“Sung Speech and the Printed Page: Form, Structure, and Temporality in Three Settings of Cruda Amarilli”

In a period known for the decline of the madrigal and the flourishing of opera, the trend of musical settings from Guarini’s pastoral play Il pastor fido reveals a still thriving madrigalian tradition. In setting the laments and dialogues of Guarini’s characters, composers turned not to the new dramatic techniques or to solo song, but overwhelmingly to the multi-voice madrigal. Nevertheless, the natural speech rhythms, declamatory textures, isolation of individual voices, and relaxed contrapuntal propriety in works by Wert, Marenzio, Monteverdi, and others have prompted scholars to describe their madrigals with terms such as dramatic, recitative, and pseudo-monody, regardless of their textual sources and polyphonic setting.

Yet alongside rhythm, texture, and other surface features is a fundamental aspect of the musical-textual union that has been largely overlooked in these scholarly assessments: temporality, as rendered in the madrigal through poetic scansion, formal design, and modal structure. This paper demonstrates differing approaches to musical-poetic form, structure, and temporality in settings of Guarini’s Cruda Amarilli by Wert, Marenzio, and Monteverdi. The results show the three composers’ individual treatments of this particular text and of the madrigal more broadly, while also reflecting the cultural and political environments from which the works arose.