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To sleep perchance to sing: the suspension of disbelief in the prologue to Francesco Cavalli's *Gli Amori d'Apollo e di Dafne* (1640)¹

ABSTRACT

In the newly popularized genre of opera during the seventeenth century, the allegorical prologue was commonly used as a preface from about 1600 to 1670, with no fewer than 98 opera prologues composed throughout Venice during this period. These prologues, often sung by allegories and/or characters from myth, set the stage for the proceeding drama. In the prologue to Francesco Cavalli's 1640 opera Gli Amori d'Apollo e di Dafne, its characters, the gods of sleep and dreams, set the stage for an opera that revolves around a dream. This article explores the act of wishing the audience peaceful and pleasant dreams by using oratory as a method that the allegorical figures use to sing the audience a lullaby. The purpose of this lullaby is to instigate the suspension of disbelief required to allow the story to gain the audience's credibility. This article will show how Cavalli's opera does so uniquely by spatially extending its effects outwards onto the audience rather than only onto the characters onstage.

KEYWORDS

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2. For more on early opera prologues, see Hansen (2003).
3. For more about the opera and its mythological context, see Heller (2004: 21–34; 2010: 186–216).

The operatic prologue was a pervasive component commonly included in Baroque opera from about 1600 to 1670. During this period, a large number of opera prologues were composed throughout Europe. These prologues were often sung by allegorical and/or mythological characters, and set the stage for the opera proper. Aside from simply prefacing it, they often have some relationship to the main part of the opera. The characters of the earliest opera prologues, such as *La Tragedia* in Jacopo Peri's *L'Euridice* (1600) and *La Musica* in Claudio Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (1607), address the audience directly, thereby drawing them into the artificial world of the opera. In these prologues, the composer did not allow for any disconnection between what takes place onstage and what occurs offstage, inevitably inviting the audience to be a part of the onstage drama. The function of the opera prologue, like the literary prologue, serves to preface the story by introducing it in some way, either implicitly or explicitly.²

At the opening of an opera, it would be highly unusual if a character were to come onstage and wish the audience pleasant dreams, since the general idea of operatic spectatorship involves the observer being awake for the performance. But in the prologue to Francesco Cavalli's second opera *Gli Amori di Apollo e di Dafne* with a libretto by Giovanni Francesco Busenello composed in 1640, this is exactly what happens.³ The prologue features four ancient Greek gods: Somnus, the god of sleep and his three sons, Pantheus, Itaton and Morpheus. Here, they address the audience directly and wish them pleasant and fantastic dreams. A closer look at the prologue, however, reveals that it serves a dual purpose: to introduce the opera, as well as to function as a lullaby in order that the audience may suspend disbelief.

This act of suspension of disbelief and audience address does not come randomly, but via a strategic rhetorical technique. I propose that the act of wishing the audience peaceful and pleasant dreams in Cavalli's prologue occurs via the use of deixis, or 'verbal pointing', as a procedure that strengthens the connection between the worlds of the stage and the audience. This extends the onstage drama outward rather than confining it inward, thereby altering the conventional focus to involve the audience as well. In this way, the characters sing the audience a lullaby, instigating the suspension of disbelief. A more in-depth discussion of the use of deixis in this prologue will occur below.

DEIXIS AND ITS LINGUISTIC APPLICATIONS

Recent scholarship by musicologist Mauro Calcagno explores the use of deixis, in early Italian opera *libretti* (Calcagno 2000: 183). Deixis is a sub-branch of semiotics and pragmatic linguistics, or discourse analysis, in which various words can function as demonstrative words. Deictical words do not characterize or qualify an object, but rather point to it and establish a point of reference between the signifier and signified, or, in other terms, the speaker and the hearer, taking into account the 'aspects of the speaker's spatial, temporal, and social orientation' (Fillmore 1966: 220). Calcagno's work discusses the way in which the words create a spatial, temporal and social relationship between the characters onstage. While Calcagno makes a convincing argument about the use of deixis confined to the stage, he does not mention the possibility for the use of deixis in addresses directed away from the stage. It is this use of deixis that this article examines in detail.

Much ink has been spilled on the use of deixis both in spoken language and in theatre. Karl Bühler, Charles Fillmore, John Lyons and a host of other

linguists both in and out of the ‘pragmatics school’ have written much about this linguistic phenomenon. Bühler in his *Sprachtheorie* of 1934 discusses the linguistic development of deixis, placing deictic words into three categories: spatial deictics, referring to space and demonstrative pronouns; temporal deictics, or words demonstrating time; and personal deictics, or personal pronouns (Bühler 1934: 79–148).

Wilfried Passow has examined the use of deixis and semiotics within spoken theatre and established five categories that comprise theatrical interaction: fictitious scenic interaction (within the make-believe world), interactions of the audience with the make-believe world, real interaction on the stage, interaction of the audience with the actors (as opposed to the characters), and interactions within the audience (Passow and Strauss 1981). All of these categories will appear at least once in the work, thus proving that spoken and sung theatre have much in common.

DEIXIS IN CAVALLI’S PROLOGUE

The plot of *Gli amori d’Apollo e di Dafne* features a fantastical story based on myth that can provoke incredulosity.⁴ Like all operas of the period based on Greek and Roman mythology, the tales used require the audience to suspend disbelief. The suspension of disbelief, inherent in sleep, was one strategy for managing the fantastic occurrences taking place onstage, creating a way for the audience to fathom the veracity of the story. The sleep scene is not foreign to the operatic stage and has its roots in the *commedia dell’arte* where it is preceded by a lullaby that serves to facilitate vulnerability on the part of the sleeper (Hill 2005: 196). As a result, it makes the sleeper susceptible to ‘assassination, rape, unmasking, discovery, loss of self-control, and exposure of private thoughts’ (Hill 2005: 196).

Sleep was a common convention in operas of this period, and, as Ellen Rosand reminds us, ‘Like all such dramatic conventions, sleep was an abnormal state of consciousness that facilitated the suspension of disbelief and thereby encouraged musical expression. It did so triply: for the singer of the provoking lullaby, for the sleeper, who could dream out loud, and for the onstage observer, who could express himself alone’ (Rosand 1991: 338). While a sleeping character in a drama exhibits vulnerability, so does the audience, who is figuratively asleep and therefore predisposed to believing the involuntary disclosures of the actions occurring onstage. It is also a conventional gambit for allowing supernatural and unusual events to transpire.

In order to understand the way deixis works in this prologue, it is necessary to first outline its structural divisions. We can divide Cavalli’s prologue to *Gli amori d’Apollo e di Dafne* into three musical sections: Somnus’ monologue, a quartet in which Somnus’ three sons join him, and the quartet. The textual progressions of each of these sections allow the orientation to move increasingly outward towards the audience: Somnus’ section (lines 1–18) centres on ‘I’ (although his ‘I’ is actually the words ‘me’ and ‘my’) and moves towards the ‘You’ of his sons (lines 19–26); the verbal orientation of the other three characters’ monologues move among the ‘You’ of those onstage (lines 27–44); and at the beginning of the quartet (lines 45 to the end of the prologue), the deictic orientation moves to a new ‘You’, that of the audience, so that the transition to an outward deictic orientation has been achieved. In addition to the three structural parts above into which the prologue can be divided, the prologue to Cavalli’s opera can be further divided into two parts that work together: the first a lullaby, including the first two-thirds of the above structure

4. *Gli amori di Apollo e di Dafne* differs from many operas of the period because the fantastical element, i.e. Dafne being turned into a laurel tree, occurs before the audience’s eyes rather than taking place offstage. The opera was mounted in 1640 at the Teatro San Cassiano in Venice. For a facsimile of the score and libretto, see Cavalli (1978). For more on the sources for the opera, see Heller (2010). I am grateful to Wendy Heller for making this article available to me in advance of its publication.

5. The most famous lullaby in Cavalli's operas occurs in *Giasone* (1648), mounted at San Cassiano, with a libretto by Giacinto Andres Cicognini. In Act 3, Scenes 1–4, Jason and Medea sing a lullaby duet before falling asleep. For more about Cavalli's use of the lullaby, see Rosand (1991: 276).
6. Other operas that incorporate dream scenes include Act 3, Scene 2 of *Il virtù dei strali d'amore* (1642), music by Francesco Cavalli, libretto by Giovanni Faustini, mounted at Teatro San Cassiano; and Act 1, Scene 14 of *Giasone* (1649), music by Francesco Cavalli, libretto by Giacinto Andrea Cicognini, mounted at Teatro San Cassiano. For more about these operas and other dream scenes of the period, see Rosand (1991: 338–442).

in the monologues of each of the four characters in bars 1–101, and the second a petition for the suspension of disbelief in the quartet, bars 102–147.

While Cavalli often uses lullabies within operatic scenes, in *Gli amori d'Apollo e di Dafne* he attempts not to put a character of the opera to sleep with song within the preface to an opera, but to put the audience in a position in which the listener is forced to suspend his or her disbelief.⁵ For this to occur, all spatial and temporal barriers must be broken. They are first broken in the four-part chorus at the end of the prologue. While sleep scenes represent an induction of vulnerability, they are typically directed to another character onstage, and not outward to the audience. In the context of this prologue, the 'I' sender/'You' receiver structure inherent in theatre becomes more overt. This and other operatic prologues contain this outward extension so that the dialogic situation seminal in the opera itself, the I/You orientation, is not reversed; the public will never address the character, so the dialogue is actually a monologue.

While Calcagno does not examine every libretto from the period, he does choose several to demonstrate this new concept of the relationship between music and language in the seventeenth century, one that delineates the singer from his or her character (Calcagno 2000). My examination takes this one step further by examining the way in which this works in terms of the separation between or the integration of the singer and the audience. Just as the music represents the actions, the deictic words allow the prologue's characters to not only connect the drama onstage with the audience, but also to bridge the gap between space and time, and between themselves and the audience, dissolving the temporal barriers. As embodied in the use of deixis for theatrical purposes, the central deictics are the words 'I', 'here' and 'now', from which all other deictics radiate (Serpieri 1981: 167–8), and the prologue represents this most acutely. Figure 1 contains the text and translation of the prologue with the deictics in bold in order to facilitate the understanding of my examples.

The outwardly directed words in the prologue, such as 'you' and 'your', occur towards the beginning of Somnus's first speech, while the self-referential words such as 'I' and 'me' tend to appear towards the middle or end of lines. In this way, the characters place the focus and priority away from themselves and onto others, increasing the level of importance of their warning that the gods not be ignored. In his discussion of the deictic 'come', Fillmore explains that the literal, motional sense of 'come' is distinguished from that of 'go' in terms of speaker-addressee deixis: when motion focuses towards the deictic centre, 'come' is used; when it is directed away from the deictic centre, 'go' is used (Fillmore 1966: 222). In the context of the final stanza of the prologue, this is relevant in that all of the onstage characters direct themselves to go out, thus radiating the deictic centre away from themselves.

In order to consider the use of deixis as the main way in which the prologue functions as an outward extending lullaby, the text to the opera's prologue must be examined more closely. The four gods make a promise to conjure up various images and forms that will teach frail mankind how to read supernatural signs. The characters never identify these signs, but we can assume that the signs are dreams. This is the main thread that connects the prologue to the opera, in that in Act 1, Scene 1 the nymph Cirilla seeks an interpretation of her dream of a nymph being transformed into a tree. As it turns out, her dream serves as both a premonitory message and a supernatural sign of Daphne's defeat by Apollo upon being transformed into a laurel tree (Carter 2005: 253). As Tim Carter notes, the dream scene in early opera functions as a warning sign against ignoring the gods, for serious repercussions will result.⁶ He states

<p><i>Sonno-</i> Già dell'alba vicina L'aure precorritrici, I venticelli amici Fomentano cortesi La mia placida forza, E le palpebre humane, Sepeliti lor moti in dolce oblio, Resister più non ponno Alla soave Deità del Sonno.</p> <p>Questa è l'hora felice Da me più favorita, In cui godo vedere Dentr'un dormir profondo, La Natura sopita. Poco lungi è la Diva, Che sparge à man profusa humide perle; Poco lunge è la luce, Che per sentier dorato il dì conduce.</p> <p>Voi, miei cari ministri!¹ Panto, Itaton, Morfeo, Mentre vengono i sogni Dalle porti fatali Servite pronti al vaticinio loro Con le vostre figure, E con mille apparenze, e mille forme Itene à visitar chi posa, e dorme. <i>Morfeo- Morpheus-</i> Sonno Dio del riposo, Dator della quiet' e della pace, Tutti gl'humani volti Io prenderò ben tosto, E com'è l'uso del le mutanze mie, Vaneggiarò i sogni avanti al die. <i>Itaton-</i> Et io d'augelli, e fere Vestirò le sembiance, E son pronto à cangiarmi in tante guise, Che non potranno i numeri adeguale, E spesso in un oggetto Unirò, mescerò più d'un aspetto. <i>Panto-</i> Le figure diverse D'insensibili cose io prenderò, E tra chi dorme andrò; Del quadro, del Triangolo, del cerchio, Figurarò e le prospettive belle, E tutte inventaro l'arti novelle. <i>Itaton, Morfeo, Sonno, Panto-</i> Uscite in varie torme, Imagini gioconde, e strane forme. E all'adormito mondo Portate in sogni lieti Metamorfoosi mill', e milli segni, E l'huomo frale à indovinar s'ingegni</p>	<p><i>Somnus-</i> Already daybreak is near The sweet morning air outruns us, The friendly winds Courteously comfort My placid strength, And the human eyes, Buried their motion in sweet oblivion, They cannot resist any longer The sweet god of sleep.</p> <p>This is the happy My most favorite, hour Of which to enjoy seeing Within a deep sleep, Appeased Nature. A little longer is the goddess, That scatters moist pearls through the hand; No longer is the light, That track covered with gold guides the day.</p> <p>You, my dear servants Pantheus, Itaton, Morpheus, While dreams come From the fated gates Serve the prophecies quickly to them With your images, And with a thousand apparitions and shapes, I will go to visit those who rest and sleep.</p> <p>Somnus, God of repose, Giver of quiet and of peace, All human faces I will take very soon, And like the custom of my changes, I will rave the dreams before the days.</p> <p><i>Itaton-</i> And I of the birds and wild beasts will dress the semblances, And I am quick to change myself into many guises, That cannot equal the numbers, And often in an object I will unite, I will mix more than a countenance.</p> <p><i>Pantheus-</i> The various shapes Of senseless things I will take, And I will go among who sleep; Of the square, the triangle, the circle, I will form the beautiful perspectives, And all will invent new art.</p> <p><i>Itaton, Morpheus, Somnus, Panto-</i> Go out in various hordes, Playful images and strange shapes. And to the sleeping world Will bring pleasant dreams A thousand transformations and a thousand signs, That frail man can interpret supernatural signs.</p>	<p>1. In the score, the word 'voi' is replaced with the word 'su', a word of invocation.</p>
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Figure 1: Text and translation of the prologue, with deixis words in bold.

that this opera's prologue 'provides a tenuous connection between the Aurora/Cefalo story on one hand, and the Dafne/Apollo on the other, given that (as the Prologue says) such dreams occur just before dawn' (Carter 2005: 253–4).

For the purpose of this examination, we will use the categories organized by Bühler. The prologue begins with the temporal aspect, setting the stage of the opera beginning at dawn when the sun rises. Somnus, the first to appear in the prologue, sings three strophes separated by a *ritornello*. Each of these strophes begins with a deictic from each of the three categories. The first strophe begins with the word 'già', or 'already', from the temporal category, the second with 'questa' or 'this', from the spatial category, and the third with 'voi' or 'you', from the personal category. The word 'now' in the third strophe refers to the word 'time', a temporal deictic, thereby allowing the deictics to return full circle in the same way that time itself rotates. By using all three types of verbal deictics, Somnus establishes the spatial, personal and temporal coordinates of his presence on the stage.

Each of Somnus' three strophes addresses a different topic. The first strophe contains an implied movement from night-time to dawn. By referring to Somnus's own 'placid strength' he gives the audience an indication of his powers. The second strophe refers to dawn as Somnus' favourite time because he can observe the deeply sleeping nature of the mortal. Using *anaphora*, he illuminates the decreasing power of things other than humanity: both the diminishing power of the light and the absence of Aurora, goddess of the dawn, increase his power. The third strophe is the most interactive because it is a strophe of invocation, whereby Somnus summons his three sons to begin their respective responsibilities. This is the first time in which a character uses the 'you' deictic to refer to another character onstage. By using this deictic, Somnus verbally deflects attention away from himself and onto the other characters onstage.

Somnus then discusses the origins of dreams, and he subsequently assigns responsibilities to his sons and finally to himself. The deictic verbs, having a quality of motion, in this case the verbs 'to come' and 'to visit', are set musically as if they were deictic pronouns such as 'my'. Throughout the prologue, Cavalli musically inflects the deictic words by placing them on heightened points of the sung melody and arriving on downbeats, syncopations or strong beats within a measure in order to ensure that the important words are highlighted. Cavalli's compositional techniques are also comparable to what Monteverdi and other contemporary composers did in their operas in order to highlight the deictic and important words for specific dramatic purposes.



Figure 2: Musical highlighting of deictic words in Somnus' prologue, bars 22–25.



Figure 3: Musical highlighting of deictic words in *Somnus' prologue*, bar 42.

As Figure 2 shows, the 'Ques-' of 'Questa' (this) (bar 22) falls on the downbeat and 'me' (my) (bar 24) falls on the second strongest beat of the bar (Calcagno 2000: 179).

Figure 3 features two adjacent deictics: the first, 'su' (come), on the downbeat, and the second, 'miei' (my), occurring twice on a syncopation.

In Figure 4, 'io' (I) falls on a syncopation (bar 66), and the word 'mie' (my) not only falls on the second strongest beat of the bar (in bar 68), but also moves to a B-flat for the first time in the prologue, thus adding the prologue's very first altered note and heightening the aural attention drawn to the word.

In each of the subsequent strophes after *Somnus'* three-strophe opening, each god introduces himself to the audience by telling them what he does and what he plans to do. Unlike *Somnus*, the gods *Morpheus*, *Itaton* and *Pantheus* use the simplest of deictic words, 'I', in their respective strophes. *Itaton*, however, is the only one who states from where he has come, and where he will go, giving his strophe a sense of movement and transformation.

None of them, however, call themselves by their own name, as was often the case in prologues from this period, the most famous example of this deriving from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* in which *La Musica* sings 'Io la Musica son'. In Cavalli's opera, however, the absence of any instance of self-reference also exemplifies this deflection away from the characters onstage.

The succeeding chorus unites *Somnus*, *Morpheus*, *Itaton* and *Pantheus*. Here they declare their intention to teach all humankind to read supernatural signs so that frail humanity can interpret them, and they extend a direct invitation to the audience to partake in the coming action. The 'playful images and strange shapes' (bars 110–112), juxtaposed with very different music from the first part of the prologue, indicate that the audience should expect the

Figure 4: Musical highlighting of deictic words in *Morpheus' prologue*, bars 65–68.

unexpected. For the first time the three gods implicitly address the audience, to warn, instruct and petition for the suspension of disbelief.

Since sleep scenes often begin with a lullaby that places the sleeper in a compromised state, the function of this prologue contains a direct connection to the opera. According to the defining features, the first half of the prologue fits the profile of a Baroque operatic lullaby. Therefore, the second half of the prologue, that which suspends the audience's disbelief, functions as an outwardly extending sleep scene. In this way Cavalli uses the prologue to draw the audience into the artificial world of the opera. By using deixis, the characters of the prologue directly address the audience, and use the elements of a lullaby to aid them in their suspension of disbelief. As a result, they bridge the temporal and spatial gaps between the characters onstage and the audience.

This examination using deictics to examine the prologue to Cavalli's *Gli amori d'Apollone e di Dafne* would prove useful in examining other prologues of Cavalli, as well as those by other seventeenth-century opera composers and librettists. After all, prologues such as the one found in both *Il Ciro* (1654) and *Xerse* (1655) in which Literature, Architecture, Poetry and Music argue over the superiority of their art forms may not be just what they seem at face value, but rather may contain a more complex meaning.

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