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Editing Italian Madrigals in the Digital World: The Tasso in Music Project

One of the distinctive features of the Italian madrigal is that it is as much about poetry as it is about music. Composers would often respond to the literary taste of their milieus by engaging in sophisticated renditions of poetry by notable authors, ranging from Petrarch to Marino. This poetry frequently had a distinguished textual tradition of its own, being widely disseminated through literary manuscripts and prints before it was set to music. This strong literary component is relatively underrepresented in musicological scholarship, as its focus has traditionally been on composers and the musical features their madrigals, with only limited attention devoted to crucial issues such as the transmission of the poetic texts. This trend is reflected also in critical editions of the madrigal repertoire. These are typically devoted to the works of single composers—as opposed to settings of the same poetry by multiple composers—and feature critical apparatuses that rarely engage with the complex textual traditions of the poems set to music. This approach to making critical editions of Italian madrigals is a function also of the limitations of the printed medium, which typically does not allow for complex critical apparatuses encompassing both the musical and the literary tradition. Furthermore, the printed medium historically has not been conducive to collaboration between musicologists and literary scholars, which would instead be desirable if one were to engage with the interdisciplinary nature of Italian madrigals.

Drawing on the possibilities afforded by digital encoding, the Tasso in Music Project (www.tassomusic.org)—the first complete edition of the musical settings of poetry by Torquato Tasso (1544–1595)—provides a different approach to editing Italian madrigals and related genres. Indeed, the project is poet-centered and devotes equal attention to the musical and poetic realms, thanks also to collaboration between music and literary scholars. The goal of this presentation is to provide an overview of the musical and poetic repertoire under consideration and, most importantly, to illustrate the digital features that allow users of the Tasso in Music Project fully to appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of its repertoire. These features include musical encodings and renderings in Humdrum and MEI/Verovio, TEI literary encodings, and tools for the analysis of music-text relations. In so doing, this presentation seeks to provide an alternative model for critical editions of Italian madrigals, one that could be adapted also to other vocal repertoires.

Arguably the most prominent poet of late sixteenth-century Italy, Torquato Tasso achieved tremendous fame well beyond the literary realm. His poems became a source of inspiration for composers, among whom they became true hits. From the 1570s through the 1630s, most composers of secular vocal music set one or more of his poems, producing a total of over 700 settings. Representing the work of over 200 composers, the project provides a snapshot of secular vocal music in an age in which it underwent profound transformations. Accordingly, it lends itself especially well to comparative analysis and to the study of emulation among composers. Likewise, this corpus provides fertile ground for the study of music-text relations.

In spite of its significance, this vast and stimulating repertoire has remained largely unexplored, as most musical settings of Tasso's poetry have hitherto been unavailable in modern edition. Funded by a 3-year NEH Scholarly Editions and Translations Grant (2016–19) and scheduled for completion in Spring 2020, the Tasso in Music Project fills this lacuna through a complete digital edition of the extant settings of Tasso's poetry. Carried out by a team of musicologists, literary scholars, and digital humanities experts from North America and Europe, the project provides open access to one of the largest digital editions of early modern music, complemented by a rich literary component and tools for analysis.

The musical editions are available in a variety of formats, such as Humdrum and MEI, and are rendered online via Verovio, with dynamic display of critical notes and commentaries. Parallel to the musical editions, the project features TEI transcriptions of the poetic texts as they appear in the musical settings and in contemporaneous literary sources, both manuscript and printed, as well as tools for the dynamic visualization of literary variants across sources. This textual component yields indispensable data for an understanding of the transmission of Tasso's poetry, which is especially intricate as his poems typically survive in multiple versions with substantial variants. Accordingly, these data are of interest both for musicologists, who can use them to trace the sources used by composers, and for literary philologists, who can use them to study the tradition of Tasso's texts and his compositional process.

Thanks to digital encoding, the website also features tools that facilitate the study of the repertoire, especially music-text relations. Powered by Humdrum, these include: simultaneous music and text search tools, applicable to individual pieces or to the entire repertoire; a text-extraction tool, through which users can visualize the text of the poems as it appears in the underlay of the settings, including repetitions, with the ability to sort words by frequency of occurrence; a music-text ratio tool, which compares the length of music in minims versus the length of poems in syllables, with the ability to sort settings and composers by ratio; a tool for the statistical analysis of melismas, which sorts settings and composers by the frequency and extent of their melismas; and a tool for the analysis of the relationship between poetic prosody and musical durations. Furthermore, because raw musical and textual data are provided through the open-access repository Github (<https://github.com/TassoInMusicProject>), the project enables other scholars to develop additional, off-line tools that fit their research agendas.

Through its content, as well as through its digital features, the project benefits a wide audience encompassing both music and literary scholars. In addition, the project provides a new model for editions of Italian madrigals, one that restores the importance of poetry in this repertoire by integrating music and literary encoding.

Bibliography

Software, Web Development Systems, and Repositories Used by the Project

Github <https://github.com/TassoInMusicProject>

Humdrum notation software <https://www.humdrum.org>, <https://humlib.humdrum.org>

Music Encoding Initiative (MEI) <https://music-encoding.org>

Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) <https://tei-c.org>

Verovio SVG rendering <https://www.verovio.org>

Select Primary Sources (Musical) [1]

Eredi, Francesco. *L'Armida del Tasso posta in musica a cinque voci, col suo basso per suonare*. Venice: Vincenzi, 1629.

Marotta, Erasmo. *Aminta musicale. Il primo libro de madrigali a cinque voci*. Venice: Gardano, 1600.

Select Primary Sources (Literary) [2]

Tasso, Torquato. *Rime di propria mano*. Chig. L.VIII.302. Biblioteca Vaticana, Vatican City.

_____. *Gierusalemme liberata poema heroico del sig. Torquato Tasso. Ridotta alla sua vera lettione secondo il proprio originale dello stesso autore, & di nuovo ristampata, con gli argomenti a ciascun canto del signor Horatio Ariosti, & allegorie del poema*. Mantua: Osanna, 1584.

[1] The musical sources listed here stand out because they feature an especially large number of Tasso settings. For bibliographic references to the over 350 musical sources on which the project draws, please refer to the project's website. See, for instance,

<http://www.tassomusic.org/settings/?id=Trm0047> and <http://www.tassomusic.org/browse/>

[2] The literary sources listed here are particularly significant in the tradition of Tasso's poetry. The first is an autograph of *Rime*, while the other is an authoritative edition of *Gerusalemme liberata*. For bibliographic references to the over 400 literary sources on which the project draws,

please refer to the project's website. See, for instance,
<http://www.tassomusic.org/sources/?id=Tsg01002> and <http://www.tassomusic.org/browse/> (click
on the “Literary browsing” tab).