

# Experiencing Alba Tressina's *Anima mea liquefacta est* through Bodily Humors and the Sacred Erotic

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*Alba Tressina sits, lute in her lap, in the choir room behind her convent's sanctuary, a sheet of music written in her own hand laid out in front of her on a small table. It is a hot weekday in early August, and the windows are flung open to the wide, tree-filled park that wraps around the back of the convent and abuts the river. If she were to look out the windows and beyond the walls of her convent, she would see several upper-class families taking advantage of the last summer warmth, picnicking leisurely on the grass by the river, within earshot of the nuns' rehearsal.*

*Tressina, however, is deep in conversation with the three sisters with whom she is rehearsing. Two stand near one another, sheets of music in their hands, while the third sits at a small, portable organ nearby. A young servant girl stands quietly next to the organ, ready to begin pumping its small bellows. Tressina is explaining to her ensemble that they will perform this piece, her latest, for the rest of the sisters and possibly their father confessor on the feast day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She confides that she chose the text she did—"Anima mea liquefacta est"—because she wanted to demonstrate in music her close relationship with the Holy Mother, out of whose very body sprung the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Tressina asks the nuns to meditate on the Virgin Mary's holy body. During her pregnancy, her bodily humors—blood, phlegm, yellow and black bile—had become Jesus's humors, and after Christ's birth, her milk had fed and nourished the infant. In a similar manner, the Virgin Mary might spiritually nourish the nuns devoted to her. Finally, her Assumption—her bodily removal from the Earth to Heaven—demonstrated the sanctity of her body, as well as the physical merging of her body and soul with God. Tressina explains to her sisters that by meditating on these holy attributes of the Blessed Virgin, and by aspiring towards the perfection of the Holy Mother through prayer, music, and mystical practices, a nun might attain a higher level of closeness with God, perhaps even reaching ecstasy or a physical union with the Divine.*

*Tressina asks the singers to pour their love for the Virgin Mary into their singing and to remember that although they would be performing for their own sisters they would also be performing for the Holy Mother and for God himself. Thus, they must sing and play with a pure heart and absolute humility and love.*

## Current Musicology

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In this article, I situate Tressina's *Anima mea liquefacta est* (1622) at the nexus of Renaissance and Early Modern intellectual and religious frameworks. I demonstrate the ways in which it connects with the sacred erotic, a major component of European religious thought in the seventeenth century, and Galenic humorism, which by the end of the Renaissance had regained popularity.<sup>1</sup> Through close reading of Tressina's composition, I explore the artistic and cultural celebration of the sacred erotic and its offshoot, liquid eros, as well as the link between humorism and musical performance. Finally, I analyze *Anima mea* with respect to humorism, mapping Galen's four humors and their cultural connotations line by line onto the piece itself in order to more fully appreciate the associations between sacred eroticism, the psychology and emotion of performance, and the physical bodies of the nuns who performed this music.

Tressina's compositions employ many conventions of sacred polyphonic music popular in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Such pre-existing conventions function as a shorthand version of collectively agreed-upon cultural meanings, performing cultural work that is easily recognizable to a wide variety of listeners living in a common time, society, and geographic area.<sup>3</sup> By linking *Anima mea* to prevailing ideas about the body and its connection with the Divine, I demonstrate the extent to which Tressina interacted with and contributed to her artistic and political communities—not cut off from society, as many in the church hierarchy expected from a cloistered nun, but very much a part of it.<sup>4</sup>

### Music in the Convent

As prominent sites for the cultivation of musical talent, convents often gave nuns access to musical instruction, providing one of the only reputable environments for female performance.<sup>5</sup> Nuns could receive musical training in several ways. Families often provided music lessons for their daughters before they even entered the convent and sometimes would arrange for lessons to continue upon the girls' profession of vows. When further lessons were approved, a suitable teacher had to be found; if the teacher came from outside the convent, he was generally a man who was old and morally beyond reproach. Teacher and pupil sat on either side of a metal grate, often in the presence of an additional nun to ensure propriety. In the event that the Church hierarchy forbade the hiring of an outside teacher, a musically gifted nun took over the duty of teaching her fellow sisters (Monson 1992). In the case of Tressina, her teacher was the renowned Leon Leoni, *maestro di cappella* of Vicenza's cathedral, an ordained priest, and an old man by the time he began working with Tressina.

Convent musical performances took on various forms. The most-described performances, both in period writings and in recent scholarship, were part of ceremonial rituals, processions, and feast days. Performances by nuns for the public, if allowed at all, required the nuns to be hidden from view, creating in the listener the experience of hearing a voice without seeing its provenance, an unusual and fantastic experience at the time. For many listeners, the invisibility of the nuns created a shift in perception: for them, the nuns *became* their voices. As nun scholar Gabriella Zarri states, “The nuns become an invisible presence, they are transformed into a voice,” a concept that Craig Monson terms the “disembodied voice” (Zarri 1986: 412; Monson 1992). To accomplish this invisibility while still allowing laity to listen to their music, nuns sang through grates in the wall, behind screens, and out of windows, and they played loud instruments (organ, trombone, *cornetto*) whose sounds could penetrate the walls to the spaces beyond.<sup>6</sup>

Many convents in Italy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were renowned for the quality of music they produced. The evidence of excellent music issuing from convent churches appears in travel diaries, official Church correspondence, city chronicles, and in the form of published music. Visiting aristocrats made sure to go to some of the most famous convents to add to their “collection” of listening experiences.<sup>7</sup> Robert Kendrick quotes the 1664 accounts of Grand Duke Cosimo III de’ Medici’s visit to Milan and the convent of S. Radegonda which describe the two musical ensembles in residence there, made up of “fifty nuns counting singers and instrumentalists of utter perfection” (Filizio Pizzichi, quoted in Kendrick 1992: 215). As Kendrick states elsewhere, “The renown of the repertory is no secret; most urban panegyric literature of the Seicento remarked on nuns’ performances (while normally omitting or downplaying music in other institutions) and ecclesiastical historians have mentioned it repeatedly” (Kendrick 1996: 15).

Italy’s cloistered religious communities were vital centers of musical production, and in line with sacred musical trends in the wider world, many nun composers made use of popular, sacred-erotic compositional techniques. Besides Alba Tressina, nuns Sulpitia Cesis (publication in 1619), Lucrezia Orsina Vizzana (publication in 1623), Chiara Margarita Cozzolani (publications in 1642 and 1650), and Bianca Maria Meda (publication in 1691) all wrote pieces with sacred-erotic texts and musical characteristics. Before I explain what these characteristics were, I want briefly to explain sacred eroticism and how it manifested in Early Modern religious culture.

### Sacred Eroticism and Its Uses in the Arts

In the mid–sixteenth century, the Catholic Church realized its fallibility as thousands left for the new promise of personal salvation that Martin Luther preached. In Luther's church, both men and women could speak directly with God without the necessity of a trained priest to intercede, shifting the lay person from a position of relatively passive religiosity to one of great personal and spiritual power. Confronted with this revolutionary idea, the Catholic Church grew uneasy, for in this alternate religious paradigm lay the potential that not only the priest, but also the entire hierarchy of the church was superfluous. In response and as a means to regain both members and spiritual clout, the Catholic Church embarked on a series of reforms that in effect tightened the Church's control both bureaucratically and socially. One aspect of these reforms was an emphasis on earthly eroticism as a metaphor for sacred love. While Luther's followers could speak directly to God, devout Catholics could unite with God both physically and spiritually. The possibility of this union must have been a powerful draw for individuals disenchanted by Roman Catholicism as it became a strong selling point for the Church seeking to bring newly avowed Protestants back into its folds.

The Catholic Church's emphasis on the sacred erotic comes sharply into focus in the influential and widely distributed works of mystic and saint Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582). The highly sexualized descriptions of her unions with God in her writings such as *The Interior Castle* and *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila* offered a new, powerful means of communion with God. St. Teresa's use of sexual metaphor to describe divine union, her myriad writings, and the Church's approval of her work all served to elevate her fame and holiness while making way for others to use the sacred erotic in their own devotions.

St. Teresa's works opened the floodgates for religious individuals, mystics or not, to seek ecstasy through devotion, often aided by works of art, literature, or music. The Church capitalized on this tradition, patronizing artistic endeavors that depicted, described, and demonstrated personal ecstasy (generally among women) all across Europe. Male excitement surrounding the idea of the female mystic in ecstasy can be seen in numerous works of visual art generated during these centuries, such as Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* or Guido Reni's *St. Cecilia*. In the visual depiction of union with God, anyone, literate or not, could view and contemplate divine encounters and strive for such experiences in their own lives. By rendering holy women in ecstasy, visual artists could graphically demonstrate for the masses the soul's ultimate goal: complete physical, emotional, and spiritual union with God.

Literature and the visual arts in the seventeenth century depicted this ecstasy while the performing arts, and music in particular, were uniquely

situated both to depict *and* to provide it. Intellectuals and theorists such as Federigo Borromeo, Milan's archbishop from 1595–1631, saw music as an especially well-suited medium for divine union.<sup>8</sup> Women in particular, thought to be less rational than men and therefore more prone to supernatural influence, were often known to experience trance states while performing, as long as they were both devout and humble.<sup>9</sup>

Multiple aspects of a composition or performance allowed for the emergence of the sacred erotic: in the use of sacred-erotic texts; in modal shifts; in the interplay between the vocal or instrumental lines; or in performance contexts that suggest non-normative expressions of gender (through, for example, the use of castrati and other male voices to celebrate the physical body of Jesus). The *Song of Songs* provides a large percentage of the sacred-erotic texts for all composers in this style—men and women, cloistered and worldly alike. This short book in the Old Testament is the primary locus of the sacred erotic in the Bible, and its metaphor of earthly love as a way to demonstrate and understand divine love has held great meaning for Roman Catholics throughout the centuries. Eleventh-century saint Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a series of sermons on the *Song of Songs*, meditating on “the gift of holy love” that he characterizes as both “ardent” and “perfect” (Bernard de Clairvaux 2005, sermons 1 and 7). Along with the nun composers mentioned above, Claudio Monteverdi, Girolamo Frescobaldi, and Alessandro Grandi (all Roman Catholics), Heinrich Schütz (a Protestant), and Salamone Rossi (a Jew) used these verses to great effect, underlining the significance of corporeal ecstasy and union with God in music brimming with eroticism and pain. Grandi's *O quam tu pulchra es*, for example, is rife with emotional agony and languishing, which is portrayed musically as a modal meltdown meant to depict (and potentially aid in) an out-of-body ecstatic experience (see McClary 1991 and 2012).

Frescobaldi uses the same technique in *Maddalena alla Croce*, his *sonetto spirituale* published in Venice in 1630. The text of this piece describes a union between Christ and Mary Magdalene, saying “For if you wish to die, my soul is united/With you (you know this, my Redeemer, my God)/Therefore with you I must share both death and life.”<sup>10</sup> Susan McClary describes the climax of this piece as a sexual release: “Here is Mary Magdalene at the site of Christianity's most holy site—the crucifixion—enacting a fantasy of simultaneous orgasm with the dying Christ” (McClary 2007: 137). McClary bases her assertion on the numerous and rapid modal shifts (eleven in all). The turning point and the chord that depicts Mary's rapture is an F#-major triad, “wildly” out of place in the previous harmonic landscape, much as a true mystical encounter with God would be in daily life (McClary 2007: 140).

One additional technique for demonstrating sacred-erotic experiences was the manipulation of timing and desire, and seventeenth-century com-

posers used dissonance and consonance to create in the listener a longing for resolution. During crunching dissonances, the listener's yearning deepens and intensifies as phrase endings are withheld, thereby delaying gratification until it either explodes in a burst of ecstasy or dissipates in frustration and fear. St. John of the Cross described the latter outcome in angst-ridden detail in the mid-sixteenth century (see St. John of the Cross 2005). This musical withholding of gratification parallels the desire a believer would have for God's love and the subsequent rush of joy she might experience in attaining a mystical union with the Divine.

These compositional techniques culminate in the act of singing, which provides, palpably and in the flesh, these sacred-erotic effects in real time. The set of musical practices that composers developed not only referred to sacred eroticism, but also demonstrated it outright, opening the door for the more spiritual performers among them to use such works as a means of becoming closer to God via performance. Devout listeners too could attain trance states through "inner participation" as they found their minds and bodies swept up in the performance (see Johnson 2013). For those nuns who did not have regular mystical encounters (surely the majority of them), the attraction towards bodily and emotional union with God remained strong, motivating these women to continue to strive for closer relationships with the Divine.

### Liquid Eros as Part of the Sacred Erotic

Liquid eros was one component of the sacred erotic during the seventeenth century, and bodily liquids like blood, tears, breast milk, or the common metaphor of the melting soul were used in meditative devotions.<sup>11</sup> The body's carnality and its internal liquids, or humors, were thus a celebrated aspect of spirituality within Roman Catholic practices. Even as early as the mid-sixteenth century, liquid imagery was indispensable in mystic writings as a metaphor for bodily union with God.

To say that one's soul is melting is to suggest that the now-liquid soul can easily merge with other sacred liquids, such as the blood of Christ or the Virgin Mary's breast milk, two of the more important liquids in the Christian tradition. Richard Rambuss writes extensively about the role of bodily fluids in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century personal devotions, revealing how combining bodily liquids in the name of faith opens the door for countless fusions of the erotic and the spiritual. Furthermore, the mixing of liquids is permanent—once tears and blood are melded together, the two cannot be parted (Rambuss 1998). This strong symbolic pairing of humorism and sacred eroticism in Early Modern religious traditions was particularly

powerful for women, whose bodies had the capacity to produce three of the most prominent liquids in Christian imagery: blood, milk, and tears.

Blood, notably the blood of Jesus, is the most celebrated of these three liquids and therefore the most obvious link between the body and the Divine for us today. During the rite of Communion, the high point of every mass, the devout take the body and the blood of Christ into their own bodies as spiritual nourishment. Tears and breast milk, on the other hand, both carry strong associations with women, and their sacred connotations are perhaps less obvious. Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary weep heavily below the crucifix after Jesus's death, as well as in the days during which Jesus's body lies in the tomb. Indeed, the two Marys are depicted mourning by the cross in countless works of art, poetry, and music, including the oft-set text "Stabat Mater dolorosa, juxta crucem lacrimosa, dum pendebat Filius" ("the grieving Mother stood weeping beside the cross where her Son was hanging"). Tears, however, are not specific to the female body, like breast milk. The holy status of the Virgin Mary's breast milk was a mainstay of Christian imagery throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The physical and spiritual nourishment that Jesus ingested with Mary's breast milk allowed believers to view Mary and her life-giving breasts as a source of nourishment for them as well.<sup>12</sup> Mary's body offered a parallel to Jesus's in that her life-giving breasts, like Jesus's bleeding side wounds, had the power to feed and nourish a believer. Unsurprisingly, such female-centric imagery struck a resonant chord with nuns at the time. Indeed, the nuns felt a strong connection with both the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene in their grief over Jesus's death and the subsequent disappearance of his corporeal shell, while the Virgin Mary served as a sympathetic intercessor from whom they could take divine nourishment.

Water, another life-giving liquid, also provided an important metaphor for divine ecstasy. In her autobiography, St. Teresa uses water to delineate the four stages of prayer a devout believer must obtain before experiencing rapture. She likens personal prayer to the cultivation of a garden for God's pleasure. The four stages are: 1) The water is drawn from a well (*difficult*); 2) The well-water is drawn with a water-wheel and buckets, worked by a windlass (*less laborious, and brings up more water*); 3) The water comes from a stream or a spring (*easy, and better saturates the ground*); and 4) Heavy rains water the garden (*easiest—sent by God himself; no labor necessary*) (St. Teresa 1957: 78). This last metaphor references divine union, when the soul is inundated with God's love. These unions can be unexpected, yet intense. As St. Teresa says, "In one of these visits, however brief it may be, the Gardener, being as he is the Creator of the water, pours it out without stint; and what the poor soul has not been able to collect in perhaps twenty

years of exhausting intellectual effort, the heavenly Gardener gives it in a moment” (St. Teresa 1957: 117).

The idea of languishing of love for the Divine also appears several times in St. Teresa’s text. In her sixteenth chapter describing the “third water” (the third stage of prayer), St. Teresa expresses her emotional state as “bewildered and intoxicated with love” (St. Teresa 1957: 113). This intoxication later causes the soul to melt in ecstasy, as she makes clear in one of her chapters on rapture (the “fourth water”): “But it is plain from the superabundance of grace that the sun must have shone very brightly here, to leave the soul thus melted away” (St. Teresa 1957: 126).<sup>13</sup> The melting soul that languishes of love is evidently an image that Teresa found useful in evoking divine ecstasy—an image that many other authors, artists, and composers appropriated to similar ends.

### Liquid Eros in the Arts

Before the end of the Renaissance, imagery of sacred bodily fluids existed apart from erotic connotations. For example, visual artists during this time generally did not depict Mary’s naked breast realistically; often it came out of her shoulder, or was not proportional to the rest of her body. In the eighteenth century, images of (specifically female) bodies became more life-like and scientific, and were increasingly secularized and sexualized. The turn of the seventeenth century, however, was the point at which eroticization of holy bodies and their fluids coexisted in single works of art and music with profound devotion (Miles 2008).

Chiara Margarita Cozzolani (1602–c.1678), perhaps the most famous nun composer of her time, wrote numerous pieces using texts that celebrate the corporeal bodies of both Mary and Jesus, each flowing with its own sacred liquid. One example is her concerted duet *O quam bonus es* (1650), which overtly rejoices in the nourishment that springs from Christ’s side wound and from Mary’s breasts. Indeed, the protagonist has a difficult time deciding which liquid to experience first, eventually alternating between the two:

O me felicem, O me beatum.  
Hinc pascor a vulnere,  
hinc lactor ab ubere,  
quo me vertam nescio.  
In vulnere vita, in ubere salus,  
in vulnere quies, in ubere pax,  
in vulnere nectar, in ubere favum,  
in vulnere jubilus, in ubere gaudium,  
in vulnere Jesus, in ubere, Virgo.



O happy, blessed me.  
Now I graze from his wound,  
now I nurse at her breast,  
I do not know where to turn next.  
In his wound is life; in her breast, salvation;  
in his wound, quiet; in her breast, peace;  
in his wound, nectar; in her breast, honey;  
in his wound, rejoicing; in her breast, joy;  
in the wound of Jesus; in the breast, O Virgin.

Later on in this text, the desire of the protagonist becomes even more fervent:

*Sanguis amabilis, nectare dulcior, manna jucundior.  
Lac exoptabile, melle suavior, favo nobilus.  
Te amo, te diligo, te cupio, te volo, te sitio, te quaero, te bibo, te gusto.*

O lovable blood, sweeter than nectar, happier than manna.  
Desirable milk, sweeter than honey, more refined than the honeycomb.  
I love you, I desire you, I want you, I thirst for you, I seek you, I drink  
you, I enjoy you.

Other nuns made use of preexisting religious texts such as the erotically charged *Song of Songs*. Alba Tressina used texts from this book of the Bible in two of her four surviving compositions: *Anima mea liquefacta est* and *Vulnerasti cor meum*. While *Vulnerasti cor meum* indirectly hints at the eroticization of Mary's nourishing milk, exclaiming, "how beautiful are your breasts" ("quam pulchrae sunt mammae tuae"), *Anima mea liquefacta est* is both textually and musically awash with liquid imagery, and thus lies at the nexus of spirituality and Early Modern liquid eros with respect to both text and music. The text comes from chapter five, verses six and eight of the *Song of Songs*:

<i>Anima mea liquefacta est</i>	SS 5:6
<i>ut dilectus meus locutus est.</i>	SS 5:6 paraphrase
<i>Vocavi illum et non respondit mihi</i>	SS 5:6
<i>quesivi illum et non inveni</i>	SS 5:6
<i>nuntiate dilecto meo</i>	SS 5:8 paraphrase
<i>quia amore languo.</i>	SS 5:8

My soul melted when my love spoke.  
I called him and he did not answer.  
I searched for him and did not find him.  
Tell my beloved that I languish of love.

## Current Musicology

Apart from the text, Tressina's musical setting similarly makes use of techniques and conventions common within sacred–erotic musical composition. One of the more striking musical techniques still part of the Italian musical landscape in the early decades of the seventeenth century is textual mimesis: the close relationship composers crafted between a given text and the musical “translation” of that text, often depicting the meaning of the text both visually and aurally.<sup>14</sup> The mimetic style that Tressina employs in this piece is straightforward and uncomplicated, yet vital to the piece's sacred–erotic theme: her melodic lines imitate the movement (and perhaps the sound, as well) of flowing water. During the first thirty–two measures, phrases melt into one another, cascading down the staff like a waterfall, spilling from voice to voice over a descending octave. These watery characteristics are paired with the first line (“Anima mea liquefacta est”) and intensify on the word *liquefacta*, which for more than half of its nine iterations is set to pairs of descending fusae (see Example 1).



Tenor

9

8

li - que - fac - ta est, li - que - fac - ta est

Example 1: Alba Tressina, *Anima mea liquefacta est*: Tenor, mm. 9–11.

One other motive, also repeated in each voice part, further emphasizes this piece's connection to liquid imagery. The word “vocavi,” which means “I call out,” bubbles up from the depths of the singer's voice like a spring, similar to St. Teresa's third stage of prayer (see Example 2).



Tenor

37

8

vo - ca - - - vi il - lum

Example 2: Alba Tressina, *Anima mea liquefacta est*: Tenor, mm. 37–39.

Why did liquid imagery hold such a place of prominence in certain kinds of sacred–erotic devotion? Part of the reason liquid metaphors were such an effective tool for pious individuals desiring a closer, even visceral connection with God in sixteenth– and seventeenth–century Europe has to do with how people of all classes and religions viewed their bodies. St. Teresa's reliance on water as a central image was no coincidence. Her writings were intended to aid the devout in bettering themselves (that is, aligning the interior aspects of themselves with Christian spiritual and mystical beliefs) in order to become closer to God. What better metaphor to use, then, than

liquids, which, according to Galenic humorism and Renaissance medicinal teachings, not only filled the interior spaces of the body, but also directly affected sickness, health, personality characteristics, and emotions?

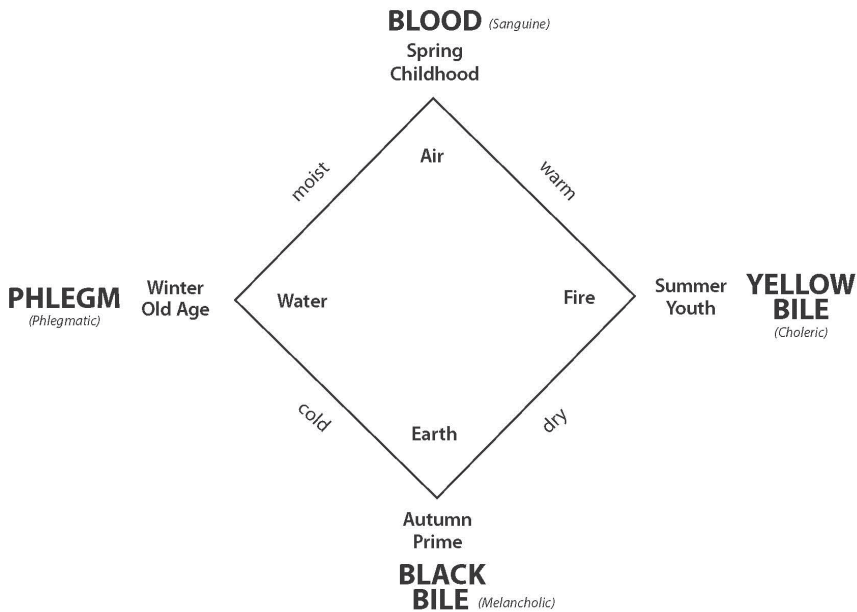
## Galenic Humorism and Its Effects on Performance

Humorism, championed by the Greek physician and philosopher Galen in the second century C.E., stated that the body was made up of four humors (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm), which regulated the body's health, characteristics, and physiological make-up. The humors, when balanced according to each individual's bodily constitution, assured a healthy body wherein all processes ran smoothly. At times of humoral imbalance, the patient showed symptoms of sickness. In this way, the body resembled a great vat of liquids and spongy organs that bobbed around in pools of mixed humors, absorbing what they needed, assimilating and transforming these liquids into useable substances, and expelling any surplus. Problems, both psychological and physical, began to occur when the humors became unbalanced and the humoral mix within the body became stagnant, clogged, and putrid (Roach 1985).

The four humors could be loosely associated with the four elements (air, fire, earth, and water, respectively), and also the four seasons, the four stages of life, and four key personality characteristics: Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholic, and Phlegmatic. Each humor had two qualities associated with it, and each quality in turn pertained to two different humors. Blood and phlegm were both moist humors, while yellow and black bile were dry. Blood and yellow bile were warm, while phlegm and black bile were cold (see Figure 1).

The properties of the most prominent humor in the body affected a person's personality. For example, a Sanguine person was extraverted, social, and prone to "amatory passions," while a Choleric person was energetic, passionate, and charismatic (Roach 1985: 39). Melancholics were creative, kind, and considerate, though also prone to bouts of grief. Phlegmatics were dependable, kind, and affectionate, though also prone to fear or astonishment (see Figure 2).

Each person's humoral makeup was different: balance in one person may have been unbalanced for another. Some people were naturally Choleric, but when a Sanguine person started to become Choleric, it signaled imbalance. Such a person would begin to take on the character and physical traits associated with an excess of yellow bile. Physical stature and weight also could be explained by the humors: for example, a fat person was viewed as having an excess of cold moisture, and thus too much phlegm (Burton 1621; Roach 1985).



**Figure 1:** Chart of the four humors, their characteristics, and correlating factors.

The renewed interest in ancient Greek and Latin philosophers, intellectuals, and authors in the Renaissance helped to re-popularize Galenic medicine, as physicians took Galen's works as a starting point and either sought to refute his ideas or champion and expand upon them. As a result, even though anatomists such as Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) began to disprove many of Galen's assertions (due largely to the fact that by the Renaissance the dissection of human cadavers was becoming legal), in the seventeenth century diagnostic medicine still relied heavily on Galen's work (Stelmack and Stalikas 1991).<sup>15</sup> Reprints of his works appeared throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries across Europe in Latin, German, Greek, and English. In fact, bloodletting, a remedy popular with Galen that would drain away the supposedly putrid, stagnant fluids from the body, was still used to treat patients as late as the nineteenth century. Thus, the image of the body as a stewpot full of sloshing liquids and spongy organs that dictate emotion, physical health, and human actions was a commonly known "fact" among all levels of seventeenth-century European society, much as the knowledge that "germs make us sick" is today.

The influence of the humors on how people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries viewed their bodies cannot be overestimated, especially since humors affected both physical and mental health. An imbalance of

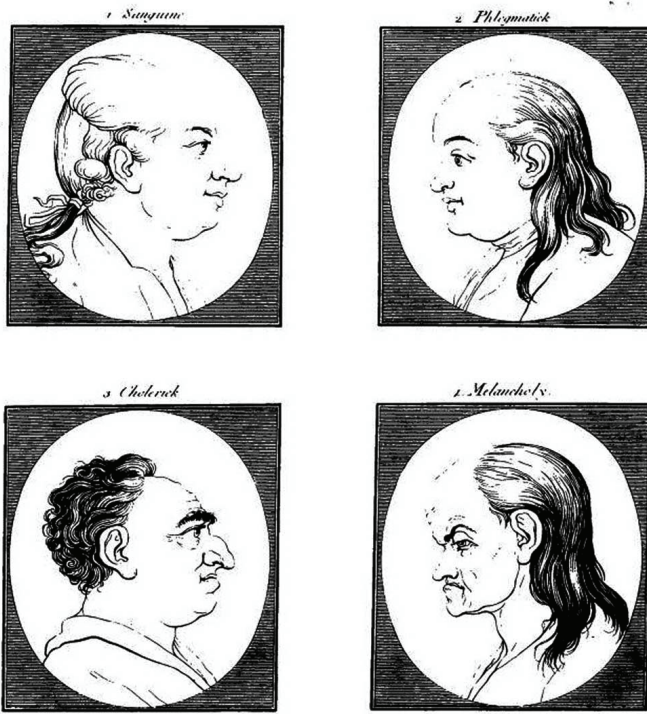


Figure 2: The Four Temperaments. From Lavater (1789: 254–255). Public Commons.

humors could either cause physical or psychological issues or be caused by them (Burton 1621, Part 1, Member III, Subsection I “Definition of melancholy, name, difference”: 45). Excessive emotion could be the cause of humoral imbalance as much as a physical malady—an immediate danger for actors, lovers, musicians, or anyone in a position to experience sudden changes in either embodied or projected emotion.

Since the humors controlled the passions and thus a person’s actions, they also affected all aspects of social and public life, especially in situations where a person sought to sway or alter another’s emotions or intellect. Public orations, political speeches, or theatrical or musical performances all had close ties to humoral movement and thus had the worrisome capacity to alter one’s physical or psychological make-up. Especially dangerous was a performance that elicited a rapid emotional shift, for as Galen states in his *Art of Physick*, “Nature abhors all suddain changes” (Galen and Culpeper 1652: 91). Performers “discover[ed] the passions of the mind with their bodies,” causing their own internal liquids to shift, possibly throwing them off balance in order to act their roles more effectively and believably (Roach 1985: 32). The rapid emotional changes necessitated by a good performance,

therefore, were actually “sudden, violent metamorphoses” within the physical body, as performers generated and embodied genuine emotions originating in a fictitious world (Roach 1985: 42). The truly great performer could effect physiological changes at will through three key steps, outlined in John Bulwer’s 1649 work *Pathomyotomia*: 1) the person imagines the emotion or character to portray, 2) this internal image in turn moves the person’s Appetite, which then 3) causes the “mobile spirits” to “flie forth with stupendous obedience to their destinated Organs” (Bulwer 1649: 21–23).

Even more perilous was the belief that actors could effect physiological changes on audience members through their performances. As theater historian Joseph Roach has written, the actor, with his “passions irradiating the bodies of the spectators through their eyes and ears, could literally transfer the contents of his heart to theirs, altering their moral nature. The exercise of this power entailed certain dangers” (Roach 1985: 27). Roach writes of actors in particular, but this same idea extended to musicians as well. Obviously, the ability of an actor or musician to produce physiological changes in audience members could have devastating implications. At the very least it could cause discomfort in the spectator, but a good performance could also incite violence, make spectators physically ill, and even generate in the audience members strong emotions such as depression and uncontrollable rage.

Music’s dangers were not unlike those of magic; indeed, Linda Austern makes a parallel between music and witchcraft, citing the practitioner’s ability to enchant. She quotes from Alexander Roberts’s *Treatise of Witchcraft* (1620), wherein Roberts states that witches “[stir] up men to lust, to hatred, to love, and the like passions . . . by altering the inward and outward senses, either in forming some new object . . . or stirring the humors,” which is similar to what music could do, according to Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim in his 1533 publication *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*:

Singing can do more then [*sic*] the sound of an Instrument, in as much as it arising by an Harmonial consent, from the conceit of the minde, and imperious affection of the phantasie and heart, easily penetrateth by motion, with the refracted and well tempered Air, the aërous spirit of the hearer, which is the bond of soul and body; and transferring the affection and minde of the Singer with it, it moveth the affection of the hearer by his affection, and the hearers phantasie by his phantasie, and minde by his minde, and striketh the minde, and striketh the heart, and pierceth even to the inwards of the soul, and by little and little, infuseth even dispositions: moreover, it moveth and stoppeth the members and the humors of the body. (Quoted in Austern 1990: 199, 203)

The musical practitioner, then, could change the listener’s physiological makeup through violent alterations of humoral balance, “striking” and

“piercing” the “inwards of the soul” and renting the listener out of his or her “even disposition.”

Alternatively, a great performer’s power over audiences was thrilling for audiences of theater or music, who during a performance could give themselves up entirely to the performers and in turn experience not only elation, joy, excitement, and suspense but also helplessness, anger, and grief. In fact, an actor or performance was judged as “good” relative to the extent to which audience members got swept up in the moment and felt the actor’s passions in their own bodies. In other words, the best performers could transfer their own emotions, made possible by the changing ratios of bodily liquids, to the audience members, altering audience members’ physical bodies in turn.

A particularly excellent performance could put listeners in a type of trance or stupor, or could generate ecstatic experiences. Through his performances, the renowned sixteenth-century lutenist Francesco da Milano “ravished” his audiences and was able to manipulate the listeners’ bodies by dulling their senses “save that of hearing” for the duration of his performance. After inciting a kind of “ecstatic transport of some Divine frenzy,” da Milano would gently restore the audience’s bodies to a normal, though invariably altered, state. French tourist Jacques Descartes de Ventemille gives a detailed account of his experience in his travel diary:

He had barely disturbed the air with three strummed chords when he interrupted the conversation that had started among the guests. Having constrained them to face him, he continued with such ravishing skill that little by little, making the strings languish under his fingers in his sublime way, he transported all those who were listening into so pleasurable a melancholy that—one leaning his head on his hand supported by his elbow, and another sprawling with his limbs in careless deportment, with gaping mouth and more than half-closed eyes, glued (one would judge) to the strings of the lute, and his chin fallen on his breast, concealing his countenance with the saddest taciturnity ever seen—they remained deprived of all senses save that of hearing, as if the spirit, having abandoned all the seats of the senses, had retired to the ears in order to enjoy the more at its ease so ravishing a harmony; and I believe that we would be there still, had he not himself—I know not how—changing his style of playing with a gentle force, returned the spirit and the senses to the place from which he had stolen them, not without leaving as much astonishment in each of us as if we had been elevated by an ecstatic transport of some Divine frenzy. (Weiss and Taruskin 1984: 159–160)

For de Ventemille, one of the most noteworthy aspects of his experience is da Milano’s ability to exert control over and effect change on his audience’s physiology. Da Milano effortlessly alters the listeners’ humoral ratios, inciting a “pleasurable . . . melancholy” that physically changes the bodies of the audi-

ence members, both externally (one is “sprawling with his limbs in careless deportment”) and internally (he is also “concealing his countenance with the saddest taciturnity ever seen”). The audience is completely and utterly at the mercy of the performer. Indeed, the author notes that they would all still be there today, enraptured and in a trance, if da Milano had not eased them back into themselves.

A common belief throughout the Renaissance and into the seventeenth century was that these emotional changes occurred in the physical air between the performers and the spectators. De Ventemille reminds us of this idea at the beginning of his account when he describes da Milano as “disturb[ing] the air.” Medical theorists such as Robert Burton, author of the wildly popular *Anatomy of Melancholy*,<sup>16</sup> used Galen’s theory of attraction, the longstanding idea of the *pneuma*,<sup>17</sup> to explain that spirits, becoming agitated by a person’s passions and emotions, create a “wave of physical force” that rolls through the ether and affects the spirits of others (Roach 1985: 45). Burton speaks of this “phantasie” of imagination which can “so imperiously command our bodies” and which “is of such force. . .that it can work vpon others, as well as our selues” (Burton 1621: “Of the Force of Imagination,” Part 1, Section 2, Member 3, Subsection 2, page 127). In a section entitled “Musicke a remedy,” he goes on to say, “the spirits about the Heart, take in that trembling and dancing aire into the Body, & are moued together, & stirred vp with it” (Burton 1621: “Musicke a remedy,” Part 2, Section 2, Member 6, Subsection 3, page 373). Galen himself wrote that air “helps to engender both Vital and Animal Spirit,” “cools the Heart by Inspiration,” and “is the Author of Life, Diseases, and Death to mortal men and women” (Galen and Culpepper 1652: 91).

Because stirring the passions required throwing off the equilibrium of humors, such an action necessitated a strong degree of self-control on the part of the performer so as not to succumb to physical disease or psychological malady, which only time or a trained physick could heal. Musicians and actors kept on hand a full range of emotions, including ecstasy, rage, passionate love, and devastating sorrow, and were able to access them quickly and easily. The true art in seventeenth-century performance stemmed from the level of restraint and self-control that a performer could wield: “to attain restraint, control over these copious and powerful energies, represents both artistic challenge and preventative medicine” (Roach 1985: 52). Sometimes, though, it may have been desirable for the performer to relinquish herself to the emotional and humoral changes that performance entailed if the end result could be a closer relationship with God.



## Humoral Analysis

Alba Tressina's composition draws from liquid and sacred-erotic metaphors as well as a collective understanding of how the body functioned. Its performance thus had the potential to effect bodily changes in performers and listeners alike and consequently afforded the opportunity for performers and listeners to tune their souls to God and experience divine ecstasy.<sup>18</sup> In Tressina's setting, each line of poetry presents an affect whose emotional content corresponds with the characteristics of one or two of the four humors; *one or two* because in humoral theory, the varying combinations of humors produce markedly different qualities than just the single "pure" humoral form.<sup>19</sup> As the emotions of the text become increasingly fraught, the humors become more complex and inflected with melancholy. Melancholy holds primacy of place in this humoral reading for two reasons: 1) the text describes a love-sickness that Renaissance doctors would have labeled as melancholy. This is the same type of melancholy that de Ventemille ascribes to da Milano's performance—a "pleasurable melancholy." 2) Melancholy is unique among the four humors in that any of the other humors can inflect and influence one's melancholic state. These combinations produce complex aggregates of humoral effects. As Burton says,

this naturall Melancholy is either Simple, or Mix't . . . according to mixture of those naturall humors amongst themselues, or foure vnnaturall adust humors, as they are diversly tempered and mingled . . . From Melancholy adust ariseth one kinde; from Choler another, which is most brutish: another from Fleame, which is dull; & the last from Blood, which is best. (Burton 1621: "Of the matter of melancholy," Part 1, Member III, Subsection III, page 50)

Melancholy mixed with blood (the "best" kind, according to Burton) results in sanguine melancholy, or love-sickness, which is caused by passionate yearning and amorous desires. Sanguine melancholy is particularly important in *Anima mea liquefacta est* because the nature of Tressina's selected text is overtly melancholic in this vein—most notably the last line, "Tell my beloved that I languish of love."

The piece begins with overlapping, descending melodic lines that mimic moving water. The lines flow into one another with no beginning and no end. After the first iteration, each subsequent entrance seems to grow out of the previous line. The explicitly liquid nature of these initial eleven measures depicts the first line of text—*Anima mea liquefacta est*—and corresponds humorally with phlegm, the humor of water (see Figure 1). The first entrance, in the altus primus, begins on a g', ending in the next measure a fourth lower, on d'. The second entrance, by the altus secundus, is identical to the first

except in the duration of the first *g'* and begins just as the first motive is ending. In measure four, the first alto begins its descent from *d'* down to *g*, imitated slightly differently by the second alto. The tenor voice, picking up on this descent, begins its motive—an imitation of the primary motive—a fourth lower, on *d*. The tenor ends its iteration of “*liquefacta est*” with falling *fusa* pairs that come to rest on *g* (see Example 3).

Measures 12 through 17 (set to “*ut dilectus meus locutus est*”—“when my love spoke to me”) depict black bile, the humor of melancholy and of earth. The harmonies shift subtly into a new modal framework as the text introduces a new person: “my love.” The voices suddenly enter a period of momentary stasis made possible by a stable homophonic texture that contrasts with the instability of the previous watery motives. The fluid lines flow gently up to the wall of homophony, which rises from the texture in a new modal space and in a new meter (3/2) (see Example 4). The two iterations of “*locutus est*” return to the opening mode, and to duple time, though in performance the two-measure change to triple meter has little to no actual effect beyond a hemiola. During these measures, while the part-writing is conventional, the brief shift to the soft hexachord during the first iteration of “*locutus*” is nonetheless melancholic in affect.

To perform this affectual change from phlegmatic to melancholic, the performers must pull themselves out of the depths to which they had cascaded individually and come together in unison. Thus, not only must they shift affects through humoral change within their bodies, they must do it together as one person, breathing at the same time and entering on the same tempo, even though the tenor solo in the three measures previous might have included a small *rubato* to signify the end of the first, phlegmatic section. Since the changes in performed affect had the potential to physically alter the humoral balance of singers, instrumentalists, and other performers, who in turn might effect similar changes on audience members, such an event occurring simultaneously among three performers (or four, if the bass line was not played by one of the singers) must have been compelling.

The homophony does not last long, however. After six measures, the singers drop out completely—the first and only time this happens. A continuo solo beginning in measure 18 and cadencing on the downbeat of measure 22 showcases a contrasting affect, and consequently a contrasting humor. The solo, featuring a repeated anapest rhythm<sup>20</sup> over a steady ascent from *g*” to *f*, counteracts the initial languid, liquid descents and the melancholy stasis in the vocal lines. Yellow bile, opposite phlegm in Figure 1, represents fire, summer, and youth in contrast to the watery phlegm associated with winter and old age. The new rhythm, full of energy and optimism in its driving upward movement (as opposed to the downward movement of the earlier motives) points to the warm fiery dryness of yellow bile (see Example 5).

Alto part (Alti primus) and Tenor part (Alti secundus) of the first system. The Alto part begins with the lyrics "A - ni - ma me - a" and the Tenor part with "A - ni - ma me - a". Both parts continue with "li - que - fac - ta est, li - que -" and "ta, li - que - fac - ta".

Second system of the musical score, including parts for Alto I (A.I.), Alto II (A.II.), Tenor (T.), and Bass/Contralto (B.C.). The lyrics continue: "fac - ta est, li - que - fac - ta est, a - ni - ma me - a" and "A - ni - ma me - a li - que - fac - ta est, li - que - fac - ta est".

**Example 3:** Alba Tressina, *Anima mea liquefacta est*: mm. 1–11.

12

Altus primus  
ut di-lec-tus me-us lo-cu-tus est, lo-cu-tus est

Altus secundus  
ut di-lec-tus me-us lo-cu-tus est, lo-cu-tus est

Tenor  
ut di-lec-tus me-us lo-cu-tus est, lo-cu-tus est

Basso per l'organo  
ut di-lec-tus me-us lo-cu-tus est, lo-cu-tus est

Example 4: Alba Tressina, *Anima mea liquefacta est*, mm. 12–17.



**Example 5:** Alba Tressina, *Anima mea liquefacta est*: Basso, mm. 18–23.

This continuo solo is interesting both in its uniqueness within the structure of the piece as well as in its location. It appears after the first iteration of “ut dilectus meus locutus est” (“when my love spoke”). I argue that this solo represents the voice of the Beloved, which, for nuns seeking further intimacy with the Divine by way of Biblical texts, would be Jesus. It is fitting that the bass line takes over at this point, both due to the line’s tessitura<sup>21</sup> and in the fact that there are no words—indeed no human voices. In Roman Catholicism, God speaks to the people through intercessors, interpreters, and symbols: saints, priests, the pope, other holy individuals, a burning bush, a voice in the wilderness. Nuns therefore would have readily welcomed the idea that God might speak *through* someone else in a medium requiring a degree of interpretation, such as a continuo solo.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in convent repertoire, the voice of God could be generated by an instrumental solo and also through the bodies of the nuns themselves (as in some compositions by nuns that require performers to envoice holy characters),<sup>23</sup> allowing for multiple types of musical interpretations of doctrine to exist simultaneously.

After the bass solo, which re-energizes the piece by bringing a new, warm, fiery affect, the voices enter once again with material similar to the beginning. In a symmetrical framing gesture, the singers repeat the first line (“Anima mea liquefacta est”) and return to their flowing, descending motives. This second iteration is more emphatic: this time, each new voice now interrupts the one before at the height of the phrase, entering during the falling fusa pairs. Additionally, all three voices sing the liquid motive on the word “liquefacta” for even more emphasis.

Measures 33–36 (“dilectus meus”) create an appropriate transition between the first half of the piece, which aurally depicts the speaker’s passion and ecstasy, and the second half, which focuses on searching for the lost lover. While liquid is a main theme throughout, the water imagery changes at this point from a gently flowing descent to waves of sound washing over singers and audience alike. Regardless of where in the convent this might have been sung, it is likely that the space was highly resonant, replete with stone walls, arched ceilings, and minimal furnishings. In such a space, these dynamic few measures would briefly immerse the audience, “drowning” them in sound as the speaker’s soul melted, or perhaps drowned in love (see Example 6).

33

Altus primus  
di-lee-tus me - us, di-lee-tus me - us lo-cu-tus est

Altus secundus  
di-lee-tus me - us lo - cu - tus est

Tenor  
di-lee-tus me - us lo-cu-tus est

Basso per l'organo  
5 6 #

Example 6: Alba Tressina, *Anima mea liquefacta est*: mm. 33–36.

The phrase cadences on a semibreve in measure 36—a natural point of rest that allows both the singers and the audience a moment to breathe after the immersion. In the following measure, rapid semifusa runs bubble up from the depths of the voice in each part, as the water imagery once again changes slightly from immersing ocean waves to a freshwater spring. For all three singers, this motive begins near the bottom of the tessitura and dips to the lowest pitches scored for these lines (g for the two alto lines, and e for the tenor), only to rise swiftly up the scale a minor seventh and then an octave. This demonstration of fluid motion offers a chance for virtuosity within the confines of an octave, fittingly over the word “vocavi” (“I called out”) (see Examples 2 and 7).

44  
Altus primus

vo - ca - - - vi il - lum

43  
Altus secundus

vo - ca - - - - vi, vo - ca - vi

**Example 7:** Alba Tressina, *Anima mea liquefacta est*: Two further iterations of “vocavi.”

As the singers take turns “calling out,” as it were, the other voices reply with “et non respondit mihi” (“and he did not answer”). At first, after the initial “vocavi,” the various iterations of the response are spread out over five measures. As the other voices “call out,” the response section shortens to two measures, their entrances cutting off those already sounding. By measure 49, all three voices are singing “et non respondit mihi” at the same time, though not homophonically.

While the musical setting for “vocavi” is both phlegmatic (due to the bubbling, spring-like nature of the setting) and sanguine (the music rises and the text expresses hope in finding the Beloved) in affect, the text of “et non respondit mihi” is melancholic and full of yearning. Each time this line appears, the motive rushes forward with fusae towards a goal—a fifth below the starting pitch—but must pause on the penultimate pitch for a minim before coming to rest on the final. This sudden notated ritardando, in emphasizing the second scale degree, creates a sense of longing that mimics the longing in the text. The second time this occurs, the second alto line includes a suspension that further augments the sensation of desire.

These measures, 37–51, layer two different humors on top of one another: phlegm and black bile. Phlegm arises from the bubbling settings of

“vocavi” while the text reveals the melancholy of black bile. In humorism, the mixture of phlegm and black bile produce phlegmatic melancholy, a form of melancholia that Burton fascinatingly attributes to “Maides, Nunnes, and Widowes”<sup>24</sup>—in other words, women refraining from sexual intercourse (Burton 1632: 202). Phlegmatic melancholics, as Burton describes, are prone to weeping, fascination with water, and vivid dreams of drowning. Burton’s attribution would likely have made a great deal of sense to his readership, since according to Galen, “women are dominated by cold and moist humors, are deficient in essential heat, and are thus passive, imperfect humans” (quoted in Harvey 2000: 13).

The meter change in measure 57 marks a longer tenor solo, repeated in measures 63–68 by the upper voices. Once again, the 3/2 meter appears for the words “nuntiate dilecto meo” (“tell my love”). Calling out for the Beloved had no effect, and so the protagonist has switched to the imperative, and is imploring someone to pass the message to the Beloved. This particular line is paraphrased, not directly quoted, from the *Song of Songs*. Chapter 5, verse 8 says, “Adiuro vos, *filiae Ierusalem*: si inveneritis dilectum meum, quid nuntietis ei? ‘Quia amore languero’” (“I adjure you, O *daughters of Jerusalem*, if you find my Beloved, that you tell him that I languish of love”) (emphasis mine). The speaker in the Bible is addressing the daughters of Jerusalem. Thus, the nuns themselves would have been implicated in both sides of this scenario: as the individual who searches for her Beloved, and as the daughters of Jerusalem who may be able to reach Him. Seeking and finding occur simultaneously in this message of love and suggest union with the Divine, this time intensified by the Trinitarian imagery suggested by the triple meter. These factors demonstrate both visually and aurally how intimately connected the speaker and the Beloved are, and how they function with one mind within a Trinitarian framework (see Example 8).

The piece ends in sanguine melancholy—the melancholy of love. Indeed, the text here states, “I languish of love.” Short melismas occur on the word “amore” in the penultimate bars, and the harmonies hearken back to the fluid lines of the beginning. Whereas the music set to the first line consistently descends, here it falls initially, but rises at the end. As a result, each line finishes the phrase higher than it began, as though reaching towards the heavens, ever searching for the Beloved. The vocal lines are not as spread out as before. Rather, the points of imitation occur much closer together, at one point resulting in parallel thirds on the word “amore” (see Example 9).<sup>25</sup>

The liquid lines, flowing and often paired off in intimate parallel thirds, intensify the erotic nature of the text. The emphasis on bodily liquids that melt, mix, and flow positions this piece firmly at the crux of the corporeal and the sacred erotic. Perhaps the single most important factor in demonstrating the ecstatic potential of this piece, however, is its performance.



57

Althus priusmus

Althus secundus

Tenor

Basso per l'organo

num - ti - a - te di - lec - to, di - lec - to me - o

63

A.I

A.II

T.

B.

num - ti - a - te di - lec - to, di - lec - to me - o

num - ti - a - te di - lec - to, di - lec - to me - o

qui

Example 8: Alba Tressina, *Anima mea liquefacta est*. mm. 57–68.

71

Altus primus  
(mo - re) lan - gue - o, a - mo - re lan - gue - o

Altus secundus  
qui - a a - mo - re lan - gue - o, a - mor - re lan - gue - o

Tenor  
qui - a a - mor - re lan - gue - o

Basso per l'organo

The musical score consists of five staves. The top three staves are vocal parts: Altus primus (Soprano), Altus secundus (Alto), and Tenor. The bottom staff is for the organ. The music is in common time (C) and features a melodic line with various intervals and rests. The lyrics are Latin, and the score includes a measure number '71' at the beginning of the vocal parts. The organ part includes a sharp sign (#) indicating a key signature change.

Example 9: Alba Tressina, *Anima mea liquefacta est*: mm. 71–end.

In closing, instead of listing and analyzing numerous performance possibilities<sup>26</sup> or reiterating the effects of performance on musicians and audience members alike, I am going to develop the scenario that began this article, and in so doing, demonstrate possible conditions and outcomes that might have been associated with the performance of this piece. Separating modern ideas about corporeality in performance from my imaginative recreations of the period has been admittedly complicated. Surely no one can be conclusive on that front, though I have made a concerted effort to immerse myself in sixteenth and seventeenth-century conceptions of the body. Many aspects of musical performance and rehearsal have likely remained unchanged in the intervening years. Subtle gestures and bodily movements that occur in communication between singers, such as leaning closer to one another to tune tricky passages, seem less culturally and historically specific and more grounded in acoustics and basic operations of the senses; to hear a pitch or a chord better, no one will move farther away from it. In attending to the corporeal experience of modern-day performance as a legitimate source of knowledge about past practices and experiences, I follow the example of Elisabeth Le Guin's *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (2006). Le Guin explores Boccherini's chamber music from a largely tactile and experiential perspective, detailing how specific physical movements during performance can inform the living cellist about the long-dead composer, his compositional choices, and his reasons for them. Given the conditions and contexts described in this article, my scenario is a plausible account of nuns employing music as both a private form of devotion and as a means of expressing creativity and feminine autonomy. Such speculative re-creation allows me to illustrate specific aspects of nuns' music making as well as provide answers to questions of performance logistics, textual significance, and musical meaning.

*Back in the choir room, the sisters commence their rehearsal. The organ and lute intone their first notes, and donna Maria Teresa, the highest alto, begins to sing, leaning gently into each sustained note. Shortly thereafter, donna Emilia, the second alto, enters, increasing the intensity of her entrance as Teresa's statement fades away, suspending the musical line until Teresa once again takes the reins, sliding gently into the D that Emilia is sustaining, resting briefly on the unison pitch before moving on.*

*In the sixth measure, Tressina's strong yet nuanced tenor voice enters the tapestry, fleshing out a G-major chord and making Teresa and Emilia shiver slightly at the beautiful harmonies coursing through their bodies. For a moment, Teresa is unsure which of the chord's pitches she is singing, so seamlessly are they blending their voices into one sound. All three singers begin to sense a*

*distinct yearning from deep within themselves, and Emilia feels tears begin to grow at the corners of her eyes. The singers' bodies begin to relax and change; the humors inside of them are responding to the liquid lines they are singing.*

*The short vocal motives and statements that dovetail and intertwine with one another leave the singers feeling breathless, as if they were gasping for air, overtaken with the love and beauty pouring out of their bodies. The organ begins its brief solo. The organist feels her pulse quicken as she pushes her line forwards and upwards, sequencing nearly an octave before falling back down to a low G. As Tressina begins to sing the second iteration of "Anima mea" over the organ's G, donna Maria Teresa prepares for her entrance. She eases into "Anima mea," two octaves above the bass line, pressing Tressina's line between the two. As she crescendos into her suspension, she realizes that her line has become inseparable from Tressina's as she renews the cycle of "Anima mea liquefacta est." Donna Emilia's line will follow a similar model, creating an unbroken string of suspensions and cascading couplets as her iteration of the first line of text creates patterns of suspension and resolution with Maria Teresa's line.*

*The low tessitura of the vocal parts creates further intimacy amongst the singers, for their voices are softer and slightly grainier at the lowest pitches. The nuns lean towards one another to tune, and to match one another's tone, especially at the crucial junctures where voices trade off on a unison pitch. For brief moments, it feels as though their voices are all one voice, their bodies are all one body.*

*As they reach the second half of the piece, the singers throw themselves into their syncopated, measure-long descending motives over "dilectus meus" and their rapid phrases that rise from the depths of their ranges over "vocavi." They gasp for air in the short rests, and breathe deeply during the longer ones. They take turns, imitating one another's entrances, style, and breathless quality. The waves of sound wash over all four musicians as their yearning and excitement deepen.*

*By the last line, Teresa's desire for God is so strong she feels the interior of her throat tense in pain, holding back tears as her F-natural rises to an F-sharp in the final cadence, her suddenly pinched voice wavering as she tries to keep from going sharp. All the musicians feel this change to major, and though not unexpected, the new major harmonies seem to open the heavens. As the sound dies away, the singers and organist are silent and still, swooning individually in God's love as they recover from the physical intensity of performing Tressina's newest piece. They can feel their humors begin to stabilize, their heart rates to slow.*

*Tressina, glancing at the mesmerized expression of the servant girl tending the bellows, suggests that the next time they rehearse this piece donna Noella,*

*the sister in charge of the young girls boarding in the convent, might want to bring the educande in preparation for the upcoming feast of the Assumption. Perhaps by listening to the music and watching the nuns perform, the girls would more fully understand the love of the Blessed Mother, and feel God's love within their own bodies. For isn't that one of music's ultimate purposes? To directly connect humans with the Divine?*

Notes

1. Though primarily a facet of Roman Catholicism, sacred eroticism also found supporters among other faiths, largely because the Biblical provenance of the sacred erotic was the Song of Songs—a text that Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism share.
2. These decades (1590s–1620s) mix aspects of what we would consider to be Renaissance and Early Modern thought, and therefore do not fit comfortably in either category. I do not use the terms interchangeably in this essay, but try to distinguish among the milieu of change those ideas that were beginning to decline in popularity (“Renaissance”) from those that were beginning to take hold (“Early Modern”).
3. These conventions would have been recognizable to a majority of Western Europeans (most notably Roman Catholics and urban Lutherans) from the late sixteenth century into the mid–seventeenth century.
4. The series of Catholic reforms in the sixteenth century tightened bureaucratic control of convents, requiring all nuns to submit to *clausura* (enclosure); those groups that refused were threatened with excommunication or were stripped of their official recognition as extensions of the Church. For more information, see Kendrick 1996 and Monson 1992 and 1995.
5. Indeed, Milanese Archbishop Federigo Borromeo insisted on “basic musical competence” as a prerequisite for sacred profession. See Kendrick 1996: 76.
6. Craig Monson has documented the practice of nuns increasing the size of a convent’s organ in order for it to be better heard through the walls, thus enabling the nuns to transmit their music to the public despite being confined behind layers of stone. See Monson 1992: 194.
7. For more in–depth examination of the practice of wealthy aristocratic men collecting “listenings,” see Dell’Antonio 2011.
8. Borromeo was a particular proponent of female spirituality, especially female mysticism. See his 1616 four–volume treatise on female mysticism entitled *De ecstaticis mulieribus, et illulis* (“On women who have ecstasies and illusions”) that delineates the differences between male and female spirituality, concluding that women through their very constitutions are more likely to experience ecstasy—either “true” ecstasy from God or “false” ecstasy from the Devil—than men.
9. In his fourth volume on female mysticism, Borromeo recounts an episode in the life of “una mistica, di grande santità,” whose sisters pester her to demonstrate for them one of her experiences of “celestial harmony” (“celeste armonia”). She puts them off for a time, and finally relents. She takes up a stringed instrument (likely a lute), and slowly begins to accompany herself as she sings. The song dramatically affects the listeners, who explained afterwards that they had never heard music of this kind before (“non avere mai sentito al mondo una melodia del genere”). Borromeo goes on to say that while singing, the nun, in ecstasy, was removed from her senses, yet she continued to play and sing “perfettamente i modi specifici dell’arte musicale.” See Borromeo 1988: 195.

## Current Musicology

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10. “Che se morir pur vuoi, l’anima unita/Ho teco (il sai, mio Redentor, mio Dio)/Però teco aver deggio e morte, e vita.” Translation by Susan McClary (2007).

11. The family of metaphors that combines liquid imagery and descriptions of divine ecstasy has been around for thousands of years; indeed, the text of the *Song of Songs*, wherein the idea of the “melting soul” (“*anima mea liquefacta est*”) can be found, was likely written between 960 and 400 B.C.E. Stylistic differences in the writing of certain verses suggest that the book is a collection of songs written over the course of several hundred years. Abraham Mariaselvam 1988 argues that the book was compiled around 400 B.C.E., though certain verses were written much earlier.

12. I must also point out the existence of a different line of thought in the seventeenth century of Jesus as a mother figure, indeed a mother capable of producing nourishing milk. One example of this arises in the poetry of George Herbert (1593–1633). See his “Lucus 34 (To John, leaning on the Lord’s breast)” (originally in Latin), wherein he writes:

You won’t really hoard the whole  
Breast for yourself! Do you thief  
Away from everyone that common well?  
He also shed his blood for me,  
And thus, having rightful  
Access to the breast, I claim the milk  
Mingled with the blood . . .  
(lines 1–7; quoted in Rambuss 1998: 37)

13. Chapter 18 is central to both St. Teresa’s argument and to mine. There are numerous statements within these few pages that link water and the rapture. Indeed, this chapter, in describing sacred–erotic experience, sheds light on sixteenth–century ideas regarding ecstasy, sexuality, and liquids.

14. This use of music as a mimetic extension of the text is highly effective. The texts of religious pieces were paramount and served multiple purposes, including instruction and as a means towards heightened spirituality, as authors as early as St. Augustine argued. Therefore, music that successfully emphasized and built upon the words was an important part of devotional experience, especially in religious communities whose members knew these texts by heart.

15. See also the introduction to Galen and A.J. Brock 1928 and Carlino 1999.

16. First published in 1621, Burton’s multi–volume work was reprinted at least nine times in its first 55 years and is still in print today.

17. Galen describes the *pneuma* as both breath (inspired air) and as a sort of vital spirit. Culpeper’s says that the spirit “Taken in a Physical sense, is an airy substance, very subtil and quick, dispersed throughout the Body, from the Brain, Heart, and Liver, by the Nerves, Arteries, and Veins, by which the powers of the Body are stirred up to perform their Office and Operation.” See Galen and Culpepper 1652: 5–6.

18. The ancient Greeks believed that the universe was made up of sounds that harmonize together (the “music of the spheres”), and that the human soul, a microcosm of the forces of the universe, was a lyre that resonated with the cosmos. This idea was renewed by Medieval and Renaissance philosophers and theologians such as Cassiodorus and Clement of Alexandria. See Nancy van Deusen 1989: 202–4.

19. A metaphor for these conjunctions that many modern–day readers might appreciate is the zodiac: the motions of the planets in combination with one’s primary sun sign (Taurus, Virgo, Libra, etc.) give rise to myriad combinations that affect one’s personality characteristics.

20. Although the rhythm appears to be dactylic based on the way this example is barred, momentum during performance relies on grouping each fusa pair with the following minim to produce an anapest rhythm.

21. In Early Modern operas and oratorios, a significant number of wise, father-like characters or characters in positions of authority sing in the bass range. Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672) scored the role of Jesus for bass in his *St. John Passion*, and in J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Jesus is a bass as well. In Schütz's *St. Matthew Passion* Jesus is a Baritone. In his oratorios, Giacomo Carissimi (1605–1674) was particularly fond of scoring God as a bass; see *Jonas*, *Ezechias*, and *Abraham and Isaac*. Carissimi also set other authority figures as basses, such as Balthazar, Christ, Abraham, and King Solomon.

22. Seventeenth-century instrumental music written for devotional purposes capitalized on the idea that instrumental music, absent words, represented the ineffable, thereby bridging the gap between the earthly world of logic and the heavenly realm of transcendence. See McClary 2012 and Strand–Polyak 2013.

23. A few such compositions include *Maria Magdalena et altera Maria*, *Magi videntes stellam*, *Angelus ad pastores*, and *Ecce ego Ioannes* by Sulpitia Cesis and Chiara Margarita Cozzolani's *dialoghi* that take place between a pious soul and a holy entity. See "Ritual and Performed Embodiment in Sulpitia Cesis's *Maria Magdalena et altera Maria*" in Johnson 2013.

24. See Burton's Part 1, Section 3, Member 2, Subsection 4, whose title is "Symptomes of Maides, Nunnes, and Widowes melancholy" (page 202 of the 1632 edition). Burton hypothesizes that the association between phlegmatic melancholy and these groups of women was likely due to the women's reproductive systems, as such women were childless, menopausal, and/or celibate. This section is an addition to the original 1621 publication; it appears in the 1632 edition.

25. Parallel thirds was one of several techniques common in the seventeenth century that was used to depict intimacy and in some cases to incite arousal. One example of this technique in context can be found in Cozzolani's *O quam bonus es* (1650). Parallel thirds occur in particular when the two voices rapidly and breathlessly sing "O me felicem, O me beatum," a motive that returns periodically throughout the piece. Parallel thirds also depict intimacy in Alessandro Grandi's *Anima mea liquefacta est* (1614). This practice may stem from the earlier idea of the "contenance angloise" and parallel thirds being "sweet."

26. Possibilities include rehearsals in the choir room or in private cells; impromptu performances in the courtyards or another common space as entertainment during times of relaxation or genteel labor (i.e. needlework); or semi-private performances in the convent's *parlatorio*, a double room divided by a grate where nuns visited with family and friends.

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