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“Appucundria napoletana: Gesualdo’s 1611 Madrigals Re-examined”

In 1596, after about two years spent at the court of Ferrara, Don Carlo Gesualdo returned, via Naples, to his castle-fortress in Gesualdo, near Naples, where he busied himself with the last two books of madrigals, published together in 1611. These have since been considered the hallmark of his “eccentric” style, likened to 20th-century chromaticism and dismissed for over three centuries as the figments of a psychopath’s sick mind. That Gesualdo was a melancholic man was well known. Also common knowledge is that malinconia (or, in Neapolitan, appucundria) is a trait of Neapolitan music, sometimes likened to Brazilian saudade, both really indefinable. This paper examines the madrigals of the last two books, most likely composed after the prince’s return home, for signs of his native appucundria and connects some of the instances with the peculiar harmonic and melodic treatment.