for her unfortunate effect on the men who surround her. Diodorus includes an addendum, attributed to the same Athenaeus, who describes Semiramis as a low-born courtesan who used her sexuality to gain the power from her husband to rule for several days, after which point she had him murdered (Diod. 2.20.3–5).
 22. Notably, in this version, Semiramide did not punish him (having heard a prophecy that he would eventually kill her), but rather turned over the government to him and disappeared, perhaps in the shape of a dove (Diod. 2.20.2–3). This

- is yet another way in which the discourse on Agrippina borrows from the Semiramide tale.
23. *The History of Justin, with an English Translation*, trans. John Clarke (London: L. Hawes, 1768), 2–3. Marcus Junianus Justinus, who lived during the second or third century A.D., reported on Semiramis in his abbreviation of a version of Trogus Pompeius's *Historiae Philippicae*, written during the reign of Augustus.
 24. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum libri*, 14.6. He makes explicit the connection between Semiramis and castration: “so that whichever way anyone goes, seeing troops of mutilated men, he will detest the memory of Semiramis, that ancient queen, who was the first person to castrate male youths of tender age.” Claudian's comments on Semiramis appear in *In Eutropium*, 3.339. I am grateful to Carolyn Abbate for pointing these references out to me.
 25. Paulus Orosius, *The Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 21–22. Orosius wrote his *Historiae adversum Paganos*, a history of “pagans” that presumably covered the creation of the world through the history of Rome until his day (A.D. 417), at the request of St. Augustine. On Semiramis, his most important source was Justinus. It is also from Orosius that St. Augustine probably took his condemnations of Semiramis in *City of God*.
 26. “A vizio di lussuria fu sì rotta, / che libito fé licito in sua legge, per tòrre il biasmo in che era condotta. / Ell' è Semiramis, di cui si legge / che succedette a Nino e fu sua sposa: / tenne la terra che 'l Soldan corregge.” Singleton's commentary on Dante notes that the Orosius–Dante connection extends to Chaucer (*Monk's Tale* 2477), who applied it to Nero: “His lustes were al lawe in his decree.” I am grateful to Robert Holzer for calling this to my attention. Dante Alighieri, *La divina commedia*, ed. and annotated C. H. Grandgent, rev. Charles S. Singleton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).
 27. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 16–24.
 28. Muzio Manfredi, *La Semiramis: tragedia* (Bergamo: Comino Ventura, 1593). Manfredi must also have been under the spell of Semiramis's dual nature; he immediately followed this play with a second work, *La Semiramis: Boscareccia* (Bergamo: Comino Ventura, 1593), which takes a lighthearted, pastoral approach to Semiramis's courtship by her first husband, whom he names Mennone. Semiramis was also an important figure on the Spanish stage; Pedro Calderón de la Barca dealt extensively with her in his cycle of plays entitled *La hija del aire*. While it has generally been thought that the Spanish theater exerted influence upon the Venetian opera libretto, the nature of this relationship needs further investigation. Helmuth Christian Wolff argues for the use of Calderón's *La hija del aire* as a model for one of the scenes in the opera libretto by Matteo Noris, *La Semiramide* (Venice: Nicolini, 1670). See Wolff, *Die venezianische Oper*, 119.
 29. Passi, *I donneschi difetti*, 60.
 30. Ribera, *Le glorie immortali*, 206: “La quale, non perdonando a' fatiche, nè temendo alcun pericolo . . . avea usata tal situazione per retto governo, e pace dall'imperio.”
 31. Della Chiesa, *Theatro delle donne*, 12.
 32. Marinella, *La nobiltà*, 77.
 33. Pona, *La galleria delle donne*, 60.
 34. *Ibid.*, 61–62: “Le notte, nel seno del marito non solo, ma di molti e molti ga-

gliardi adulteri, fra lascivi trattenimenti, fra giochi osceni, fra impudicizie senza regola e senza esempio. . . . E caldi ancora degli amplessi, uscii appena del seno c'avea loro aperto nelle lotte d'amore, gli faceva trucidare. . . . Ella ebbe animo per dar ricetta a sì reo pensiero di uccider Nino: e come subito, e violenta, ricorse agli stromenti di morte; e negli stessi maritali congiungimenti con breve ferro lo svenò. Megera! mostro stigio! Se recitasse né pur lo inferno tanta barbarie!"

35. Pallavicino, *Scena retorica*, 135–48.

36. *Ibid.*, 146. "Sì, sì, è vero caro, che un'amante deve avere più opere che parole . . . Ho errato, e da' tuoi taciti rimproveri, sono persuasa a ravvedermi. Chiudo però la bocca, per collegarne i rubini, onde s'ingemmino le tue labbra. Ricevi questi baci, amato mio bene . . . Ahimé! E così mi respingi? Qual anima diede moto alla tua mano, per iscacciarmi, vietando alla madre il baciarti? . . . ogni modo sovra di te voglio pascere i miei appetiti. Sono regina e madre, voglio goderti, e mi nutriranno le tue carni, ancorché non bene stagionate da amore."

37. Bisaccioni had already shown interest in heroic female characters, as is evident in his numerous translations of novels by Madame de Scudéry. His interest in Semiramis may have been in response to the tradition surrounding the *femme forte*: the image of the strong woman was exploited throughout Europe—particularly in France—in response to the persistent presence of ruling females. On this tradition, see Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 157–59, who points out the ways in which such imagery was used for Marie de' Medici, regent in France for Louis XIII between 1601 and 1616. Marie was able to sustain her own heroic image by associating herself with what Garrard describes as a "personal virile heroism," drawing upon a whole host of exceptional women. She cites the pamphlet accompanying the marriage of de' Medici's son in which she is praised in comparison with Elizabeth of Portugal, Cornelia, Cleopatra, St. Helen, Zenobia, Joan of Arc, Penthesilea, and Elizabeth of England. A series of paintings of "femmes fortes" commissioned or inspired by Marie de' Medici demonstrate a kind of eclectic collecting of various heroic women, regardless of the difference in their reputations. Garrard observes that Vouet's gallery of heroic women at the Hôtel de l'Arsenal (1637) includes as varied an array as Lucretia, Semiramis, Judith, Esther, Joan of Arc, and Mary Stuart. She also notes the probable influence of this kind of painting on the works of Artemisia Gentileschi. This type of imagery would not have been unfamiliar to the Incogniti: Loredano was probably well acquainted with Artemisia Gentileschi's artistic representations of the legendary fighting women; his published letters include two written to that artist in praise of her work; and he also includes a satirical epitaph in her honor in Giovanni Francesco Loredano and Pietro Michiele, *Il cimiterio: Epitafi giocosi* (Venice: Guerigli, 1654), 39.

38. Maiolino Bisaccioni, *La Semiramide in India* (Venice: Miloco, 1648): "Egli è bene una favola chimerizzata sopra le azioni della più celebre eroina che cingesse mai spada, ancora che di soverchio donna alle fragilità degli amori . . ."

39. *Ibid.*, *argomento*.

40. Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, 21.

41. On Matteo Noris, see Harris Saunders, Jr., "The Repertoire of a Venetian Opera House (1671–1714): The Teatro Grimani di San Giovanni Grisostomo" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1985), 94–98.

42. The Viennese seem to have held a more benign view of the legendary Queen Semiramis. A brief cantata entitled *La Semiramide*, presented for the birthday of Marianna of Austria in December 1673 (music by Antonio Draghi; lost), is a dramatization of Semiramis's famous flight from the dressing table, presenting a complimentary and heroic view of her, with a concluding chorus praising "Semiramide innocente" and comparing her to the illustrious Marianna. For the libretto, see *La Semiramide* (Vienna: Hacque, 1673). In the eighteenth century, Empress Maria Theresa would use Metastasio's *Semiramide* (*Semiramide riconosciuta*) as an emblem of her reign.
43. There are two extant sources for *La Semiramide*: I-Vnm, It. IV, 455 (= 9979) and D-AN VI g. 38. The two sources differ from each other only in mostly minor details, with one notable exception, which will be discussed below. The musical examples are taken from I-Vnm.
44. Arthur Henkel, *Emblemata: Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1967) contains numerous examples of allegorical depictions of roses, such as the one representing "defloratio," cited from a seventeenth-century allegory book by Anulus Bartolemaeus (Göttingen, 1652).
45. Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 344. She also includes the "comically rustic" in this list; however, clearly that is not the case for Semiramide. Noris's use of *versi sdruccioli* for Semiramide is by no means accidental; she will return to them at several other points in the opera, in even more blatant demonstrations of her power.
46. For example, see Giasone's act 1, scene 4 aria in Cavalli's *Giasone* or Endimione's arias in *La Calisto*. On the conventions associated with the castrato, see Freitas, "Un atto d'ingegno."
47. Nino is not the only male who is weakened in the Venetian libretto. In Moniglia's version, Semiramide's lover Ireo is an admirable hero. In act 1, scene 4 he speaks longingly of his desire to achieve military success and glorify himself in Semiramide's eyes, while his servant Clitarco, with all the bravado of a quaking Leporello, agonizes over his fear of war. In the parallel scene in the Venetian version, Noris reverses the stances of master and servant. It is Ireo who shakes with fear as the brave servant Clitarco warns his master of the approach of Creonte's army. It is no coincidence that Noris eliminates virtually all of Clitarco's buffoonery: Clitarco with Figaro-like cleverness devises all of Ireo's plans, and "caring not for risk," crosses enemy lines to deliver a letter to Semiramide. Like the feminized Nino, Ireo prefers love to war. His lack of heroism has other consequences as well. Where Moniglia's Semiramide explicitly states her intention to have her lover Ireo crowned consort, the Venetian queen makes no such plans, protecting her own status by cultivating sexual relationships with men of inferior social rank who would thus not themselves be eligible to rule.
48. In revising Moniglia's libretto, Noris used this scene as yet another opportunity to reshape the character of his heroine. Despite extensive quotations from the libretto, he revises much of Semiramide's text in the confrontation between the two women so as to heighten the queen's cruelty. While both queens are undoubtedly angry, Moniglia's Semiramide tries to be gentle with Iside, urging her to repent her sins as "he" himself has done. At last, becoming impatient with her

protestations, Semiramide threatens to tear out her “audacious tongue.” Noris plays this scene with much more exaggerated emotions; his Semiramide rebukes Iside, pretending that “her” previous show of passion was a hoax: “Still you speak of love? A slave presumes so much? Listen, vile plebeian woman. Nino the monarch loved you for a joke, laughs at your insanity, your delirium.” As a result, Iside’s reaction is also more extreme.

49. The shifting meters and tonality in fact disguise Ziani’s attempt to unify the monologue musically. For example, measure 20 (in duple) is an almost exact transposition of the material in mm. 14–15.
50. It is particularly interesting to compare Ziani’s setting of this scene with that of Antonio Cesti in Moniglia’s version. Rather than a recitative lament, Cesti supplies a lengthy da capo aria for his heroine (A-Wn).
51. Strikingly, the D-AN score includes a different setting of this aria for Nino. While it is also in A major, it is set in the alto clef in a more normal alto tessitura. Quite possibly, the unknown singer who played Nino in the Venice production had the ability to sing in the upper register more easily.
52. In the same season, 1671, Ziani and Beregan’s *Heraclio* featured a near-seduction scene between the tyrant Foca and the hero Heraclio, who had dressed as a woman in order to protect his lover’s virtue. As Foca finally makes his advances on Heraclio in the middle of the Coliseum, Heraclio dramatically rips off his skirt and murders the unsuspecting tyrant. In this case, the female disguise did little to alter Heraclio’s claims for heroism; rather, it provided an opportunity for delightful play on the possibility of the homoerotic encounter. Noris uses cross-dressing in another elaborate revision of a libretto for Venice, Giovanni Apolloni’s *Amor per vendetta* (Rome, 1673) as *Astiage* (Venice, 1677): he adds a new male character, who unwittingly falls in love with another man disguised as a woman. Noris also expands the female role of the male-disguised warrior, making her of Assyrian origin so as to align her implicitly with the other great Assyrian warrior, Semiramis. My comparison of these two libretti was inspired by Thomas Walker’s suggestion in “Giovanni Apolloni,” *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 1:540.
53. Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 240 n.: “Si e principiato a recitar a S. Zuanipolo la Semiramide, opera non riuscita, e poco lodata, ancorchè li musicisti sono esquisiti.”
54. Giulio Corradi, *La schiava fortunata* (Venice: Nicolini, 1674). I-Vnm, It. IV, 453 (= 9977).

CHAPTER 7. MESSALINA LA MERETRICE

1. “Chi loda il sesso femminile, vive molto ingannato; le donne sono state sempre (parlo delle cattive, senza pregiudizio delle buone) la corrutela del genere umano, e l’infezione della natura. È la donna inventrice del peccato, e strada lastricata della morte. È un mongibello infernale ch’offre nel di fuori neve che alletta; ma nasconde al di dentro fuoco che brucia; è un diabolica primavera, che lusinga co’ fiori ma tien celati i serpenti; è un’infausta cometa, che diletta con lo splendore la vista, ma presagisce morte alla mente; è una mascherata Megera, che sotto benigno aspetto ricuopre orribili arpie; è un tragico teatro,

- ove come in maestoso apparata se vede la morte de' cuori." Bonaventura Tondi, *La femina origine d'ogni male; ovvero, Frine rimproverata, opera morale* (Venice: G. P. Brignonci, 1687), 1–2.
2. Phryne is described in Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.20.1; also 10.15.1. From him we learn of Phryne's relationship with the sculptor Praxiteles, the way in which she tricks him into revealing which of his statues he most prizes, and his statue of Phryne herself, as well as others that he presented to her. Pliny (*HN* 36:20–21) relates that the sculptor carved two figures of Aphrodite in marble, one draped, the other nude. While the people of Cos chose the draped one for reasons of decency, the people of Cnidus chose the nude one, and it established their reputation for greatness.
 3. Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 387–405; Fabbri, *Il secolo cantante*, 293–300, likewise notes this tendency in the operas of the latter part of the century.
 4. Ivanovich, *Memorie teatrali di Venezia*, 431.
 5. Pullan, *Crisis and Change*.
 6. Irene Alm, "Operatic Ballroom Scenes and the Arrival of French Social Dance in Venice," *SM* 25 (1996): 345–71.
 7. See I-Vnm, *Proclama pubblicato d'ordine degli Illustrissimi e Eccellentissimi Signori Sopraproveditori e Provediti alle Pompe*, printed proclamation in Vol. Parte Pompe, N. 15488.1677, cited in L. Menetto and G. Zennaro, *Storia del malcostume a Venezia nei secoli xvi e xvii* (Abano Terme: Piovan, 1987), 83. "Et perchè è arrivata al sommo la temerità delle Meretrici nella dissolutezza tanto del vestire quanto del presentarsi nelli lochi pubblici con scandalo che merita particolar correzione: Però alli Decreti fin ora stabiliti per regola alle medesime, e che restano ressolutamente replicati, viene aggiunto che non possino farsi mai vedere in alcun concorso nè tempi a loro prohibiti, ma nelli lochi permessigli col loro Cendà negro schietto e vestite in quella forma che gli viene prescritta dalla Deliberatione 11 marzo 1653. Nelli altri lochi pubblici come sarebbero Opere, Commedie, Ridotto e vagando per la Città in fanno Maschere, non possino portarsi che in Cendà come sopra, e trattandosi o camminando star sempre coperte la faccia con la Maschera . . ."
 8. Tondi, *La femina*, 5.
 9. Giuseppe Passi, *Dello stato*, 156–57, regarded the story of Candaule and Alinda as a lesson to prospective husbands, for if they exploit women in such a manner they must be prepared for the consequences that will inevitably result from their vengeful natures. "Therefore the husband must take care not to play tricks on his wife that might give birth to scandal and hatred; because some for disdain and under impetus of anger, and others for amusement and jest, have given dishonest names to their women, and showed them off nude, to their own greatest detriment. Thus we read of the wife of Candaules, who, while sleeping, was shown nude to his companion Gyges. And she, having discovered this, had him [Candaules] killed, and took Gyges for her husband, saying that it is not appropriate for a woman to be seen nude by anyone except her husband."
 10. "Narcissus, having got Claudius by himself, informed him through his concubines of all that was taking place. And by frightening him with the idea that Mesalina was going to kill him and set up Silius as ruler in his stead, he persuaded him to arrest and torture a number of persons. While this was going on, the em-

- peror himself hastened back to the city; and immediately upon his arrival he put to death Mnester together with many others, and then slew Messalina herself, after she had retreated into the gardens of Asiaticus” (Dio Cassius, 61.31.4–5).
11. Juvenal, *The Satires*, trans. Niall Rudd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). This is the longest of Juvenal’s Satires, and the most brutal. On Satire 6, see the introduction by William Barr, xxi–xxii.
 12. Passi, *I donneschi difetti*, 30.
 13. Passi, *Dello stato*, 115.
 14. *Ibid.*, 155.
 15. Antonio Loredano, *Riflessioni morali sopra C. Cornelio Tacito*, vol. 2 (Venice: Gueriglio, 1674), note to reader: “che Tacito di nome sa parlare ne i cuori di chi lo legge, e persuadere al suo studio necessario tutto quello che professano cività di vita.”
 16. *Ibid.*, *Centuria Prima* 47, p. 37.
 17. *Ibid.*, *Centuria Prima* 10, p. 11.
 18. *Ibid.*, 24, pp. 24–25.
 19. *Ibid.*, 31, p. 26.
 20. *Ibid.*, 32, p. 27.
 21. Pallavicino, *Le due Agrippine*, 266–67: “Messalina non fu la prima tra queste ma la prima in dargli a vedere con più chiara esperienza l’infelicità del matrimonio. Li di lei vituperi fecero tal pompa delle sue ignominie, che li rossori non più bastavano al coprire la morta pallidezza propria d’infradito cadavere, qual’era già fatta la sua riputazione. Miserabili quegli uomini, che dotati di natura dolce, anno un temperamento dedito agli amori di donna, in guisa che sotto la viltà di questo sesso lasciano conculcata ogni loro gloria, per gustarne le contentezze anche miste con frodi.”
 22. Malipiero, *L’imperatrice ambiziosa*, 21–22. The reference is to the tale of Diana’s murder of Actaeon, recounted in book 2 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.
 23. Loredano, *Bizzarie*, 1:148: “Non v’è cosa più incontinente, più lasciva, più dissoluta, più lussuriosa della donna.”
 24. Aprosio, *Lo scudo*: “Meretrice illustrissima non la lassa mentire. Giuvenale veracissimo encomiaste delle sue eroiche azioni dice a ver. 1115 della Satira VI.”
 25. Pona, *Messalina*, 9: “La donna è cupa, ardente, tenace de’ suoi propositi oltr’ogni credere. Messalina, ondeggando nelle turbolenze de’ suoi pensieri, non dormiva le notti, e se dormiva, dormiva Morfeo a lato a lei, vestendo e spogliando mille sembianze, secondo che l’immagini da essa versate il giorno per la fantasia sensuale suggerivano motivo a lui. Alle favole che vedeva rappresentare, quanto più lorde e schiffevoli, tanto stava ella più attenta.”
 26. *Ibid.*, 16–17.
 27. Paolo Ulvioni, “Stampa e censura a Venezia nel Seicento,” *Archivio veneto* 106 (1975): 45–93.
 28. Pona, *Messalina*, 5: “Fermati, o mano audace: non toccare ciò che mira l’occhio invaghito. La bellezza che ti lusinga è cadaverosa. Costei, che ti sembra viva e accenna di parlarti e di muoversi, è donna morta. L’ha tocca il fulmine della impudicizia; e consunte le viscere all’onestà, ha lasciato illesa la figura. . . . Ella è Messalina. . . . Accostatevi pulcelle: non fuggite. Venite caste matrone: e voi accorrete incauta preda d’amori immondi, femine avviluppate nelle sozzure del senso. La vista di questo volto può mostrarvi quanto sia deforme l’impudicizia.”

29. Ibid., 36: “Mirala, corrotto mondo; guardatela, sesso fragile e composto in opposte regole vivi da lei diverso per morire diversamente.”
30. Heller, “Tacitus Incognito,” 57–62.
31. Zaguri, *La Messalina*: “Ecco Messalina, che al solito portata dalle naturali inclinazioni ad onte della mia volontà avviene a far mostra di sè stessa; tuttochè il nero del mio inchiostro l’abbia resa così deforme, che doveva (com’è solito delle donne) ritorsa celarsi, e temere di lasciarsi vedere in pubblico. In somma tutti gli istituti e tutte l’educazioni riescono invalide, per poter raffrenare i naturali impulsi a chi trassi con la nascita un animo tutto dedito alle compiacenze e alle lascivie. Lettore, scusa i suoi mancamenti; e se viva con sfacciatezza la lasciassi godere, ora dopo la morte con violenza ritorna alla luce.”
32. A side plot of *La Messalina* concerns Callistus, a former aide of Claudius, who was supplanted by his former lover Delia and the ambitious Narcissus. Callistus, who had sided with Agrippina and used Delia to help him arrange for Gaius’s murder, is also killed at the end, leaving the faithful and loving Delia without a lover. This makes a striking comparison with Busenello’s libretto for *L’Incoronazione di Poppea*. In *La Messalina*, Delia plays the role of a Drusilla (*Poppea*), faithful to her lover to the end and performing nefarious deeds in his name. Yet, in this more “realistic” work that was not bound to the happy ending, the faithful Delia is left without her lover.
33. Zaguri, *La Messalina*, 35: “O infelicità di poveri ammogliati, che a guisa di lumache non possono mai abbandonare la propria casa, e se pure ardiscono porre tal volta il solo capo fuor di quella, tosto se gli veggono spontare le corna.” Nino is equally critical of palace intrigue; at the conclusion of act 2, his extensive commentary also focuses on the duplicity required for court life: in order to succeed, one must have “a double face and a double heart” (“che per riuscir in corte vi vuol doppia faccia e doppio cuore”; Zaguri, *La Messalina*, 66). This is a theme frequently exploited in the operas.
34. Ibid., 89: “Quella legge, ah troppo è dura / Ch’un marito sol mi dà / Vuò seguir la mia natura / Che più d’uno amar mi fa.”
35. For a facsimile of the score and edition of the libretto see Francesco Maria Piccioli and Carlo Pallavicino, *Messalina*, ed. Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *Drammaturgia musical veneta*, vol. 8 (Milan: Ricordi, 2001).
36. Francesco Maria Piccioli, *Messalina* (Venice: Nicolini, 1680), *argomento*: “Vanta anco l’onda del Tebbro nella singolarità de’ suoi parti l’aver bagnata la culla alle Venere più lascive. Fra queste, celebre con le sue dissolutezze si rese Messalina, che sposa a Claudio imperatore di Roma, arse tuttavia comunemente alle fiamme de’ più licenziosi amori, ne’ quali sovente la videro i pubblici lupanari consumare le notte intere. Predilesse con distinzione d’affetto Caio suo favorito, ma con arte sì scaltra seppe sempre ingannare la credulità del marito, che non gli fu difficile mascherare allo stesso con oneste apparenze la deformità delle proprie delinquenze. Sopra questi storici fondamenti, (omessa la serie de’ fatti più scandalosi) fabbrica l’invenzione poetica.” The libretto to *Messalina* was published in Venice in two editions, the first dated 28 December 1679 and the second 8 February 1679 *more veneto* (= 1680). The first edition most closely matches the I-Vnm score (Cod. It. IV 438 [=9961]); it is this version of the opera on which the discussion in this chapter is based. The second edition, with changes in the secondary characters and allegorical figures and the elimination

- of some of the more suggestive aria texts and situations, may well be an indication of some censorship of the first version. For a comparison of some aspects of the two libretti, see also Eleanor Selfridge-Field, "Messalina: Context and Content," in Piccioli and Pallavicino, *Messalina*, xxv–xxxii.
37. The garden has a special significance in Messalina's history. Audience members familiar with Tacitus would have known that she had brought false charges against a rival in order to obtain the famous Gardens of Lucullus (*Annals*, 11.1). A garden was also the scene of her execution.
 38. Piccioli, *Messalina*, *argomento*: "fingendo in oltre, che in quel tempo vivesse cortigiano nella reggia Tergisto principe della Seria, fuggitivo dalla patria, dopo aver violata Ergindia principessa, qual lo seguisse in abito virile sotto al nome d'Alindo, scoprendosi solamente a Floralba sua germana, sposa di Tullio Cavalier Romano." The plot and secondary characters are handled somewhat differently in the second edition of the libretto, "ristampata con nove aggiunte" (Venice, 1680). A new character, Sergio, is added, who takes over many of the plot functions of the cross-dressed Alindo. The change in some of the texts—most notably Messalina's final aria and Tullio's "drag" aria—suggests that the second edition may well have been inspired by the need to censor some of the more objectionable elements of the first edition.
 39. Several of Aurelio Aureli's librettos from the 1660s focus on the possibility of adultery, and, in so doing, place two very different types of women in competition for the same man. In his *L'Antigona delusa da Alceste* (Venice: Batti in Frezz, 1660; Nicolini, 1670), for example, Alceste's untimely descent to the underworld to save her husband Admeto's life leaves him free to consider adulterous activities with the beautiful Antigona. It is the possibility of Admeto's infidelity that propels much of the drama.
 40. Notably, Alindo is eliminated from the opening scene in the second edition of the libretto, which features Caio and Messalina playing chess, surrounded by Roman knights and ladies.
 41. For example, act 2, scene 8 ("Non si disperì misero core").
 42. "Voglio goder ogn'ora; / Per non pentirmi un dì / Se già mai più non rinverde / Quel piacer un dì si perde, / Faccia chi può così."
 43. "Gli credo come moglie / Ma come donna no. / So ben che l'incostanza / Di femina in sembianza / Il cielo a noi mostrò."
 44. "Folli amatori, o voi, / Che se talor amate / Senza alcun costanza / Imparate ad amar sol per usanza."

CONCLUSIONS

1. In the seventeenth century, Endymion's interest in the moon also linked him with Galileo and scientific discoveries. See, for example, the painting by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (*Il Guercino*) at the Galleria Doria Pamphili: Endymion sleeps while sitting with a telescope in his lap, prepared for a scientific rather than a sexual adventure. See chap. 5, n. 33.
2. On the spectacular nature of this production, see Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 103–4. She notes that the libretto was published before its premiere, and reprinted four times in Venice and Padua; the production was also immortalized by Torelli's commemorative volume on his stage productions (*Ap-*

parati scenici per lo Teatro Novissimo di Venezia nell'anno 1644 d'inventione e cura di Iacomo Torelli da Fano). It was a sufficiently spectacular production to have inspired the publication of a book detailing a French production of the opera. See the set of engravings based on Torelli's stage design for the Parisian performance of *Vénus jalouse*. *La décoration du palais de Mercure du 2. acte de l'opéra de Vénus Jalouse* (Paris, n.d.).

3. On *Amore innamorato*, see above, chap. 2.
4. This is considered at greater length in Heller, "Reforming Achilles."
5. Hasse's setting of *Semiramide riconosciuta* was used to celebrate Maria Theresa's coronation, and she commissioned Gluck to compose another version to celebrate her birthday and the opening of the newly renovated Burgtheater.
6. Gianvincenzo Gravina, "Discorso sopra *L'Endimione*," in *Scritti critici e teorici*, ed. Amedeo Quondam (Rome: Laterza e Figli, 1973), 51–73.
7. *Ibid.*, 67–68.

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