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Title: Whether dramatic actions were set to music wholly or in part. First Lecture recited in the chamber of Signor Cardinale Barberino in the year 1624.

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I have considered several times within myself the causes of the fact that, while in these last centuries many things, which lay buried for a long time under Italy's ruins, or had been abandoned and discontinued, have been re-discovered thanks to the efforts and hard work of men of great talent, few have been those who have taken delight in investigating and spreading the knowledge of the theatre and the music of the ancients. The few who have done so have treated this subject in their writings so superficially, that not only they have not explained fully the difficulties that occur in this topic, but they have left almost more doubtful and confused the mind of those who have intended to ascertain the truth from their books. I do not intend to investigate the reason of this, as I have no ease to digress from the subject that I have proposed to deal with tonight, which will be, if not proportionate to the greatness and superiority of my audience, at least not unsuited to the approaching carnival season, since, while comic and tragic performances are being prepared as an honourable form of entertainment for an audience tired after long hard work, we will consider as succinctly as possible the way in which the ancients used to perform dramatic actions at the time when such spectacles flourished; in other words, we will investigate whether tragedies and comedies were performed [-iv-] as sung plays, and, if that was so, whether all the text was set to music, or only certain parts of it; this is an enquiry which is as attractive and interesting, as it is difficult and full of unanswered questions, given the lack of ancient writers who can teach us about these and similar matters. Also, because few or hardly any of our contemporaries have dealt with this topic, if not fleetingly, a great deal of controversy often arises in the discussions of men who enjoy reasoning of such entertaining and jolly studies. However, in order to approach the proposed topic from the start, I will begin by stating that there are two ways by which we can learn about things that are far removed from our times. One of them is the authority and record of the writers who in some way mentioned what they saw or knew for certain in their works. The other consists in deductions and conjectures which, although sometimes are proved wrong, must not be discarded when they are not too far-fetched, but based on solid and evident principles. The authority and witness accounts of well respected writers would save us from this drawback if the books of any of those writers who wrote *ex professo* (as one says) about topics related to the theatre and the stage had survived until today; but, since the books which were written by Marcus Varro, Suetonius Tranquillus, and Iarbas king of Mauretania on theatrical matters have been lost, as it has happened to many others by Latin writers and to a vast number written by Greek authors on the same topic, all that we can do is to avail us of the accounts of those who have written incidentally and succinctly about these matters, such as some Grammarians and others who will be mentioned further on. By way of conjecture and arguments logically constructed it is possible to gather some insight into the acting style favoured by the ancients in performing their dramatic actions on stage, but you have to allow me a premise on the subject of such theatrical spectacles, namely, that the ancients were more

sophisticated, exquisite, and precise than we are, and that their actors performed those stage works in a way [-f.2r-] that was the most appropriate, reasonable and entertaining ever seen for the audience. This is the foundation, I believe, that I could lay with reason as a basis for my discourse because of the number of different arguments which I could produce as evidence, if the short time allotted to me did not prevent me from doing so. From such arguments, everyone would be able to appreciate the mastery and diligence of the ancients in everything that pertains to the theatre. Therefore, once I have demonstrated what is the best and more seemly way to recite - I am referring to acting and performing on stage -, consequently one will be put in a position to be convinced that this was the way adopted the ancients. Now, since there is no time to pursue everything in detail, let us see briefly what opinions are held around these difficult questions which I have set myself. There are some who believe strongly that no other parts were sung in the performances of tragedies, comedies or any other kind of dramatic play in verse except the choruses. There is no reason to doubt that the choruses were sung. Conversely, others believe for certain that singing occurred also in the rest of the action besides the choruses. This group is further split into two according to their opinion, since some have imagined that the entire play was performed uniformly as a sung play, as perhaps those, who claim to have restored an ancient tradition in our time by having every part of their plays sung on stage, have thought. This is the practice adopted every time that a play is performed with music. Others, on the other hand, choosing a middle path, believe with certainty that there were differences between a section and another of such dramatic actions, since they were not sung all in the same way, and they believe that this should be done in order to maintain the necessary social conventions and to achieve the proposed goal of who organises such spectacles, namely, to entertain the audience. However, before moving on, let us consider a little the reasons [-f.2v-] on which those who adhere to the first line of thinking base their opinion. These people believe that music is not suited to the kind of mimesis which takes place in the theatre, and that hearing a performer sing on a stage causes the audience boredom and nuisance, rather than pleasure and delight. Moreover, these maintain, the audience would also be vexed because of the sheer length of the works, since, if they were performed entirely set to music as they appear in the printed books, they would turn out definitely very long, and consequently very boring, while the ancient plays are not as long as to induce boredom and nuisance in the audience. In fact, among the works of these seven dramatic poets, four Greek (Aristophanes, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides), and three Latin (Plautus, Terence and Seneca), thanks to whom from an infinite number of ancient plays we have about seventy between tragedies and comedies, none of them is much longer than fifteen hundred verses. However, if even the shortest were performed with music throughout, nobody could withstand listening to it because of its long-windedness and bathetic nature. Moreover, how realistic would be the facts that are told and acted out - realism is something that Aristotle recommends to all those who study his Poetics -, if singing was employed on stage? In fact, who has ever seen someone who is dealing with some serious matter, or is irate, or in a threatening mood (which are all situations represented on stage, besides other of a similar kind) speak while singing, or singing while speaking? Certainly nobody has. Therefore, those who hold this opinion come to the conclusion that, since poetry is a kind of imitation which represents human actions while availing itself of enjoyable and entertaining language in a manner that approaches the reality of the object itself most closely, therefore, since it would be impossible to do this if the act of singing impeded it, it follows that singing is not only ill-suited to dramatic actions;

more, that it is completely incompatible and inappropriate. Albeit this opinion is based on some apparently true foundations, it is nevertheless totally unsubstantiated, since what has been said about the boredom, namely, that the long-windedness and sentimentality caused by singing to the actors' parts in their performance on stage, this would happen only if the music of the ancients had not been very different from our own, and especially from [-f.3r-] the kind used in churches, as perhaps on an other occasion I will demonstrate with some observations pertaining to this matter and quoted from several passages of the writers of antiquity. I would not want anybody to believe that I stated without reason that the music of our time is not commensurate and suited to the task of imitating, and consequently to stir the emotions, since everybody who has written about music in a learned way agrees on this point, and particularly, among others, Vincenzo Galilei in many parts of his book that deal with this issue. [[Signor Giovanni Girolamo <Kapsberger> states the same and applies it in his compositions. As befits a person of not mediocre erudition, he recognises this truth, and strives to approach that simple and natural style championed by the ancients, which alone has the power to stir human emotions, by using the kind of melodies that are in use nowadays, since altering them would be something extremely difficult to achieve, if not impossible]] But why I am going around begging for authorities, when experience itself is the proof of what I say? It is certain that, since sung tragedies and comedies were introduced a few years ago, the style of singing so-called recitativo (namely, the style adept to imitation of speech and suitable to the stage, which more approaches the music of antiquity the more it deviates from our contemporary one, especially from the sort which is used in our churches and is not covered by the meaning of the word aria) was also introduced. Hence one can learn and be assured that the attempt to find a new style of music suitable to the stage and the theatre is not a redundant and fruitless effort or the result of imagining things which have no grounding in reality. I cannot avoid mentioning the origin of such a beautiful invention. Its beginnings took place, if I am not mistaken, some years ago in Florence, and within a brief time it spread throughout the rest of the most refined cities in Italy, and one can see that it is being improved and developed further in the very place where it came into the world. The credit for this must go mainly to Signor Iacopo Corsi and Ottavio Rinuccini, who are both deserving to be remembered in eternity; the first one, because his house was a constant gathering of the Muses and of men of letters, the other, for the beautiful poetry that he has [-f.3v-] bestowed upon the world, as everyone knows. These two men, seeing that today's music is really too ill-suited to produce the good effects on the stage that were achieved in antiquity, as we know thanks to the witness accounts of highly regarded writers, came to the conclusion that music needed some particular device that would enable it to fulfil its role of mimesis and expression on the stage. After discussing the matter between themselves and with the professionals of the field, they gave them the task to realise in practice what they had decided. And since many liked the result, it encountered a marvellous success. Then, *La Dafne* by the same Rinuccini was performed with music in Mantua for the first time. This kind of music has been improved to such an extent since that time through the application of experience (which discovers new ways) that we can hope to see it restored soon to its ancient splendour. It is not long ago that *Il Medoro* by Signor Andrea Salvadori was performed with music in the house of the late Cosimo Grand duke of Florence. It was recognised clearly on that occasion how much this stile recitativo had been improved. I have digressed from the topic in this way for no other reason than to show that, where the music is such of quality as it is required to meet the needs of the stage, the objection raised by those who maintain

that there was never any singing outside the choruses loses any validity. Now, I intend to prove the truth of the opposite opinion by relying on the accounts of the ancient writers. These accounts are so clear and irrefutable, that there is no place to balk at the idea. Livy, in the seventh book, where he deals with the question of the origin of the stage spectacles presents us with a passage which I will quote in its entirety because we can deduce from it many observations which pertain to this topic. As for the rest - Livy says -, their origin was on a small scale (as almost all beginnings are) and the events themselves were of foreign origin. Some performers, who danced in a simple way to the sound of a flautist with no script and without imitating poetry, were sent for from Etruria. They performed a pleasing dance in the Etruscan style. Then, the young started to copy them and, at the same time, to crack jokes with each other exchanging coarse verses and accompanying them with movements. So, this form of entertainment was adopted and gained in popularity because it was organised frequently, and the professional, but native, actors were called *histriones*, because the performer was originally called *hister*, which is an Etruscan word. These no longer threw at each other coarse verses composed on the spot and without any skill, in a similar vein as the *Fescennines*, but performed varied spectacles accompanied by music which was written out to match the melodies of a flutist and with suitable gestures. Livius was the first, after some years, who put aside the *saturae* and to weave a play with a plot. The story goes that, as all the performers in those days, he performed his own poetry, and when his voice became faint because of the frequent performing, he excused himself, and obtained the privilege to let a boy sing to the sound of the flautist while he danced. So, his dance became more vigorous, since he was not any longer impeded by having to sing. Hence singers began to be employed to accompany the gestures, but the dialogues were left to the voice of the actors. These were the origins of dramatic poetry, or poetry suited to the theatre. It appears that Valerius Maximus has lifted outright from this passage in Livy what he writes, in a similar vein, in the fourth chapter of the second book. From the passage quoted above one can gather many details of great interest with ease. This one the main one, namely, that it was common practice to recite verses on stage accompanied by gestures, like our comic performers do even nowadays, but without any singing. This will be found to be true in any type of poetry written by Livius Andronicus, namely, tragedies, comedies, and satires, because in no way it is possible to say that those words *suorum carminum actor* and the following have to be taken as referring to the chorus, which was not sung by a single person, but by many, and in unison (although Zarlino was criticised rightly by Galilei for writing that polyphony was not practised by the ancients). Moreover, there was no chorus in the satires, not even in the most ancient ones written by Livius (Casaubon explains fully how they differed from those by Ennius, Lucilius and Horace in his book *De satira*). Nor do I believe that Livius' comedies contained a chorus, or that they differed in any way from those by Plautus, Terentius and the other writers of comedies in Latin in this respect. One could gather many other very interesting details from this passage of the historian Livy, especially that expression *ad manum cantari*, which Salmasius wants to emend to *ad manum saltari*. However, since I have no time to dwell on this, I will move on to other authors who also clearly convince us that singing took place even outside of the choruses. Suetonius writes these words in the Life of Nero. He also sang tragedies wearing a mask, and shortly thereafter. Among the others he sang of Canace giving birth, of Orestes killer of his mother, of Oedipus being blinded, and Hercules driven mad, all of which were subjects of tragedies. Some will say perhaps that Suetonius does not say [-f.4v-] that Nero used to sing on the stage, and that he does not explain how

tragedies were sung ordinarily. However, one cannot believe that he hints at anything else but at the fact that Nero used to sing them as they used to be sung, namely, as tragic subjects, particularly because Suetonius himself teaches us that Nero had acted and sung on stage before, firstly in Greece, where he went to prove himself, then in Naples, which was a Greek town at the time, and after that in his gardens in Rome. There, having convinced himself that he had practised enough, he abandoned any modesty, if ever he had any, and he enacted his desire to sing in public among other comedy performers in a public spectacle in front of the people of Rome. The same Suetonius at the end of the Life of Nero says. It had also been noted that the last piece that he performed in public was Oedipus in exile. Who does not know that this is one of the main ancient Greek tragedies? The same author writes in the Life of Caligula. He was so taken by the pleasure he derived from singing and dancing that he could not hold back from singing along with the tragoedus and from imitating the moves of the histrio as if he was praising him or correcting him, not even in public performances. One can gather expressly from this passage that the roles of the tragoedus and of the histrio were separate and distinct, since the first one used to sing the verses written by the poet in a stilo recitativo, while the latter acted them out with gestures according to the requirements of the subject, just as we have learned from Livy that that used to be the way then adopted. However, Livy teaches us that the *diverbia*, or the passages recited alternatively between characters, which occur in every dramatic action, were recited by the *histriones*. These are his words. Hence singers began to be used to accompany the gestures, but the dialogues were left to the voice of the actors. Here has its origin the usage adopted by Prudentius, an ancient Christian poet, who calls the tragoedus a *tragicum cantorem*. Just as the *tragicus cantor* covers his mouth with a hollowed mask, so that some great atrocity may emanate through its opening. An ancient inscription reads I was also appreciated as a tragoedus because of my voice. The words the very sweet voice of the tragoedus are found in the same Life of Caligula. Hence the Greeks of more recent times, and even the ones of our time, call [Tragodemata] the melodies, [Tragodein] the act of singing, and [Tragodetai] the singers. Liutprandus from Pavia, who lived about eight-hundred years ago and wrote elegantly for those times about the events that happened to him during his diplomatic mission to Greece, says this. After a few pointless tragoedimata and songs they went to sleep et cetera. See the scholia to Euripides' *Phoenissae* and those to Theocritus' poems, where in several places [Tragodein] is glossed as [melpein]. Moreover, I would conjecture [-f.5r-] that the Greeks started to call the singers {[tragodoi]} even from the time of the historian Arrianus. As proof that this is true, here is a passage from the Discourses (third book, fourteenth chapter) which provides us with sufficient evidence. [Hos hoi kaloi tragodoi monoi asai ou dynantai alla meta pollon houtos henioi monoi peripatesai ou dynantai]. Here one can see that the word [tragodoi] is taken to mean singers, rather than those tragoedi by the Romans, because it is not true that these sang in a group, as common singers do. Arrianus' words are these. Just as good singers cannot sing alone but only in a large group, thus there are some people who cannot stroll alone. And because the Greeks called a group of singers with this special name [Tragodoi], thus by converse the Romans called tragic and comic performers with the name collective name of Cantores. Where Horace says until the Cantor will say to you: clap! in his *Ars poetica*, he shows that the word cantores meant the actors themselves, since they themselves uttered that word *Plaudite* at the end of the action, as one can see in the comedies by Plautus and Terence. Whether they did this all together (in which case they were referred to as *grex*) or one of them did it individually, it does not matter. One could wonder with good reason if that

plaudite was also uttered at the end of the performance of a tragedy. I like to believe that this was the case, because I am convinced that the audience applauded by clapping their hands at the end of the tragedies which they enjoyed not less than at the end of comedies. The reason why this is not observed in Seneca's tragedies, can be explained by noticing that this request by the performers was not usually inserted in the last verse as an integral part of it, hence it was omitted in the written text of the tragedies. I am inclined to believe that those who maintained pugnaciously that there was no singing in the dramatic actions of antiquity outside the choruses will have conceded defeat, after being faced with the authority of such important writers. However, should there be someone, who is not content with such evidence, would he tell me, please, what he will reply to Aristotle, who in a most beautiful problem of the nineteenth section, where he discusses musical matters, demonstrates clearly that singing occurred in parts of the action that were not choruses. His precise and formal words translated into our language are these. Why do not tragic choruses sing in the Hypodorian tone or in the Hypophrygian? Perhaps because these tones do not have the air (this is what I think he means with that word [melos]) which is necessary to the chorus,[-f.5v-] since the Hypophrygian music, or tone is endowed with an active character, and for this reason in the Geryon (which I think is the title of an ancient tragedy) the exit scene and the stripping of the arms (this seems to me to be the meaning of these words [he exodos kai he exoplisis] and not diversion and arms as the ancient translator interprets them) are set to a melody in this tone. Conversely, the Hypodorian tone embodies the idea of splendour and solemnity, and therefore it is more suited to the playing of the cithara than all the others. These two features of the Hypodorian tone (he means its character of activity and splendour) are not really commensurate to the role the chorus, but they are better suited to those on the stage, namely, the principal actors themselves, because they take the parts of the heroes, who were the only ones to be leaders and princes in antiquity, while the people were common men and were represented on stage by the chorus. For this reason, a plangent and composed quality and, equally, a certain song-like character of the melody (all features that partake of human nature) are suited to the chorus. These features are found in other tones, but not in the Hypophrygian, which has as something of the possessed and of the bacchic. The Mixolydian instead is the one that can embody these characteristics, because it has a passive and compassionate disposition, which is more often a feature of the weak than of the powerful, and therefore, it is suited to the chorus. By converse, the Hypodorian and Hypophrygian have an active nature which is not convenient to the chorus, as it embodies the character of an idle hanger-on or servant, since it administers only promptness of feeling to the characters whom it assists. From this Problem, which is unique and extraordinary, since it enlightens us on so many features of the music of the ancients and can be useful as a guide to composing the music aptly and judiciously, so that it matches the subject matter, one can learn clearly not only that the choruses of the tragedies were sung, but also the most essential parts of them, such as the above mentioned stripping of the arms, which was undoubtedly an integral part (to use a scholastic term) of one such tragedy entitled Geryon, based on the story of how that mythical and monstrous hero was deprived of his arms by Hercules. It appears that this stripping was represented on stage with some verses sung to the sound of the flute in a way which was proportionate and fitting to the action, and with gestures and other means which were required in order to express and represent that event successfully. What more should I say? Now anyone can understand also that, within the same dramatic action, the

chorus was sung accompanied by a particular type of music, the rest of it by a different one.