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Title: Fourth Lecture on theatre music recited in front of the Accademia della Crusca

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[[Most Serene Principe, Arch-consul, Worthy Academicians, since you have lent a kind and benevolent audience to three of the Discourses]]

Most Serene Principe, Arch-consul, Worthy Academicians, the polite and benevolent audience that you were kind enough to afford this past summer to my three Discourses (the first one on recitation on the stage, the second one on the rhapsody and the third one on the ancient verse) leads me to hope now that you will not fail to appreciate my continuing and resuming the thread of the first of them which was interrupted at that time, in order to arrive at what is more important and new, and such, I forecast, that it will allow some elevated minds the chance to examine this new doctrine of mine and to refine it with their strength of thought, in the same way that happens to a piece of iron when it is beaten by a hammer, and thus it is reduced to greater purity. I must be fond of this process in every respect, since I profess to be a follower and friend of the truth, as I am very well aware that the modest and polite discussions that take place here are very effective at discovering the truth, while, on the other hand, nothing clouds the truth and removes it from our understanding as much as those exhaustingly tenacious and boisterous debates that are practised nowadays, which, for the most part follow the fashion of sophistic discourses. Hence hails the ancient proverb: 'Too much of the truth is lost in arguing'. I shall resume the thread of my interrupted discourse and, firstly, I shall adduce some other authorities (besides the ones already presented) that prove that in antiquity singing occurred in the tragedy elsewhere apart from the choruses; secondly, on the basis of this evidence, I shall show that dramatic actions were not sung in full, as in the case of entire tragedies, in contrast to what is common practice in our time, on the false premise of imitating the ancients, and I shall show which parts were sung and which ones were not.; thirdly, I shall strive to demonstrate with several and important reasons that such practice is much superior and more laudable than the current one, since it allows us to enjoy precious and singular worth and great beauty. Now, the two excerpts from Aristotle and Livy quoted by me speak so clearly that, should we want to adopt the style of the bar and of the tribunals, they could do so. However, in order to be liberal with the evidence we submit and to satisfy our curiosity more completely, we shall collect other examples as well, [-f.121r-] to support the common and true assertion that the ancients employed music and singing not only in the choruses, but also in other parts of their dramatic actions. Suetonius writes these words in the *Life of Nero*: 'He also sung tragedies while dressed in the costume' and a little later: 'He sang, among others, *Canace giving birth*, *Orestes matricide* and *Hercules insane*'. Almost all of these were tragic subjects. Nevertheless, those who believe that only the choruses were set to music argue that Suetonius does not say that Nero sang on the stage and that he does not explain how the tragedies were sung commonly. However, what could he be saying, perchance, if, since

these are tragic subject matter, one cannot believe but that he sung them in the way that they were sung then on the stage? All the more so, since Suetonius himself teaches us that Nero acted and sung first in Greece, where he went specifically to prove himself, then in Naples, which was then a Greek city, and finally in his gardens in Rome, where, confident of having practised extensively, and, abandoned any embarrassment and shame (if ever he had any) he realised his wish to sing at last with other performers in a public spectacle in front of the people of Rome. Again, Suetonius himself, towards the end of the *Life of Nero* states: 'It was noted also [-f.121v-] that he sang a very new tragedy entitled *Oedipus exile*.' Who does not know that this is one of the most important ancient tragedies? Furthermore, in the *Life of Caligula* he states: 'He was so taken by the pleasure of singing and dancing that even during public performances he did not abstain from singing along with the Tragic actor while he recited on the stage, and he imitated the actions of the performer as if to praise him or to correct him.' In this passage Prudentius, the ancient Christian poet, calls the tragic actor with these words tragic *cantor* (singer) and says: 'Like the tragic singer covers his face with a hollow wooden mask, from whose mouth opening he breathes a grave sin.' Hence it appears that a tragic actor endowed with a pleasant and sonorous voice was held in the highest esteem. Thus, one reads in the same *Life*: 'the very sweet voice of the tragic actor,' and in an ancient inscription: 'I was also admired for my tragic voice.' Moreover, so widespread became the custom to recite the tragedies with a singing voice, that even the Greeks of later times up to the most recent ones unanimously called their vocal compositions [tragodemata], and the act of singing [tragodein], as one gather from the scholia or glosses to Euripides' *Phoenissae* and from those to Theocritus, where in several places the verb [tragodein] is explained as [melpein], which means simply 'to sing'. Liutprandus of Pavia, who lived about eight hundred years ago and writes very beautifully, for those times, about the events occurred to him during his diplomatic mission in Greece, [-f.122r-] supports this where he says: 'After a number of worthless tragoedimata, or songs, they went to sleep,' etcetera. More, I suppose that even at the time of the stoic Arrianus the Greeks began to call singers [tragodoi]. As proof that this is true, here is a passage from the third book, fourteenth chapter of Epictetus' philosophy book that makes me certain of it: [hos hoi kai kaloi monon asai ou dynantai, alla meta pollon, houtos enioi monoi peripatesai ou dynantai], which means: 'Since the good singers cannot sing by themselves, thus there are some people who cannot stroll alone.' Hence one can see that even up to that time the word [tragodoi] meant ordinary singers, rather than those who were called [tragodoi] by the most ancients, since nobody shall say that these sang together with others, as the members of the chorus, whose job was very different, since they were expected specifically to sing harmoniously with each other. It is worthy of reflection that, just as the Greeks sometimes called the singers collectively with this special term [tragodous], conversely, the Romans sometimes used to call comic and tragic performers with the more general name of cantor, or singer, as Horace did in his *Ars Poetica* where he says: 'Until the cantor will tell you to clap,' which are the words that concluded the ancient comedies (as one can see in Plautus and [-f.122v-] Terence) and were uttered by the actors themselves collectively, as we said just now, or by one of them, which makes little difference. As a confirmation of this very fact, allow me to tell you about a certain curious event occurred in Abdera, a town in Thrace, under the reign of Lysimachus, as it is recounted by the most elegant Lucianus at the beginning of his treatise *On how history*

*should be written.* What happened was that, while Euripides' tragedy *Andromeda* was being performed in that town at the height of summer, a strange illness overcame those citizens caused by the fact that they had been sitting for most of the day in an open-air theatre under the scorching rays of the sun. In fact, most of them, after they returned to their home, fell foul of a burning fever that lasted no less than six days and was accompanied by some attack of copious sweating or nose-bleeding. This illness lasted until the arrival of the fresh winter winds that dispersed that excessive heat which originated in the veins. The interesting part of the story is the following. While those poor invalids were delirious, and the characters of the tragedy and the melodies therein swirled around their minds, they took to singing the following Iambic verse with other similar ones: [Sy d'ho theon tyranne k'anthropon eros], which means: 'O Love, you, who rule the gods and the men.' However, since those words constitute an Iambic verse that never occurs in the melodies of the Chorus, [-f.123r-] this proves that singing must have occurred in said Tragedies outside of the choruses. [-f.125r-] However, to move on to what is most important, and to demonstrate with incontrovertible authorities that not all the dramatic actions were sung (as it is believed commonly nowadays) but only certain parts of them, where singing is appropriate, here the very erudite Grammarian Diomedes comes to my mind, who adorned his books by drawing from the works of Marcus Varro, Suetonius and also of other writers of that florid century, who wrote with accuracy about theatrical matters. Diomedes makes a manifest distinction between sections that were sung and sections that were merely recited. He says: Membra comoediarum (dice egli) sunt tria, diverbium canticum chorus. In canticis una tantum debet esse persona, aut latet. In choris iunctim omnes loqui debent, quasi voce confusa; et concentum in unam personam reformantes. Latinae comoediae chorum non habent. Olim omnia quae in scena uersabantur in comoedia agebantur. nam et Pantomimus et choraules in comoedia canebant. uerum actores comoediarum pro facultate et arte potiores, principatum sibi artificij uindicabant. sic factum est ut nolentibus cedere mimis in artificio suo caeteris separatio fieret reliquorum. Indicio sunt quod tibijs paribus, imparibus, sarranis agebantur Comoediae. quando enim chorus canebat choricis tibijs, id est choraulicis, artifex concinebat. In canticis autem pythaulicis responsabat. quod paribus tibijs aut imparibus dicitur, siquando monodio agebat, unam tibiam inflabat, siquando synodio duas tibias.' Although these words cannot be translated easily into a single [-f.125v-] language, since they contain many words that have no correspondent in it, nevertheless, I shall strive to translate them as best as it is possible. 'The parts of the comedy are three: the diverbia (dialogue), the canticum (solo song) and the chorus. Only one character is involved in the canticum, or, if there is another one, this one will be standing aloof. Everyone in the chorus must recite jointly with a voice almost fused together (which means joined together) reducing the plurality of voices as if to a single character. Latin comedies have no chorus. In ancient times, all what appeared on stage belonged to the comedy because both the Pantomime, who danced and expressed everything with gestures and the choraules, or flute player, sung and played in the comedy. It is true that the actors of the comedy, as they were the most important in artistry and level of task, claimed for themselves most of the artistic responsibility. So, it happened that, since the Mimes (it appears that this word is taken to mean Pantomimes) did not want to bow to the others with regard to their artistic clout, they ended up creating a separate genre of performance. There is evidence that comedies were performed to the accompaniment of flutes of the

same length (pari), of different length (impari), or Tyrian origin. In fact, when the chorus was singing, the player used instruments appropriate to it that we call nowadays *pifferi* or dulcians, but in the cantica the Pythauls (or player of the single flute) responded to the singer by playing the appropriate flutes (tibiae pithaulicae) which could be of the same or different lengths. So, if the piece was a monodium, or solo song, he played a single flute, [-f.126r-] but if it was a synodium (or song for two voices) he would play two flutes at a time. If such a clear authority is not sufficient, let another most learned Grammarian come forward, and let those irrefragable authors of the best century from whom it is certain that he took almost word by word his doctrine vouchsafe for him. Elius Donatus in his *Prolegomena on Terence*, where he deals with comedy, also describes the cantica and the diverbia as separate parts of it. Moreover, he specifies the way in which both were recited. He says: 'Actors recited in the diverbia, but the cantica were adapted to melodies composed not by a poet, but by an expert musician. Nor everything was sung to the same melodies within one canticum, but they often varied. This is what is meant by those who write three numbers in the comedies, as this indicates that they contain three varied melodic forms of that canticum.' Donatus continues a little further on: 'This type of songs were accompanied by the flutes in such a way that many among the audience, after hearing the sound of the flutes, knew in advance which play the performers were about to perform even before the preceding title was announced to the spectators themselves at all.' Donatus could have not declared more clearly to us that the cantica were sung, while the diverbia or dialogues were simply recited or spoken. If this was practised in the comedy, we have every reason to believe that the same occurred in the tragedy, since the question of the diverbia or dialogues is extremely clear. Some believe (and among them a [-f.126v-] Certain Dionysius Ronsfert, which I believe to be a nom de plume, in his notes on Father Mario Bettini's *Rubeno*, a work that he extols to the sky, that these cantica could have been a sort of group of detachable sections, which were added to the play itself, and that this is why they do not appear in the comedies of Plautus and Terence. This seems to me to be utterly implausible. In fact, either these cantica had a content that was linked in some part to the subject of the play or they did not. Should they answer that they did, I would ask them whether they were composed by the same poet who wrote the play or by someone else. If they were written by the same person, why are there not transmitted in the sources with the rest of the comedy, and why is it that the ancient Grammarians do not quote a single word of them, as they do of the other sections? However, should they answer that they were the work of writers other than Terence or Plautus, apart from the fact that this seems to me to be something said on a whim, it is remarkably unusual that nobody mentions the names of these writers of cantica. Moreover, it is not credible that someone would be better placed to compose them than the poet himself. However, should they maintain that said cantica were completely different and detached from the comic subject, I will reply that it seems illogical that they should be mentioned by the ancients among the essential or, to use a [-f.127r-] scholastic term, quantitative parts of the comedy together with the diverbia and the choruses of the ancient Greek comedy. Would not such a division deserve the mockery and boozing of the Logics? The answer is a resounding yes, because they would correspond to sections that are completely external and separate from the play, as are the Intermedi nowadays, or the dance or the mime that used to be performed after the more serious action, as I have witnessed to be customary in France. We must consider certain and definitively proven

that such Cantica are to be found in the comedies of Plautus and Terence and, conversely, in the Tragedies of Seneca and of the Greek authors and that one must not look for these Cantica elsewhere. Moreover, this can be gathered openly from what Donatus says in the preface to Terence' *Andria*, namely, that that comedy is divided sensitively and astutely into diverbia and cantica, and that for this reason it was performed with great success. (Diuerbijs et canticis lepidè distincta est et successu spectata prospero.) Nor should we be worried by the fact that the aforesaid Ronsfert states that Diomedes' division of the comedy into cantica, diverbia and choruses has to be understood as referring to the ancient Latin comedy rather than to the new one, which, according to him, does not have cantica. In fact, this difference of his is a mere chimera and [-f.127v-] the fruit of his imagination, since Latin comedies were all of the same kind as to the distribution of their sections and they were not divided into two kinds, as the ones of the Greeks, namely, the ancient comedy, whose main representative was Aristophanes, and the new one, which was perfected singularly by Menander.

I said 'as to the distribution of their sections' because apart from this I know that there were more than a few differences. In fact, some of them were called togatae, because their subject matter and their characters were Roman citizens who wore the toga, as those by Titinius and Atta, but the majority, such as those by Plautus and Terence, were called palliatae, because they portrayed actions set in Greece and the characters wore the pallium instead of the toga in accordance to the tradition of that nation. Similarly, some had coarser and more archaic language according to the nature of the times, like those by Livius Andronicus, while others had a more modern and refined style, as those of Terence; some retained a more serious character, as the same ones mentioned above by Terence, others were closer in character to the mime and relied more on what made the audience laugh out loud, as one finds in the comedies by Plautus. However, as to their essential parts, it is certain that none of them had a chorus. Therefore, we must conclude that both the cantica and the diverbia were found in each of them, and that they can be found even nowadays in the extant ones by Plautus and Terence.