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POLIZIANO TO MONTEVERDI

NINO PIRROTTA AND ELENA POVOLEDO

TRANSLATED BY KAREN EALES

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to Lea

1 Orpheus, singer of *strambotti*

Ever since Romain Rolland first wrote the essay for which he coined the catchy title 'L'Opéra avant l'Opéra',¹ Angelo Poliziano's *Orfeo* has been assured of a mention in the corresponding introductory paragraph or chapter of every history of opera. Usually, however, the only details given about the work are that the poet composed his dramatic fable for the city of Mantua, where it was performed with some music. The dates given for its performance vary – 1471, 1472, 1474 and 1480 have all been suggested – and when the name of a composer is mentioned at all, it is usually by misapprehension that of an obscure nineteenth-century musician, Pietro Germi, whose Pre-Raphaelite tastes had led him to compose music for Poliziano's text.² Nevertheless, Rolland's discussion is still the most thorough treatment of the topic to date, though it concentrates on developing the ideas originally expressed in Alessandro D'Ancona's seminal study *Le origini del teatro italiano*. He studies in some detail the analogies alleged to exist between *Orfeo* and contemporary Florentine religious *rappresentazioni*, the links between these and the later *maggi* (sung May-day plays) of the Tuscan countryside, and the theatrical *ingegni*, stage machines designed and made to work by famous artists such as Brunelleschi and Leonardo da Vinci for use in both sacred and secular performances.³

That the text of *Orfeo* is the memorial inscription of a lost musical event is a source of constant frustration to music historians, whose sense of loss is made all the sharper by their awareness of the poetic qualities of the work and its importance as a literary document. I might therefore be induced to think that all I can hope to do is resolve the confusion over the dating of the work, and then move on to another topic. But such is the charm of Poliziano's *operina* (let us not be deceived by the ambiguity of the term *opera* and its diminutives), with its delicate grace and apparent simplicity, that even with

¹ This is the title of the first article in Rolland's *Musiciens d'autrefois* (Paris 1908).

² Giosue Carducci, in the introduction to his edition of *Le Stanze, l'Orfeo e le Rime* (Florence 1863), p. lxiii, warned people against trying to see *Orfeo* as the first example of true drama. It is possible, he wrote, to call it a tragedy or a pastoral fable, to claim it as the first melodrama or to admire the creation of certain characters and the erudition showing in the fable; 'but, despite all this, *Orfeo* remains basically a [sacred] *rappresentazione* and as such offers no more than a narrative in dialogue form'. Referring to the element of 'melodrama', he hinted at a music master, Signor Germi, who evidently intended to 'adorn the text of *Orfeo* with harmonies, perhaps opening up a new field or a forgotten one by his art'. No one knows what became of this project, but the reference was misinterpreted by Pietro Canal in his 'Della musica in Mantova', *Memorie del R. Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere e Arti*, XXI (1879), pp. 655ff. which earned Carducci's obscure contemporary a place in the history of a century not his own. The error was noted by Ferdinando Neri in the introduction to his edition of *L'Orfeo e le Stanze* (Strasbourg 1911), p. 14.

³ Rolland, *Musiciens d'autrefois*, pp. 21–31.

those flaws bewailed by the poet himself and rather over-stressed by its critics, I have been tempted to do more, and investigate to what extent it does in fact deserve to be considered an *opéra avant l'opéra*. The fame of the work itself and of its author make it all the easier for me to explore what views were held by the generations which preceded the birth of opera about music, theatrical illusion, and how music could be fitted into a dramatic production.

The source of all the speculations about the date of *Orfeo* is a letter which in the oldest manuscripts, in the first edition printed in Bologna in 1494 and in most subsequent editions is attached to the text as a sort of preface. In this, Poliziano, with the coy modesty common to so many authors and so many prefaces, laments the many imperfections of his work, which, he claims, make him wish to see it destroyed rather than preserved and circulated:

Thus I desired that *La fabula d'Orfeo*, which at the request of our Most Reverend Cardinal of Mantua, in the space of two days amid constant tumults, I had composed in the vernacular so as to be better understood by the spectators, should immediately, like Orpheus himself, be torn to pieces: for I know that this creature of mine is of a quality likely to bring shame rather than honour to its father, and to cause him grief rather than joy.⁴

The letter is addressed to one Messer Carlo Canale, one of the retainers of Francesco Gonzaga, cardinal deacon of Santa Maria Nuova ('our Most Reverend Cardinal of Mantua'),⁵ and appears to have been written while the cardinal, who died on 21 October 1483, was still alive. From the passage quoted above, it has been inferred that the *Fabula* was written and performed in Mantua – arbitrarily ruling out Rome, where from 1462 onwards the cardinal usually lived, Bologna, to which he had been appointed legate in 1472 though he was not obliged to take up residence there, and all those other places he might have visited either on official business or for pleasure.⁶ Even more arbitrarily, scholars have singled out for special attention two particular visits which the cardinal paid to his father's court: those of the summer of 1471 and of August 1472.⁷

Rolland provides us with a clue to this narrowing of the field, though he himself favours 1474 as the most plausible date, when he writes: 'Thus, in 1474, at the height of the Renaissance... Angelo Poliziano, Lorenzo dei Medici's friend, attempted, with resounding success, a stage production of a subject which three centuries of masterpieces were not to stale, and which

⁴ Text as in Neri, ed., *L'Orfeo e le Stanze*, p. 33. A description of the *editio princeps* of 1494 was given by Carducci in his introduction to the 1863 edition of *Le Stanze, l'Orfeo e le Rime*, pp. lxxxii–lxxxv. For the early manuscripts of the *Fabula* see Vincenzo Pernicone, 'La tradizione manoscritta dell'Orfeo del Poliziano', in *Studi di varia umanità in onore di Francesco Flora* (Milan 1963), pp. 362–71. The sources are individually described by Ida Maier, *Les manuscrits d'Ange Politien* (Geneva 1965). See also Cynthia M. Pyle, 'Politian's "Orfeo" and other "favole mitologiche" in the context of Late Quattrocento Northern Italy' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University 1976).

⁵ Canale remained in Rome after the death of Cardinal Gonzaga and in 1486 became the third husband of Vannozza Cattanei, the notorious favourite of Rodrigo Borgia. See Alessandro Luzio, 'Isabella d'Este e i Borgia', *Archivio storico lombardo*, series V, vol. XLI (1914), pp. 476ff.

⁶ The Bolognese legation was conferred on Francesco Gonzaga by Paul II and reconfirmed by Sixtus IV, who in gratitude also added the abbacy of San Gregorio. Gonzaga occasionally travelled to resting places such as Viterbo or the Bagni della Porretta near Bologna.

⁷ There is little point in considering the earlier visits given the age of Poliziano, who in 1471 was barely seventeen years old.

Gluck was to take up again exactly three centuries later.'⁸ By choosing 1474, he is able to draw this exact and satisfying rhetorical parallel with the first Paris performance of Gluck's *Orphée*, but there is a further consideration: it is also the date painted into Andrea Mantegna's frescoes in the so-called Wedding Chamber in the Gonzaga castle of San Giorgio in Mantua. For a long time it was thought possible to recognize a portrait of Poliziano amongst the members of the cardinal's retinue in one of these frescoes, which is still known as 'The meeting between the Marquis Ludovico II and his son Cardinal Francesco', though the identification of Poliziano is now acknowledged to be wrong. The poet was born in 1454 and was said to look young for his age in 1474, while the man depicted in the alleged portrait is much older, though not old enough to justify identifying him as Leon Battista Alberti, who was forty-eight years older than Poliziano.⁹ The fresco is therefore useless in establishing when Poliziano was in Mantua, especially as the date of the two main scenes which decorate the Wedding Chamber has ceased to be a matter of prime importance, since the current trend is to reject a precise historical interpretation of them in favour of a more general view that 'it is better to regard them as a free evocation of court life'.¹⁰ They form a collective portrait in which the groupings of the figures and the overall composition were dictated by the artist's tastes and by his expressive and symbolic intentions, though the individual features themselves are true to life.

Even if the Wedding Chamber frescoes cannot be used as evidence for dating *Orfeo*, they are nevertheless valuable, for however different they may be from Poliziano's fable, they do share two of its characteristics. In both there is a sense of theatrical immediacy: though set in a distant time and place, the reality depicted is not remote and detached, confined to a space beyond the surface of a wall or a proscenium arch, but may at any moment come into direct contact with the lives of the spectators. And in both the artists show great skill and inventiveness in overcoming inappropriate or even unfavourable conditions.

Mantegna was faced with the problem of transforming into something much more dignified a rather small room dimly lit by narrow windows cut into the thick walls of a tower. His extraordinary scenic solution has been described somewhat rhapsodically as one in which 'the eye is delighted to see the oppressive walls recede as if by magic, and in their stead appear the supernatural harmony of the most exquisite and delightful scenery'.¹¹ The spectator is led to feel that he is in a pavilion surrounded on all sides by open arcades. Only two of the walls are actually painted: whenever the room was used to receive important guests, the other two walls were hung with heavy curtains of gilded Cordovan leather, to give the impression that the circle of arches continued behind the temporary hangings. On one of the arcaded walls one's eye is drawn upwards to an open balcony where behind the balustrade a swarm of relatives, retainers, and servants surround the seated figures of the Marquis Ludovico and his wife Barbara of Brandenburg. On the other,

⁸ Rolland, *Musiciens d'autrefois*, p. 21.

⁹ The church of Sant'Andrea was rebuilt according to a plan by Alberti. The start of the project led to the cardinal's visit in 1472.

¹⁰ Luigi Coletti, *La Camera degli Sposi del Mantegna a Mantova* (Milan 1959), p. 11.

¹¹ Giuseppe Fiocco, *Mantegna* (Milan 1937), p. 57.

one arch frames the scene of the 'Meeting' referred to above, while through the other arches one can see grooms holding horses and dogs ready for the hunt. The figures in the foreground do not block the view of a distant panoramic background quite different from the monotonous flatlands of the Gonzaga domains. The ceiling too is deceptive. It simulates a highly ornate cupola with a round central hole open to the sky, surrounded by a circular balcony from which serving maids, a black slave girl and a peacock can be seen leaning out. The visitor who finds himself in the centre of this varied scene thus becomes a spectator to the lively rhythm of court life, which seems about to spill out of its arcaded frame and involve him too.

The problems involved in *Orfeo* will require a lengthier discussion. It is now almost unanimously accepted that the most probable date for its composition is 1480.¹² It is known that Poliziano was in Mantua in the first six months of that year, whereas there is no evidence that he had ever been outside Florentine territory before then. Cardinal Gonzaga was also in Mantua at that time, having arrived on 20 December 1479 for a short visit which, however, lasted until the following October. In June, the Mantuan court was more than ever involved in 'constant tumults': the betrothal of Chiara Gonzaga (daughter of Federico, who had succeeded his father in 1478) and Gilbert de Montpensier seemed imminent, and did in fact take place shortly afterwards. In addition to this, on 17 June came the news that the Duchess of Ferrara, Eleonora of Aragon-Este and her young daughter Isabella (born in 1474) were about to arrive to take part in the festivities and to celebrate the recently arranged betrothal of Isabella and the young prince Francesco Gonzaga. The two Este princesses reached Mantua on 22 June, and 'preparations were made to hold a great triumph and celebrations', but the same source reveals that 'in those days the lord marquis did not reach an agreement with the ambassadors [sent by Louis XI of France to negotiate the betrothal of Chiara] and nothing came of them' or at least everything was postponed.¹³ This explains why those who associate the writing of *Orfeo* with the June celebrations tend also to wonder whether it was actually performed,¹⁴ especially as its author had already left Mantua and by 17 June was back in Florence enthusiastically pursuing his study of philology.¹⁵ As far as I can see, however, one of the stage directions clearly indicates there to have been at least one performance of *Orfeo*. In it, the prescriptive form of the other directions is abandoned in favour of a statement of fact: 'Orpheus on the mountain, singing to the lyre the following Latin verses (which are intended by Messer Baccio Ugolino who acted the part of Orpheus to be in honour of the Cardinal of Mantua), was interrupted by a shepherd announcing the death of Eurydice'.¹⁶ Baccio Ugolini, an envoy of the Medici to the cardinal legate

¹² G. Battista Picotti, 'Sulla data dell'*Orfeo* e delle Stanze di Agnolo Poliziano', *Rendiconti della R. Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, series V, vol. XXIII (1914), pp. 319-57, reprinted in Picotti, *Ricerche umanistiche* (Florence 1955), p. 87ff. Subsequent references are to the later edition. ¹³ Picotti, *Ricerche umanistiche*, pp. 102-5.

¹⁴ Thus Picotti, *Ricerche umanistiche*, pp. 104 and 105, in contrast to what he had previously written on pp. 90 and 91.

¹⁵ Ida Maier, *Ange Politien* (Geneva 1966), pp. 388-90. Though Maier notes the date of the *subscriptio* added by Poliziano to an incunabulum of Pliny, she maintains that it was still possible for *Orfeo* to have been written between 12 and 15 June.

¹⁶ The fact that the verb is here in the past tense, whereas all the other directions are written in the present, makes it appear that this was a later addition or modification, in which Poliziano,

of Bologna and to the Gonzaga court, was away from Mantua from Easter (2 April) to June. It is inconceivable that a theatrical performance should have been staged during Lent in those days, so one is forced to push back the possible date to the festive 'tumults' of the carnival, when one occasion in particular appears to lend itself to such a performance: the banquet held by the cardinal for his brothers on the evening of Shrove Tuesday, 15 February 1480.¹⁷ The Latin verses referred to in the stage directions are a Sapphic ode in which no mention is made of Federico Marquis of Mantua or of his marriage alliances. They are entirely in praise of the cardinal, for whom they even predict the triple crown of the papacy.

Though Francesco Gonzaga was made a cardinal before he reached the age of seventeen in Pius II's last creation of cardinals on 18 December 1461, he never became a prominent figure in either politics or the church. To begin with, his father made the mistake of giving him as his secretary Bartolomeo Platina, who twice managed to put him in an embarrassing, if not an actually compromising, position with respect to Pope Paul II.¹⁸ As a cardinal, his most intensive political activity was at the time of the 1472 conclave, when with the conclavist Pietro Riario, nephew of the pope-elect and himself the future Cardinal of San Sisto, he campaigned successfully on behalf of Francesco della Rovere (Sixtus IV). The rest of the time Francesco Gonzaga was a reasonably perceptive observer of the political scene, about which he kept his father informed through a regular correspondence. But his main interest was to assert and enjoy his status as a secular prince as well as a prince of the church, living a life of luxury and pleasure, often in the company of Pietro Riario and Rodrigo Borgia. When he arrived as papal legate in Bologna in 1471, the chroniclers made a point of noting that 'he brought with him a most honourable retinue and carried with him a whole silver canteen (*credenza*) whose value was estimated at 20,000 ducats, and a most beautiful tapestry which included one section depicting the battle between Alexander and Pyrrhus [read Porus] in which the figures seemed to be alive'.¹⁹ Though we

while not omitting the tribute to Cardinal Gonzaga, took care to ascribe the sentiment, if not the text itself, to Baccio Ugolini. There was no reason to blame Baccio Ugolini (who frequently visited Cardinal Gonzaga or the Marquis of Mantua on missions for Lorenzo dei Medici) for trying to ingratiate himself with the recipients of his master's messages. But Poliziano must have had uncomfortable memories of his stay in Mantua at a delicate moment in his relationship with Lorenzo - one so delicate that, despairing of regaining favour, he had probably decided to go into the service of Cardinal Gonzaga. Picotti gives a detailed account of the episode in 'Tra il poeta ed il lauro', *Ricerche umanistiche*, pp. 3-86.

¹⁷ I shall return later to Baccio Ugolini. In the two articles already mentioned, Picotti gives detailed information about Ugolini's journeys between Florence and Mantua in the period relevant to the composition of *Orfeo*. Picotti is also the source of information about the banquet offered by the cardinal on 15 February (*Ricerche umanistiche*, p. 101), and he suggests other occasions in that carnival season when a banquet and a theatrical performance might have been held. M. Vitalini, 'A proposito della datazione dell'*Orfeo* del Poliziano', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, CXLVI (1969), pp. 245-51 also supports the date of 15 February 1480.

¹⁸ Platina was first jailed in 1464-5 for vicious libel against Paul II, in protest against the suppression of the Collegio degli abbreviatori. He spent even longer in jail in 1468-9 when he was involved in the suit against the members of the Accademia pomponiana. However, under Sixtus IV he became Vatican librarian. His association with Cardinal Gonzaga, whose preceptor he might have been for a time, is an indication of the cardinal's humanist interests.

¹⁹ Cherubino Ghirardacci, 'Historia di Bologna', *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, XXXII, part I (Città di Castello 1915), p. 207. On p. 218 it is reported that in 1478 the legate 'ordered the destruction of some houses beside the Palazzo de' Signori [where he lived], and there he built a beautiful garden and surrounded it with high walls'.

know little of his general tastes, he does appear to have had a certain interest in the *studia humanitatis*, a passion for collecting cameos (*camaini*) and bronze figurines,²⁰ and a love of gardens which he indulged wherever he took up residence, his preference being for ones surrounded by high walls. He wanted the walls of one of these 'secret gardens' decorated with paintings of 'the battle of the Lapiths and centaurs...the story of Theseus...the fable of Meleager', and ordered that Lelio Cosmico should be consulted on their execution and as to whether 'Hercules too should be included'.²¹

This was the man to whom Poliziano, having lost all hope of regaining Lorenzo the Magnificent's favour, seems by about 21 April 1480 to have decided to transfer his allegiance. He might indeed have stayed on in his service as 'chaplain and permanent table-companion'²² were it not for the fact that the long-awaited message finally arrived, upon which he went back as quickly as he could to Florence, to his lectures at the university there and the writing of his *Sylvae*. This was also the man to whose conviviality and extravagance we owe the creation of *La fabula d'Orfeo*. The connection between conviviality and *Orfeo* need cause no surprise: one has but to read the paragraph entitled 'De conviviis per dominos cardinales faciendis' in an unpublicized plan for curial reform which was probably suggested to Pope Sixtus IV by the untimely death in 1474 of his high-living nephew, Cardinal Pietro Riario. The plan proposed that 'because the banquets given by the afore-mentioned lord cardinals give rise to scandal, we establish and command that henceforth the afore-said banquets should be conducted with sobriety and moderation; that it should suffice to have two kinds of courses, that is one of roast meat and one of stewed...At table, let sacred texts be read...let there be no music, no profane songs, no acted fables'.²³

One of the banquets which had prompted these reforms had been given 'in the house of Mantua' (i.e. in the house of Cardinal Gonzaga) on 16 July 1472, in honour of the ambassadors of the King of France. The Bishop of Novara, Giovanni Arcimboldi, described it to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, relating that 'amongst other worthy things the story of Jason was represented, how he went to capture the golden fleece, and how he slew the dragon and sowed

²⁰ In 1472 the cardinal wrote to his father asking that Mantegna (to whom he wished to show the objects) and the musician Malagise, 'to help him not to sleep', should be sent to meet him at the Bagni della Porretta. In the autumn of the same year Mantegna invited the cardinal to dine 'without the walls'. See Paul Kristeller, *Andrea Mantegna* (Berlin 1902), documents 45 and 48.

²¹ Vittorio Rossi, 'Niccolò Lelio Cosmico, poeta padovano del secolo XV', in *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, XIII (1889), p. 111. See also notes 18 and 24 of the present chapter.

²² The document containing this title is reproduced in Picotti, *Ricerche umanistiche*, pp. 95 and 96. Although the expression normally refers to the close collaborators of a high prelate, it is possible that in Poliziano's case it was purely honorary, a sign of magnanimity used by the cardinal in returning the poet to his legitimate master. For the entire episode, see the references in notes 12 and 16 above.

²³ 'Item cum ex conviviis quae per eosdem Cardd. fiunt scandalum oriatur, statuimus et ordinamus quod de cetero sobrie et modeste praedicta convivia fiant; sufficientque duo genera ferculorum lissati videlicet et assati. Poterunt etiam in principio mensae aliquibus pasteris uti et in fine tortibus et fructibus et aliis talibus... Recitetur in mensa aliqua lectio... non soni musici, non cantus saeculares, non histrionum fabulae', from Vatican MS 3884, fol. 122, quoted in Camillo Corvisieri, 'Il trionfo romano di Eleonora d'Aragona nel giugno 1473', *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria*, I (1878), p. 479.

its teeth and ploughed with oxen'.²⁴ The banquet was offered by 'Monsignor of Santo Sixto', that is by Cardinal Pietro Riario, but took place in Cardinal Gonzaga's palace either because in the summer heat 'the porch overlooking the garden' was preferred ('covered with crimson velvet: with satin curtains all around the walls, all worked with silk and gold filigree, and with other stately decorations'),²⁵ or because Cardinal Riario, only recently appointed, did not yet have a suitable residence. Soon afterwards he acquired just such a residence, in Piazza Santi Apostoli, and from Eleonora of Aragon's description it would appear to have been most lavish. She was a guest there in June 1473, when she stopped in Rome while on her way to be married to Ercole I d'Este, and she described in detail the fabrics and tapestries of the palace. An awning covering the whole of the piazza was erected for the occasion, and two platforms were put up beneath it, while no fewer than eight hundred lines of Latin verse were composed by two poets, Emilio Boccabella and Porcellio Pandoni, to describe the banquets and stage performances which took place.²⁶ Although only one detailed account of the banquets of Cardinal Gonzaga exists, again in a letter addressed to the Duke of Milan and dated 2 January 1476, it is unlikely that his were any less splendid than those of Cardinal Riario. The 'royal banquet' of which we have the description was accompanied by 'a show of the conflict between the Virtues and the Vices' which included 'a debate... before the king'.²⁷ The king of the carnival, played by one of the cardinal's young pages known as Brugnollo, is a late survival from the medieval tradition of the *ludi stultorum* or Feast of Fools.²⁸

These convivial performances, which on the whole were very basic and simple, were just one of the various means, which included music, dancing, jugglers' acts and jesters' antics, used to entertain guests in the intervals

²⁴ Emilio Motta, 'Un pranzo dato in Roma dal cardinale di Mantova agli ambasciatori di Francia', *Bollettino Storico della Svizzera Italiana*, VI (1884), pp. 21 and 22. The title does not actually match the contents of the letter.

²⁵ I do not know the location of the cardinal's residence in Rome at that time; it may have been in the 'house or rather palace of Cardinal Mantua', at San Lorenzo in Lucina, or near the church of Santa Prassede, or elsewhere.

²⁶ The young princess's letter and the poetic texts which describe the banquet are reproduced by C. Corvisieri in *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria*, X (1887), pp. 629ff, in a text written as the continuation of the article referred to in note 23 above. A useful contribution to this matter has been made by W. Osthoff, *Theatergesang und darstellende Musik* (Tutzing 1968), I, pp. 33-8, and II, pp. 34-44, in which he discusses and reconstructs a song performed towards the end of a verbose allegory attributed to Giovanni Santi and performed in 1474 for Federico da Montefeltro (see A. Saviotti, 'Una rappresentazione allegorica', *Atti e Memorie della R. Accademia Petrarca... in Arezzo*, new series I (1920), pp. 180-236. The song was a quatrain of octosyllabic lines sung by Modesty, Love, two sprites (all sopranos), a contratenor and a tenor, and danced by six queens as a *bassadanza* to the tune of 'J'ay pris amour pour ma devise', a rondeau for three voices which was very well known in France and Italy and which can even be read in the inlays of the Urbino *studiolo*. The same music had already been sung, though perhaps with different words, towards the beginning of the performance, during which twelve nymphs also danced to the sound of a virelai (*Gente de Corps*, recalled by Jean Molinet as a *chanson rurale*; see Howard M. Brown, *Music in the French Secular Theater 1400-1550* (Cambridge, Mass. 1963), p. 109). Finally, after another dance, 'all the instruments began to play, and they went on their way'.

²⁷ For more precise information see below, p. 287.

²⁸ For 'one dressed in royal robes and called the King of Macedonia' at a banquet given by Cardinal Riario in 1473 see P. Ghinzoni, 'Alcune rappresentazioni in Italia nel secolo XV', *Archivio storico lombardo*, series II, vol. X (1893), p. 962. Another text also referred to, on p. 964, mentions the same custom under the name of 'the feast of the King of Beans' (*Re della Fava*).

between courses, the arrival of which, formally and elaborately ushered in, contributed yet another element of theatricality. From this custom derived the various terms by which these entertainments were known: *tramesse*, *inframesse*, *tramezzi* and other similar ones, probably partly influenced by the more precise French term *entremets*. The more elaborate performances were probably reserved for the end of the banquet, though even they usually simply consisted of a larger number of characters being called on to sing or recite the praises of the guests of honour. Ten years after Poliziano's *Orfeo*, for example, the performance held in Milan, which is known as *La festa del Paradiso* on account of the *ingegni* designed for it by Leonardo da Vinci, was essentially a parade of gods, Graces and Virtues. Of more interest, however, are certain entertainments performed in 1475 in Bologna, for one of them, a rather free adaptation of a story from Ovid, is possibly the closest known forerunner of Poliziano's fable.²⁹

There were three of them, given during the banquets held for the wedding of Count Guido Pepoli and one young Rangoni countess from Modena, and it is likely that the cardinal legate Francesco Gonzaga attended them. The plot of the first is exceedingly simple: 'At the start of the banquet it was pretended that Dodonean Jupiter was arriving in the forest of Dodona to deliver his oracles and to honour the wedding. And first master Tomaso Beccadelli recited the argument of the fable in vernacular verse... and when the argument had been proclaimed and people's attention caught, Jove in the shape of a dove descended from heaven to the same forest...' The argument recited by Beccadelli, poet, notary public and official of the *comune* of Bologna, consists of nineteen lines, though it is difficult to decide whether they form a *sonetto caudato* (i.e. an extended sonnet) or are two octaves plus an extra line. Dodonean Jupiter also recited nineteen lines when he delivered his oracle, though his were slow Latin hexameters in which, besides praising the bride and groom, he also managed to compliment the 'Bentivoglio regnans domus', the Bentivoglio being the ruling house of Bologna. The descent of the dove must have been of particular interest, for it 'spoke' by means of a hollow cane (a *lanza forata*), the voice being that of another poet Francesco Dal Pozzo of Parma, a lecturer in rhetoric and poetry at Bologna from 1468 to 1477 and the probable author of the verses.

'The second fable, included by Ovid in his major [work], was that of Cephalus and Procris. The argument was recited by the aforesaid Tomaso Beccadelli who did not sing it but recited it most elegantly, immediately after the banquet.' So the report continues, raising an interesting question. Had Beccadelli sung the argument of the first *fabula*? In this, the most complex of the three fables, the argument alone consisted of seven octaves; thus when the description gives only six more for the actual performance we are in doubt whether other verses were omitted, and if so how many, or whether a substantial part of the plot was merely mimed. We are told that in the initial scene 'Cephalus, dressed as a hunter... went to the woods for the hunt.' There is no mention of spoken text and though the scene itself is crowded and animated only onomatopoeic sounds are suggested in a reference to horns

²⁹ The anonymous memoir describing them was published by Filippo Cavicchi, 'Rappresentazioni bolognesi nel 1475', *Atti e memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia Patria per le provincie di Romagna*, series III, vol. XXVII (1909), pp. 71ff, from which the quoted excerpts are taken.

and hounds. Then 'Aurora, in love with Cephalus and disguised as an old woman, went to Procris and said these words...' which were three octaves of slander against Cephalus, recorded in the description under the heading 'Verba linguae susurrae' ('words of the murmuring tongue'). Procris' answer is a despairing lament in a single octave, after which 'Procris went with the old woman to the forest to see Cephalus who, when he heard her [approaching] pierced her heart with an arrow...' Here at last the text comes to life with something like real dialogue. In one octave-Cephalus, realizing his tragic error, curses himself:

O Cefal traditor, o dispietato
che con toa mano hai pur sommessò a terra
costei che amavi più ch'el tuo gran stato!
Fulmina, love! in me tuo arco s[f]jerra!
Non me lassar, o viso mio rosato;
se lassime convien che teco perra.
Dime, te prego, o dolce anima mia,
chi t'ha condotta in questa silva ria?

O Cephalus, traitorous and heartless, with your own hand you have felled to the ground her whom you loved more than your own pride! Thunder, O Jupiter! Discharge your bow against me! And you, my rose, do not leave me. If you do leave, then I shall have to die with you. Tell me, I beg you, O my gentle heart, who brought you here, to this ill-starred forest?

Another octave, some of whose lines are incomplete, is recited by Procris as she lies dying in Cephalus' arms, and ends with the request:

Per quel amor te prego, per cui moro,
che Aura non toglì, sol per mio ristoro.

By that love for which I die I beg you; stay away from Aura [*sic*]; this shall be my last solace.

And finally 'Cephalus, sitting and clasping her dead body thus in his lap, wept reciting the following song, so that in truth there was no one present who did not weep.' Unfortunately, the writer immediately adds 'this song was stolen, so I have not been able to include it'.

All we are told of the third *fabula* is that 'it was [given] during the evening, after dinner, and consisted of Apollo, the Muses and the three Fates, who all sang in praise of the guests, and the Fates blessed the newlyweds.' This time at least, thanks to the combined efforts of the Muses and the Fates, music won the day.

As we shall see later on, the custom of including dramatic elements in banquet ceremonial survived for some while, so that some of the treatises on cooking or stewardship which date from the following century are useful sources of information on theatrical history. Banquets and dramatic performances were held whenever there were state visits, weddings or other celebrations, but during the carnival they were allowed even without a special reason. 'Festi sese dies offerunt. Personatas licet adducere...' ('Festive days are coming. It is permissible to bring on masked performances...') Thus the prologue of Francesco Ariosto's *Isis*, a Latin 'elegy' acted in Ferrara before Leonello d'Este during the carnival. The performance is noteworthy not only

for its early date (1443) but also because of its references to a king of the carnival, to dances, music and songs, and even to 'mountains' which were conjured up for the occasion.³⁰ Poliziano's *Fabula* belongs to this same tradition of convivial entertainments. Whether it was actually performed during the carnival of 1480 or simply planned for the following June and not performed is immaterial. In either case it must have been conceived to be part of the elaborate pomp and ceremony of a banquet, one of a carefully calculated succession of visual surprises which accompanied the arrival of each course brought in by its stewards, in the midst of a show of precious drapes and tapestry, standards and salvers glistening with silverware or multicoloured heraldic majolica. This in no way affects our judgement of the poetic values of *Orfeo*, but if one bears in mind the implications for its structure of this sort of ceremonial setting, then one is led to a different appreciation of those 'shortcomings' which Poliziano claimed were a result of hasty composition. One has but to compare his fable with the extremely simple standard of the Bolognese spectacles which had preceded it, and indeed of many later ones, rather than seeing it in the light of standards of drama formulated at a much later date, for doubt to be cast on the sincerity of his self-criticism.

Poliziano called his work a *fabula*, and this Latinate term, which he may have chosen for precise philological reasons, is the one best suited to *Orfeo*. Others have preferred *fiesta*, while manuscript sources also give 'eclogue' and 'comedy'. (A subsequent version of *Orfeo*, in which Poliziano had no hand, was called a *tragoedia*, but I shall return to that later.)³¹ The first term, however, was the one most frequently used in Poliziano's own time and even without the addition of the adjective *personata* it implied a dramatic performance. Claims that the term *fiesta* is to be applied stem from the fact that Poliziano used it in the opening stage directions: 'Mercury announces the *fiesta*.' To my mind, two considerations militate against the use of the term. In the first place, this is the only time it occurs, and secondly, it is normally applied to sacred *rappresentazioni*. Those who use it here do so in support of the theory that *Orfeo* developed from the performing style of the Florentine religious theatre.³² I disagree with this thesis. I consider Mercury's two octaves to be the equivalent of the 'arguments' of the Bolognese fables and of many other secular productions. At most, since Mercury is the messenger and therefore the 'angel' of Jupiter, one may see this analogy with the so-called 'annunciations' of sacred plays as a parody similar to that of the king of the

³⁰ Guido Stendardo, 'L'Iside di Francesco Ariosto', *Archivum romanicum*, XX (1936), pp. 114ff. The prologue, on p. 117, begins with the exclamation, 'Dive Leonelle noster et Princeps inclyte, spectatores optima' ('Our Lord Leonellus, and renowned Prince and best of audiences'). to whom it is then announced, 'Hic mihi Calliope volenti novam delegavit provinciam, vobis offerrem veridicam fabellam.' ('With Calliope's consent, he assigned to me the new task of bringing you a true little tale.') The reference to the hills is in the joke, still part of the prologue (p. 118): 'Agereque[?] non montes parere, et nasci mures; sed mures parere, montes inde nasci...' ('And in the field not mountains [were seen] to travail and bring forth mice, but mice to travail and bring forth mountains...')

³¹ Pernicone 'La tradizione manoscritta'. I shall return below to the *Orphei tragoedia*.

³² 'The angel announces' or 'announces the *fiesta*' is a common formula in fifteenth-century Florentine *rappresentazioni*. See the three volumes of *Sacre rappresentazioni dei secoli XIV, XV e XVI*, ed. Alessandro D'Ancona (Florence 1872). In the *Rappresentazione di Costantino imperatore*, which is already sixteenth-century, 'a youth with a cither announces' (*ibid.*, pp. 187 and 211).

carnival and like it only permissible in the context of carnival itself. If one accepts that the last two lines of the octave, which do not belong to Mercury, are to be spoken by a Dalmatian shepherd who mispronounces and distorts the words, surely they must have been intended to be humorous:³³

Stat'attanto, brigata, bono argurio
che di ciavolo in terra vien Marcurio.

Tak' keer, goo' folks, it's goo' luck that from haiven to airth there come Marcury.

One might be tempted to regard this first example of rustic realism (which later became more popular) as a precursor of the lively and realistic *frottole* which at a certain point came to replace the angel's 'annunciation' in the Florentine religious *rappresentazioni*, but there is no evidence that such *frottole* were already in use by 1480.³⁴ (Incidentally, one must take care not to confuse this use of the term *frottola* with its use to describe a genre of poetry to be set to music.) In any case, here it does not replace the 'annunciation', and its sole purpose may have been that Mercury's identity 'might more clearly be understood by the audience'.

The brevity of the 'annunciation' or argument – a mere sixteen lines if one includes the shepherd's – is the first indication of the limited scale of the work. *Orfeo* is an extended and more subtle version of the fables introduced during banquets, official receptions or social dances, and represents a considerable advance on the simple entrances of characters who announce themselves to be such-and-such a person and proceed to praise either the master or the distinguished guest. Nevertheless, despite his greater skill and learning, and his wish to give the *fabula* a richer and more consistent development, it was impossible for Poliziano to overcome the limitations of the genre: *Orfeo* is not planned as an entity in its own right but as a part of the complex social occasion it was intended to embellish. This accounts for the swift transitions and the abrupt and unexpected juxtapositions which critics have variously judged as marking either Poliziano's lack of dramatic talent (a fair enough criticism) or the charm of an immature primitivism. It may be that when, no longer concerned with the practicalities of performance, the author himself came to evaluate his work more critically as a literary text, he saw these flaws as some of the shortcomings of his creation, though given what a delicate craftsman of images he was it is likely that he was more concerned with the occasional imperfect choice of words, dissonant sound or lack of symmetry in his versification.

³³ *Schiavone* (literally Slav), as shown by Isidoro Del Lungo, *Florentia* (Florence 1897), pp. 350–6, covered people from both Dalmatia and Illyria. It is impossible to say whether this touch of colour was suggested by some encounter which had taken place during Poliziano's recent visit to Venice, or by the presence in Mantua of a servant, slave or jester from that area. It is present in the older manuscripts but was omitted in the 1494 Bolognese edition.

³⁴ Lorenzo dei Medici's *Rappresentazione di San Giovanni e Paulo* (c. 1490) still retains the customary annunciation in octaves, but it is given to one of the youths belonging to the Compagnia di San Giovanni who were performing the play. The examples of *frottole* quoted by Alessandro D'Ancona, *Le origini del teatro italiano*, 2nd edn (Turin 1891), I, pp. 379ff. all date from the sixteenth century. According to Vincenzo Borghini, quoted in D'Ancona, *Le origini*, p. 395, it was one of these *frottole* recited without music (the one preceding the *Rappresentazione di Abramo e Agar*) which started the move to abandon the sung delivery of the text in the main plot of the *rappresentazioni*. The term *frottole* derives from the short, seven-syllable lines which closely rhymed.

If one merely reads *Orfeo*, it is not easy to see how much briefer it is than the sacred *rappresentazioni* for, while in *Orfeo* spoken recitation predominates, in contemporary sacred drama monologues and dialogues were still conducted on set patterns of sung recitation which, though extremely simple, nevertheless moved more slowly than spoken words alone.³⁵ This is a difference which has not been sufficiently stressed, but there is another even more important one to be borne in mind. The subjects of the *rappresentazioni* were always visual and auditory evocations of events in a distant past, which took place on a remote plane of existence quite separate from the lives of the spectators. Contrasting with this, it was quite possible for the world of the mythological or allegorical fables, however unreal or fantastic it might be, to come to interfere temporarily with the present, with reality. The spectators were as close to it as they were to the paintings in Mantegna's Wedding Chamber. It was often actually *brought* to them and involved them;³⁶ remarks were directly addressed to them and in some cases they themselves were even drawn into the action, as for example in the evening parties in which a dramatic performance of some sort preceded and introduced more general social dancing.

Having thus outlined the tradition to which *Orfeo* belongs, I cannot refrain from pointing out those features which make it a highly individual work. As far as I can see, three of Poliziano's interests combine, not always harmoniously, to make up *Orfeo*. These are his interests in literature, the figurative arts, and music.

³⁵ See D'Ancona, 'Metro e canto delle rappresentazioni', in *Le origini*, I, pp. 391ff, to which it would not be difficult to add further examples and considerations. The traditional singing formulas must have been well known to the performers and were probably selected to help the identification of certain characters and dramatic situations; they must have derived from the manner of singing which had been called elsewhere *canto passionale* (the narrative way of singing suitable for the Passion or related liturgical times) as opposed to the more festive *canto pasquale* (from the term *Pasqua*, which can be applied in a broader sense not only to Easter but to all the major liturgical feasts). In addition to such formulas of sung recitation, hymns, *laude* or even secular songs, instrumental pieces and dance music were introduced as required by the plot. On the music of sacred plays see also notes 45 and 46 below.

³⁶ One significant example of scenic elements 'brought' before the spectators is provided by this extract from Giovanni Sabbadino degli Arienti's *Hymeneo*, a description of the entertainment held in Bologna in 1487 to celebrate the marriage between Annibale Bentivoglio and Lucrezia d'Este:

And suddenly to the sound of trumpets there appeared in the hall a hairy man in sylvan dress... bearing a tree-trunk, with which he parted the people to permit the passage of a wooden tower artfully carried by dancing people. It was not apparent who was carrying it... In this tower was the goddess Juno with two handsome youths... As soon as the tower had been set down, there came a palace, also carried by dancers, which seemed to advance of its own accord, no bearers being visible, and in it was Venus with Cupid with his quiver of arrows and two ladies... Similarly, it was followed by a mountain surrounded by a wood, which incorporated a grotto wherein lived Diana and eight nymphs... Then came a rock, it too carried by dancers, on which was a beautiful girl with eight others dressed in Moorish garb. And when these *edifici* had been put down, the spectators, of whom there were a large number, were asked to be silent, for the hall was full of the noise of their comments on the arrival of the floats.

The description repeatedly emphasizes the care with which the acts were presented to the dais on which the banqueters were seated. Arienti had the good luck to find a space on the balcony reserved for the six singers. Most of the entertainment consisted of the dialogue between the characters, but it also included dances with a musical accompaniment provided by the six singers or by instruments. See Giovanni Zannoni, 'Una rappresentazione allegorica a Bologna nel 1487', *Rendiconti della R. Accademia dei Lincei*, VII (1891), pp. 414ff.

His choice of the main theme is literary – entirely so, in the sense that it contains no trace of the reflections of Ficino's Orphic mysticism which some have claimed to see in it. I agree rather more with the critic who refers to Poliziano's 'love for harmonic procedures' and like him almost succumb to 'the temptation to place under the sign of Orpheus the whole ideal line of Poliziano's development, and to see his vernacular drama, his *Nutricia, de poetica et poetis*, and the one of his *Sylvae* which contains a sort of profession of faith in the formative virtues of poetry, as being made up of converging themes'.³⁷ But only the symbol is as yet present in the 'vernacular drama': only later does the 'profession of faith' mature. In *Orfeo*, before the chief protagonist arrives Poliziano portrays a bucolic society conscious of many pleasures, not least that of sung poetry, but he never suggests that this state of affairs is a result of Orpheus' educating influence.

In Mantua, where the myth of Orpheus is depicted in some of the panels in the ceiling of the Wedding Chamber, Poliziano was influenced more by the memory of Virgil, himself from Mantua, and Ovid, than of Horace. It was their tales which he decided to make visible and audible. We shall never know how great a part he himself played in the actual visual presentation of the story; in his text Eurydice is the only figure to be sketched in pictorially, portrayed in the act of picking flowers and, even more vividly, in her agitated and arrested flight. But the various episodes are like a series of bas-relief scenes endowed with speech, not leading into each other but following one another like the symmetric panels of a frieze. This may be an untypical dramatic procedure, but it is hardly a defect from the point of view of the poetry, for it is Poliziano's most authentic form of expression. This 'frieze', with its interwoven memories, allusions and classical quotations, reflects the man whose prime object in life had been the cultivation of the classics. Every image stands out clearly from its background, and all the sounds and stresses are delicately balanced against each other with unrivalled precision.

The classical accounts of the myth of Orpheus are not the only literary sources which inspired the fable. As soon as Mercury has withdrawn, and the Dalmatian shepherd has perhaps been reabsorbed into the anonymity of a group of background figures, the theme of the 'annunciation', which we may perhaps concede to have some parallels with the 'annunciations' of the religious *feste*, gives way to the new theme of the eclogue. This had nothing at all to do with religious drama but was just emerging as a favourite theme of Latin and vernacular humanist poetry.³⁸ To Poliziano, Mantua could not fail to suggest bucolic Virgilian themes, especially as he may have been hoping to find in Francesco Gonzaga his 'Maecenas atavis editus regibus', a shelter in times of difficulty. Florence too had provided him with plenty of bucolic models in the vernacular, and ones, moreover, rich in dramatic possibilities. He must already have known Bernardo Pulci's translations of Virgil and Girolamo Benivieni's eclogues, for both of these were Florentines,

³⁷ Quoted from Eugenio Garin, 'L'ambiente del Poliziano', in *Il Poliziano e il suo tempo, Atti del IV Convegno Internazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento* (Florence 1957), p. 37. See also Cynthia M. Pyle, 'Il tema di Orfeo, la musica e le favole mitologiche del tardo Quattrocento', in *Ecumenismo della cultura*, vol. II, ed. G. A. Tarugi (Florence 1981).

³⁸ In manuscript tradition, *Orfeo* appears frequently linked to eclogues. In fact it is even called an eclogue in the Vatican MS Capponi 193.

and he may also have known the eclogues of the two Sienese poets Jacopo Fiorino dei Buoninsegni and Francesco Arsocchi, all of which were soon afterwards collected in the *Bucoliche elegantissimamente composte di varii autori* (Florence 1481; 1482 new style). The search for the lost calf at the start of *Orfeo*, the amorous outpourings of Aristaeus (a youthful shepherd), and the wise counsels he is given by Mopsus (an old shepherd) are all common features of the eclogues. Nor is there anything new in the transition from dialogue to the 'Song of Aristaeus', for it has precedents in eclogues by Leon Battista Alberti, by the Roman Giusto dei Conti, and by Arsocchi. There is no need even to mention (except as an indication of a general trend) the frequent singing to be found in the eclogues of Sannazaro's *Arcadia* and in Boiardo's fifth eclogue, for Poliziano could not have known either work yet.

In *Orfeo*, Poliziano thus has two parallel aims: to bring to life the tale of Orpheus, and to portray a literary myth, the world of the eclogue. A close study of the versification bears out this idea. In line seventeen, Poliziano abandons the metre of the octave in favour of the variety of metres already used by the bucolic authors mentioned above. First comes a passage in *terza rima*, the metre most frequent in the eclogues. Then he shifts to a true *ballata* for the 'Song of Aristaeus' as Alberti does in his eclogues, and finally he reverts to the octave (itself also occasionally used in eclogues) for the resumption of dialogue, which is enlivened by the return of Tirsis, 'servant of Aristaeus', who has recovered the lost calf and describes an encounter with Eurydice (lines 101–8):³⁹

Ma io ho vista una gentil donzella
che va cogliendo fiori intorno al monte:
i' non credo che Vener sia più bella,
più dolce in atto, o più superba in fronte;
e parla e canta in sì dolce favella
ch'e' fiumi svolgerebbe in verso el fonte;
di neve e rose ha il volto e d'or la testa,
tutta soletta e sotto bianca vesta.

But I have seen a gentle maiden, picking flowers around the mountain. I think Venus could not be more beautiful, sweeter in gesture, prouder in composure. She speaks and sings in such sweet tones that she might turn rivers back towards their source. Her face is snow and roses, her head golden; she walks alone and is all clad in white.

Basically, lines 17 to 137 are an eclogue, and as such have nothing – neither theme nor development nor metre – in common with religious drama. Indeed, one of the octaves consists entirely of *versi sdruccioli* (lines with a dactylic ending), which was one characteristic of the bucolic style. And the *frottola* which are also a frequent feature of eclogues (yet another meaning of the term *frottola*, used here to indicate an irregular succession of short lines with frequent adjacent rhymes) can be related to the lively irregular rhythm of the conclusion, in which 'Aristaeus to the fleeing Eurydice speaks thus':⁴⁰

³⁹ This quotation, and subsequent ones, are taken from the text chosen by Natalino Sapegno in his edition of Poliziano's *Rime* (Rome 1965).

⁴⁰ In Boiardo's Eclogue V, it is said that Menalca sings in *frottola*; but the metre of his song is still the *terzina*, though with an extra rhyme in the middle of each verse. Aristeo's invocation to Euridice is the first example of freer versification in the *fabula*; another occurs at the end of the scene set in Hades. The development must have found favour, as it was extended in the later adaptation known as the *Orphei tragoedia*.

Non mi fuggir, donzella,
ch'i' ti son tanto amico,
e che più t'amo che la vita e 'l core.
Ascolta, o ninfa bella,
ascolta quel ch'io dico;
non fuggir, ninfa, ch'io ti porto amore.
Non son qui lupo o orso,
ma son tuo amatore:
dunque raffrena il tuo volante corso.
Poi che 'l pregar non vale
e tu via ti dilegui
el convien ch'io ti segui;
porgimi, Amor, porgimi or le tue ale!

Do not flee me, O maiden, for I am your good friend, and love you more than my heart and life.
Hear, O fairest nymph, hear the words I speak; do not flee, nymph, for I bring you love.
I am not a wolf or bear, but your own lover; stay then your hasty flight.
But if my pleading is to no avail, and you vanish away, I must then follow you; lend me, Love, lend me now your wings.

Here no sooner has the nymph appeared than she draws back and flees without a word; in other eclogues her singing acts as a lure, or else she entices her lover with blandishments and rejections. Nor is there any reason to identify the 'mountain' around which she picks flowers before fleeing behind it as belonging specifically to religious theatre; stage directions for sacred *rappresentazioni* do not refer to the mountain often enough to force one to conclude that it was a permanent and indispensable feature of their staging. Its use in secular productions, on the other hand, is a response to an urgent need for scenic properties which could occupy little floor space and would therefore be able to enter mounted on wheeled platforms (see plates 1, 3 and 4).⁴¹

It was behind the mountain that Mopsus' calf had got lost; after finding it, Tirsis 'slides (*sdrucciola*) down the mountain' (Poliziano here puns on *sdrucciola* by writing in dactylic lines – *versi sdruccioli*), and it is around the mountain that Aristaeus pursues the 'hasty flight' of Eurydice, but Orpheus 'appears singing upon the mountain'. Poliziano may have intended this to symbolize that Orpheus' heroic verses, sung in Latin to a lyre accompaniment, were superior to the more ordinary style of the amorous *ballata* just sung by Aristaeus 'to the sound of our pipe'.⁴² But in a sense the ode sung by Orpheus (lines 138–89, the longest of Poliziano's known Sapphics, which are mostly panegyric) should be seen as being part of the eclogue, because it continues the Virgilian allusions and clarifies their purpose, praising the cardinal as a

⁴¹ See note 36 above.

⁴² Irene Affò, in his Osservazione IV (reproduced in Carducci, *Le Stanze, l'Orfeo e le Rime*, pp. 172–4), intending to show that the *Orphei tragoedia* was more authentic than the *Fabula*, noted a discrepancy between the *fistola*, mentioned by Aristeo in the text of the *ballata*, and the preceding line 51 in which Mopsus is invited to take from his pocket *la zampogna*. But he mistakenly derived *zampogna* from *sambuca*, when the correct etymology is from *symphonia*; the term is rightly used to indicate the instrument which Affò describes as a *fistola*, i.e. the so-called Pan-pipes. Evidence in favour of the Pan-pipes can be seen in Poliziano's *Stanze per la giostra*, Bk I, octave 116, where Polyphemus' *zampogna* is described as having 100 pipes.

prince who cares for poets and poetry ('qui colit vates citharamque princeps'). The entrance of a shepherd announcing Eurydice's death is conveniently postponed until Poliziano has had time to shower adulatory compliments on his modern Maecenas. Then in one short octave the transition is made from the eclogue, which until then has served to set the atmosphere of the fable, to the treatment of the myth itself.

Orpheus resumes his singing immediately afterwards, this time in octaves in the vernacular (lines 198–229), though these are more a lyrical outpouring than true dialogue. Two of the octaves of Pluto and Minos (lines 230–45), which express their surprise, and further on in the text two other octaves assigned to Proserpina's pleading and Minos' consent (lines 286–301) are definitely dialogue, but the five octaves of Orpheus' prayer can be nothing but song, and therefore should be called not octaves but stanzas or *strambotti*.

The remainder of the underworld scene, with the return journey begun and then fatally interrupted and with the definitive loss of Eurydice, is dealt with in varied and unusual metres. Orpheus' song of victory consists of two Latin distichs ('certain lively verses which are by Ovid, arranged for the occasion'), while the final episode is made up of three short verses which are not really dramatic but certainly show some excitement in their lack of regularity and symmetry:

Eurydice bemoans to Orpheus that she is being forcibly taken from him:

Oimè, che 'l troppo amore
n'ha disfatti ambedua.
Ecco ch'i' ti son tolta a gran furore,
né sono ormai più tua.
Ben tendo a te le braccia; ma non vale
che indreto son tirata. Orfeo mio, vale.

Alas, too much love has undone us both. Now I am taken away from you with great cruelty, and am no longer yours. I stretch out my arms to you, to no avail, for I am pulled back. My Orpheus, farewell.

Orpheus follows Eurydice and speaks thus:

Oimè, se'mi tu tolta
Euridice mia bella? O mio furore,
o duro fato, o ciel nimico, o morte!
o troppo sventurato el nostro amore!
Ma pure un'altra volta
convien ch'io torni alla plutonia corte.

Alas, are you taken from me, fair Eurydice? O rage, O bitter fate, O cruel heavens, O death! O our ill-starred love! But yet, still once more I must return to the kingdom of Pluto.

As Orpheus tries to return towards Pluto, one of the Furies blocks his path and speaks thus:

Più non venire avanti; anzi el piè ferma,
e di te stesso ormai teco ti dole.
Vane son tue parole,
vanno el pianto e 'l dolor; tua legge è ferma.

Advance no further, rather hold your step; and in your sorrow blame only yourself. In vain you spend your words, in vain your tears and sorrow; your fate is sealed.

A later version of *Orfeo* attempted to transform it into what purported to be a five-act *tragedia*.⁴³ But whoever was responsible for the attempt had to incorporate new material and new characters and do violence to the original structure, which had consisted basically of three main episodes, which we could describe, imitating the titles later given to the acts of the 'tragedy', as respectively bucolic, heroic and Bacchic. We have already seen each of the first two episodes proceed from a quiet and relaxed beginning to an agitated conclusion. The same is true of the third: Orpheus having returned to the world of the living (though this is not specified by any stage direction) 'bemoans his fate' in four octaves and expresses his intention to renounce all 'feminine association' and to prefer instead 'the springtime of the better sex'. He is evidently overheard by the Bacchantes, who appear out of nowhere. A mere two octaves suffice for their revenge: in the first 'an indignant Bacchante invites her companions to put Orpheus to death', and by the second 'the Bacchante re-enters with the head of Orpheus'. A 'Chorus of Bacchantes' (also entitled 'Sacrifice of the Bacchantes in honour of Bacchus' in one variant) concludes the fable. This is a true carnival song in *ottonari* (octosyllabic lines) with alternating accented and dactylic endings, and even if one is merely reading the text it manages to suggest the unruly and picturesque pantomime (or *moresca*, as it was called) which must have accompanied it.

It seems to me that nothing emerges from this survey of the text of *Orfeo* to support the oft-repeated theory that its dramatic technique is substantially based on that of contemporary religious theatre.⁴⁴ Even if one accepts that the phrasing and stage directions of the 'annunciation' (which is itself however quite similar to the 'arguments' of the 1475 nuptial performances in Bologna) are in fact intended as a parody of the annunciation scenes to be found in religious theatre, that is as far as the connection between them goes. The rest of the text hardly bears out the uncompromising statement made by D'Ancona, the most authoritative proponent of that theory, that Poliziano retained the metre of the octave 'in the greater part of his work'. In *Orfeo* one finds a variety of metres never used in contemporary sacred drama, and if the octave does predominate slightly, one must remember that it was the most popular verse form in fifteenth-century secular poetry too. Nor are all octaves alike: in *Orfeo* most of them are used not for narrative or dialogue, but as a vehicle for lyrical expression. More serious are the plot's lack of temporal perspective and the inadequate characterization of the protagonists, but this is a criticism applicable to contemporary theatre in general, whose aim was not to create *ex novo* but rather to re-present a story whose time, setting and characters were already familiar to the audience and had ever been restated in the argument or prologue preceding the action. And whereas in *Orfeo* the visual presentation is rapid and terse, in sacred theatre it is relaxed and unhurried, with a tendency to dwell on minor episodes.

Let us move on now to the musical element, which until now has only been

⁴³ I have already mentioned this in notes 40 and 42 above, and shall return to it in the next chapter.

⁴⁴ The most authoritative advocate of these views was D'Ancona, in *Le origini*, II, pp. 2–5. In some ways, the view had already been anticipated by Carducci in his introduction to *Le Stanze, l'Orfeo e le Rime*, in which, however (see the passage quoted in note 2 above), he did not claim that *Orfeo* adopts the same techniques as the *rappresentazioni* but, more accurately, that like them it is a narrative cast in dialogue form.

mentioned in passing. Depending on what one means by 'music', the sacred *rappresentazioni* contained either too much or too little of it. They contained too much if one counts as music the intoned recitation of dialogue; in a sense, however, intoned recitation was music with no musical intent, being only a simplified and formalized vestige of the original custom of singing *laude*, which had itself already developed along different lines.⁴⁵ They contained too little of it if one confines oneself to considering those few instances in which the characters are represented in the act of singing, a hymn, a song or a prayer.⁴⁶ If in *Orfeo* Poliziano had adopted the technique of intoned recitation typical of sacred drama, the result would have been an interesting forerunner of opera with its alternation of recitative and aria. As it is, he chose instead to follow the tradition of court performances in which spoken recitation alternated with song. Nevertheless, influenced by the bucolic tradition, the nature of its protagonist and the tradition of carnival songs, his fable is exceptionally full of singing.

There can be no doubt that the 'Song of Aristaeus' was actually sung. Its title indicates as much, and even if it did not the lines which precede the song would confirm the supposition, for Aristaeus calls on Mopsus to cooperate with him in making music:

Ma se punto ti cal delle mie voglie
deh tra' fuor della tasca la zampogna
e canterem sotto l'ombrose foglie,
ch'i' so che la mia ninfa il canto agogna.

But if you care at all for my desires, pray take your panpipes out of your bag, and let us sing among the leafy shadows, for song, I know, is dear to my nymph.

The song is a regular *ballata* of hendecasyllabic lines: four stanzas separated by the regular repetition of a two-line *ripresa*, and apparently accompanied by the sound of Mopsus' panpipes. It is unclear whether Mopsus' part was limited to an instrumental accompaniment or if 'e canterem' implies that he was being invited to join in the singing in the responsorial style typical of the bucolic tradition. If so, then the reply of the elder, though less Apollonian,

⁴⁵ This derivation becomes clear as the texts of liturgical plays make the transition from *ballata* metre (in the *canto pasquale*) to *sesta* or *ottava rima* (in the *canto passionale*).

⁴⁶ It is not surprising that the problem of music in sacred *rappresentazioni* has never been adequately studied. Until towards the end of the fifteenth century they were normally entirely in song, but the styles and melodic formulas (probably very simple, but varying from one passage to another) belonged to what I would call the music of the unwritten tradition, and can only be guessed at. Information about singing and playing for realistic purposes (that is, as part of the plot) is at times very vague, at times somewhat more precise. (A parallel phenomenon in connection with the performance of comedies is discussed in one of the following chapters.) For example, the following directions taken from *La Regina Ester* (D'Ancona, *Sacre rappresentazioni dei secoli XIV, XV e XVI*) are very general: 'they dance and rejoice' (p. 141), or 'they sing and rejoice and the play is finished' (p. 166). More precise directions have enabled Wolfgang Osthoff to identify in the Panciatichiano MS 27 the music of the *lauda-ballata* 'Chi serve a Dio' sung and danced at the end of the *Rappresentazione di Abramo e Isacco* by Feo Belcari (1499), and the music of a hunters' song 'Jamo alla caccia' in the later *Rappresentazione di Santa Margherita* (W. Osthoff, *Theatergesang*, I, pp. 31 and 43-4; II, pp. 33 and 45-9). The case of the *lauda* 'O vaghe di Gesù o verginelle', also from the *Santa Margherita*, is unconvincing as Osthoff (*Theatergesang*, II, pp. 38-44) fits to it the music of a late *villota* (a distant derivation of a *ballata* by Sacchetti) taken from a printed source of 1529. It is possible, however, that the *villota* should have picked up musical elements from the tune of the popular song which was also used for the singing of the *lauda*, and indeed, of several *laude*.

shepherd is a *strambotto* of *sdrucchioli*, which one assumes was improvised since its last line comments on the return at that moment of the servant who had been sent to search for the lost calf:

The shepherd Mopsus answers:

E' non è tanto el mormorio piacevole
delle fresche acque che d'un sasso piombano,
né quando soffia un ventolino agevole
fra le cime dei pini e quelle trombano,
quanto le rime tue son sollazzevole,
le rime tue che per tutto rimbombano;
s'ella l'ode verrà come una cucciola.
Ma ecco Tirsi che del monte sdrucchiola.

The gentle murmuring of fresh waters falling from rock to rock, or a pleasant soft wind blowing among pine tops and making them sing, are not as great a solace as your rhymes, your rhymes which echo all around. If she can hear, she'll come here as tame as a puppy. But here is Tirsis sliding down the mountain.

The end of the fable features the Bacchic chorus which combines the evocation of classical myths with contemporary carnival customs which were typically, though not exclusively, Florentine. It is similar to Lorenzo dei Medici's well-known *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne* and may perhaps rightly be regarded as its model, though it is richer in suggestions of acting. A large number of polyphonic carnival songs for three or more often four parts has survived but I doubt if there is any point in looking to them for an accurate idea of how the last chorus of Poliziano's fable was performed. Contrary to what is generally thought, the carnival music which survives is not representative of 'the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent'. A small part of it dates from the last years of his life, but most is from the first quarter of the sixteenth century.⁴⁷ I believe that at the time when *Orfeo* was conceived both carnival songs and *maggi* had a single vocal part which was supported by one or two instrumental parts, as in Aristaeus' *ballata*.⁴⁸ It is more likely that the song of the Bacchantes was performed according to the traditions of dance songs. The choragus probably intoned the first two lines (the *ripresa*) which was immediately repeated by all the Bacchantes, though not polyphonically. She then probably sang all the remaining stanzas, each being separated from the next by choral repetitions of the *ripresa*. The only instruments to have appeared on the stage, if a stage it can rightly be called, would have been percussion instruments such as cymbals and tambourines, which were traditionally associated with Bacchic dancing. If other instruments were used to support the singing they must have been placed elsewhere or hidden.

What I have just been saying ties in with a more general thesis of mine. I have frequently maintained that though polyphony tends to monopolize the attention of music historians to the exclusion of virtually all else, it in fact represents a highly specialized and restricted activity, at any rate in Italy and throughout the fifteenth century.⁴⁹ The interest which it arouses is justifiable,

⁴⁷ See Joseph H. Gallucci, 'Festival Music in Florence ca.1480-ca.1520' (unpublished dissertation, Harvard University 1962).

⁴⁸ See note 71 below.

⁴⁹ In particular, Pirrotta, 'Ars nova e stil novo', *Rivista italiana di musicologia*, I (1966), pp. 3ff, and 'Music and Cultural Tendencies in 15th-Century Italy', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, XIX (1966), pp. 127ff.

given its intrinsic value and the fact that its concepts and modes of expression greatly influenced subsequent developments, and, of course, as it was the only form of musical activity associated with a written tradition, its documents comprise all the music we know of the period. But this did not prevent other forms of musical activity from existing alongside it, and these were much more widely influential amongst the common people as well as amongst the wealthy. However, either because they were wholly or partially based on improvisation, or because they were transmitted without the use of written notation, much less evidence about these forms has survived. We cannot afford to overlook this unwritten, and therefore oral, tradition (though in the case of instrumental music one might almost call it a manual one) however elusive it might prove. Indeed, it becomes especially important to consider it carefully when one is studying the different manifestations of humanist culture, for though we are better acquainted with the written tradition, the humanists themselves were almost suspicious of it, associating it as they did with scholasticism.

Poliziano and his contemporaries were quite right in seeing the works of musical theory on which polyphony was based as one of the most typical examples of that convoluted scholastic thought against which they were reacting. They knew little of the music which depended on these theoretical works, and were in any case perhaps less than prepared to understand and appreciate the little they did know. Music to them was something less artificial, more spontaneous. Above all, poetry itself was music – poetry of any sort, which differs from prose in that it is the result of words being combined harmoniously according to proportions of duration, recurring stresses, patterns of rhyme, and a symmetrical disposition of lines, units of metre and stanzas, as well as to that orchestration of sounds and rhythmic elements which ‘beautify the harmony of the [overall] structure’ (‘que... pulcrum faciunt armoniam compaginis’) to which Dante’s theory of versification specifically calls our attention. The frequent recurrence of the rhetorical image of poetry as singing, of the lyre or cithar with their strings and plectrum as the instruments of the poet, is an implicit indication that the language of poetry was itself felt to be music. It also shows the close affinity between verbal music and the new musical dimension it can acquire by the addition of a melody and an instrumental accompaniment. We have long been accustomed to consider music and words as at least distinct, if not actually conflicting, elements, which come together as a result of an arbitrary decision usually taken by the composer. The humanist poets on the other hand regarded the musical performance of their verses as a natural extension of the process by which language becomes poetry. This view was still then flourishing, nourished in part perhaps by the antiquity of the rhetorical imagery which encouraged them to believe that they were reverting to the traditions of classical culture, as well as by their awareness that most poetic forms have musical designations.

I will not go so far as to claim that Lorenzo dei Medici and Poliziano were totally indifferent to polyphonic music. (Nothing is known of the musical tastes of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga.) Lorenzo occasionally corresponded with Dufay through the organist Antonio Squarcialupi, and he certainly kept an eye on the standard of performance of sacred music at Santa Maria del

Fiore and the Baptistery. But even Paolo Cortese, the contemporary writer who seems best disposed towards polyphony (he was a Florentine transplanted to Rome, where the atmosphere of the curia was extremely favourable to an encounter between humanism and polyphony), praises Josquin des Près and mentions with various degrees of approval other contemporary polyphonists, yet still considers the highest level of musical accomplishment the singing *ad lembum* (that is, on the lute), and cites as its most famous exponents Francesco Petrarca (!) and Serafino Aquilano.⁵⁰ From Vincenzo Calmeta, only six years younger than Poliziano and a follower of Aquilano, we gather glimpses of a habit common among poets of publicizing verses by singing them personally or by entrusting them to an established singer. Elsewhere, speaking of Antonio Tebaldeo’s *Opere d’amore* which appeared in print in 1500, Calmeta observes that by ‘hearing today some poet’s sonnet, elegy, *strambotto* or epigram sung or recited, and then ten or fifteen days later hearing another, and a week later still another, and so on’ one formed an impression quite different from the more careful and considered judgement which came from reading the same works collected in one volume.⁵¹ In the case of Tebaldeo’s work, he felt the considered opinion to be also the less favourable.

As we have already seen, the most common and best appreciated form of music-making was singing *ad lyram* or *ad citharam*, which when writers allowed themselves to use more familiar expressions was generally translated as ‘singing to the viol’ (in one case ‘viuola’)⁵² or ‘to the lute’ (plates 5 and 6). Lorenzo the Magnificent loved singing, as well as arranging the sequence of steps for dancing *bassedanze*. During one journey in the country, after a certain amount of music-making, he amused himself by ‘taking up and trying to refine a certain skilful dancer of local fame’.⁵³ Of those who surrounded him, Marsilio Ficino, Domenico Benivieni, Antonio Naldi and Baccio Ugolini all sang, as did Poliziano and two of his favourite pupils, Piero dei Medici and Lorenzo Tornabuoni.⁵⁴ Florentine singers were generally in demand because

⁵⁰ *De cardinalatu libri tres* (Castel Cortese 1510), fol. 74r. For a facsimile reproduction, translation and commentary, see Pirrotta, ‘Music and Cultural Tendencies’, pp. 151, 155 and 161.

⁵¹ Vincenzo Calmeta, ‘La poesia del Tebaldeo’ in *Prose e lettere edite e inedite*, ed. Cecil Grayson (Bologna 1959), pp. 15–19. The other passage to which I refer is in ‘S’egli è lecito giudicare i vivi’ (‘If it is permissible to judge the living’; Calmeta did not hesitate to do so): ‘A further new way, in addition to printing, has been found, by means of which compositions, especially those in the vernacular (‘lingua volgare’), can be brought to light; ... this is the appearance of many citharists, who, while supporting themselves on the efforts of a few poets, publish these works in every princely court, city or land.’ (p. 4.)

⁵² The spelling is taken from a letter of 1468; see Franca Brambilla Ageno, ‘Una nuova lettera di Luigi Pulci a Lorenzo de’ Medici’, *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, CXLI (1964), p. 107. In any case, even without this reference, the close connection between the *viuola* and the fifteenth-century Italian *viola* is clear.

⁵³ The *De prattica, seu arte tripudij, vulghare opusculum* by Guglielmo Ebreo of Pesaro, from the MS Magliabechiano XIX, 88, edited by Francesco Zambrini (*Trattato dell’arte del ballo*, Bologna 1873), describes the *bassedanze Venus* and *Zauro* (which should be read *Lauro?*), both preceded by the words ‘composed for Lorenzo di Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici’. The episode of the provincial dancer is described in a letter written by Poliziano from Acquapendente, in his *Prose volgari inedite e poesie latine e greche*, ed. Isidoro Del Lungo (Florence 1867), p. 47. Del Lungo dates the letter 1476. I must add that both music and dancing followed ‘reading a little St Augustine’.

⁵⁴ In an earlier piece of work I referred to the sentence about Piero in a letter by Poliziano to Pico: ‘Canit etiam, vel notas musicas, vel ad cytharam carmen’ (*Epistole inedite di Angelo Poliziano*, ed. Lorenzo D’Amore, Naples 1909, pp. 38–40). On 5 June 1490 Poliziano also wrote to Lorenzo, then at Bagno a Morbo: ‘Not two evenings ago I heard Piero sing impromptu, for

of their skill and versatility. Part of their art consisted of improvising new verses which they sang to established melodic patterns, and of demonstrating their wit and quickness of mind by rapidly 'swapping' each other's rhymes and poetic themes. Traditional melodies were also used for more ambitious compositions, but quite often the poets themselves composed new melodies for them, or had them composed by others with more musical talent.

My revised understanding of 'the love of harmonic procedures' therefore leads me to see in the character of Poliziano's Orpheus the symbol or personification of this broader definition of poetry as song. The fact that Baccio Ugolini was chosen to play the role is a clear indication that Orpheus was intended to sing, for Poliziano had previously praised him for his skill. There is a further indication that great significance was attached to Orpheus' singing: when, in 1490, the question of a revival of *Orfeo* was raised, one of the greatest problems, despite the existence of plenty of singers in Mantua, was to find one who could satisfactorily play the leading role.⁵⁵

Ugolini was a priest not a professional singer, and as a member of Lorenzo's chancellery had ably and effectively carried out a variety of political and administrative missions. Shortly before his death he was made Bishop of Gaeta, after having acted for Giovanni dei Medici, then Abbot of Montecassino. He was universally well-liked, and was in great demand everywhere because of his jovial nature and skill in singing to the lyre.⁵⁶ This was the instrument, whose name lent it an air of classicism despite the fact that it was quite different from the classical lyre (plate 5), which the stage directions tell us he carried when he appeared 'upon the mountain' to sing in Latin the Sapphic ode in praise of Cardinal Gonzaga. It is equally clear that the other Latin text (lines 302–5) was also sung: 'Orpheus returns, after rescuing Eurydice, singing certain lively verses by Ovid, arranged for the occasion.' Between these two Latin texts only one stage direction is as explicit, stating that 'Orpheus singing arrives at the gate of hell.' Strictly speaking, it should refer only to the two octaves which follow it (lines 214–29), but I think it must also apply to the two preceding stanzas (lines 198–213) which are the first expression of Orpheus' grief. In them he turns to his lyre and asks it for a new form of song:

Dunque piangiamo, o sconsolata lira,
che più non si convien l'usato canto...

he came to assail me at home with all these improvisers. He pleased me greatly, *et praesertim* in the jokes and retorts, and his ease and pronunciation, so that I seemed to see and hear Your Magnificence in person' (*Prose volgari inedite*, p. 78). He speaks with affection of Lorenzo Tornabuoni in another letter to Pico and adds: 'Dat & Musicis operam'. Paolo Orvieto, 'Angelo Poliziano "compare" della brigata laurenziana', *Lettere italiane*, XXV (1973), pp. 317–18, suggests identifying Poliziano with 'the fellow playing the viol' in the entourage of Lorenzo dei Medici during a trip.

⁵⁵ D'Ancona, *Le origini*, II, pp. 358ff.
⁵⁶ On Baccio Ugolini see Del Lungo, *Florentia*, pp. 307ff. Also Picotti, *Ricerche umanistiche* and *La giovinezza di Leone X* (Milan 1927). On the instrument he played, see Emanuel Winternitz, 'Lira da Braccio', in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* vol. VIII (Kassel 1960), cols. 935ff. which is also notable for the illustrations which deal with the humanists' use of the instrument. Viewed from above, this is easily recognized by a flat box with a round or almond-shaped top into which the pegs which served to tauten the strings were inserted vertically. See plates 5 and 6. An English translation of the same article, in which some of the text has been cut but the illustrations have been reproduced intact, is included in E. Winternitz, *Musical Instruments and their Symbolism in Western Art* (New York 1967).

Weep then with me, unhappy lyre, for no longer can we sing our former song...

Further on a description prefaces the five octaves of Orpheus' prayer: 'Orpheus on his knees speaks thus to Pluto.' The expression 'speaks thus' does not indicate singing, but it does not rule it out either, while the last two lines (lines 291–2) of Proserpina's intercession seem to indicate clearly that Orpheus *has* been singing:

Dunque tua dura legge a lui si pieghi,
pel canto, per l'amor, pe' giusti prieghi

Let your stern law then bend for him, for his song, for his love, and for his just prayers.

as do the last two lines (lines 300–1) of the octave in which 'Pluto answers Orpheus and says thus':

I' son contento che a sì dolce plettro
s'inchini la potenza del mio scettro.

I am content that to such a sweet plectrum, even the power of my sceptre should bow.

On the other hand, I doubt whether the four octaves were sung in which Orpheus 'bemoans his fate' once he is back in the land of the living (lines 322–53). A song at this point would have had the power to tame the fury of the Bacchantes,⁵⁷ and thus it seems more logical to assume that singing had been reserved for the heroic moment when Orpheus had faced death and fate. But however many verses Baccio Ugolini may have sung as Orpheus, what really matters is that they are octaves, which puts the *strambotto* on a par with the Latin verses as the representatives of the noblest form of sung poetry.

This is not the place to investigate the obscure and controversial origins of the *strambotto*, or to insist on the necessity, already indicated earlier, of distinguishing it from the various other forms of the *ottava rima*. Nor is it the place to advance hypotheses about whether literary *strambotti* were derived from the popular ones, or whether the example of the aristocratic ones filtered down to less educated singers, or if in fact there were even more complex exchanges and reciprocal imitation between the two levels. It is important, however, to point out that from the time of Leonardo Giustinian until the end of the century, the *strambotto* was the form of poetry for music most assiduously cultivated by Italian men of letters as a vehicle for the most passionately lyrical sentiments. It was probably its brevity which made it so popular: while allowing musicians to give their song a more extended and even more florid course, it encouraged in the poets a more precise epigrammatic brevity which not infrequently tended towards preciousness. Certainly a large number of *strambotti* texts were included in contemporary manuscript and printed collections of poems, where they are attributed, not always correctly or consistently, to the best-known poets. The music to which these *strambotti* were sung, however, was not yet written down. Only towards the end of the century does one begin to find examples of *strambotti* in musical as opposed

⁵⁷ Cynthia M. Pyle, 'Il tema di Orfeo', strongly argues that these octaves must also have been sung. Of course, this would only strengthen my characterization of Poliziano's Orpheus as singer of *strambotti*. Pyle's paper also gives valuable new information on Poliziano's views of Orpheus and music.

to literary manuscripts; and soon some collections appeared which were primarily, if not exclusively, dedicated to settings of *strambotti*.⁵⁸

To what degree these written *strambotti* reflect the unwritten practice is a difficult question to answer with certainty, since one of the terms of comparison is by definition missing. One point which I must make clear is that equating the written tradition with artistic polyphony, as I have done here and elsewhere, does not imply that the music of the unwritten tradition was exclusively monophonic. There are indications that, beginning with the last decades of the fourteenth century, if not before, a way had been found – perhaps not very orthodox from the point of view of official musical teachings – of adding the accompaniment of a second, supporting part to the sung melody.⁵⁹ Nor were the two traditions so totally separate that contact between them was impossible: there was nothing to prevent the one less hampered by rules from assimilating for its own ends whatever aspect of the other might be of use. It is probable in fact that some of the 'regular' compositions of Francesco Landini, the blind luminary of fourteenth-century Italian *ars nova*, were incorporated into the other tradition, though possibly in a simplified form and certainly subject to the modifications and variations which were inherent in the procedures of a written tradition.⁶⁰

It is not easy to trace the stages by which it happened, but it seems that singing to the cither, viol, or lute came to imply the addition of a second part, a *tenor*, which accompanied the sung melody. This development had taken place by the time the *strambotto* was at the peak of its popularity, though it applied to the singing of other verse forms as well. A *tenorista* (actually different people at different times) used to travel around with the virtuoso lutenist Pietrobono del Chitarrino of Ferrara, who in his early days had been a singer accustomed to providing his own lute accompaniment and whose career typifies the success of these unwritten musical practices.⁶¹ The *cantus-tenor* relationship remained a fundamental feature of all music which directly or indirectly reflects this unwritten tradition and which musicologists now commonly call *frottola* music, a term derived from its frequent use in the titles of Ottaviano Petrucci's printed collections. It is surprising how readily this type of music later adapted itself to four voices or parts – a feature new to the artistic line of secular polyphony as well.⁶² This apparent

⁵⁸ See the codices Montecassino, Badia, 871; Perugia, Biblioteca Comunale, 431 (G20); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Réserve Vm. 7 676; Milan, Biblioteca Trivulziana, 55; Modena, Biblioteca Estense, α.f.9.9. To these one may add some of the more recent compositions appended to the Seville MS, Biblioteca Colombina, 5.1.43, and to its complement in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, nouv. acq. fr., 4379.

⁵⁹ See Pirrotta 'Musica polifonica per un testo attribuito a Federico II', in *L'Ars nova italiana del Trecento*, II (Certaldo 1968), pp. 97–112, and Pirrotta, 'New Glimpses of an Unwritten Tradition', in *Words and Music: the Scholar's View: Studies in honor of A. Tillmann Merritt*, ed. L. Berman (Cambridge, Mass. 1972), pp. 271–91.

⁶⁰ See for example the texts of Landini's *ballate* which figure in the semi-popular repertory of the Treviso MS, Biblioteca Comunale 43, published in Vittorio Cian, 'Ballate e strambotti del secolo XV, tratti da un codice trevisano', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, IV (1884).

⁶¹ For further details see in particular Emile Haraszti, 'Bono, Piero', in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. II, cols. 117–19, and Pirrotta, 'Music and Cultural Tendencies'. On the *tenorista* (player of the tenor part), see *ibid.*, p. 141 note 53. The style of lute-playing current at the time of Pietrobono still assigned to each player a single melodic line.

⁶² It would appear that four-voice writing was accepted for the *strambotto* even more readily than for the *frottola* or *barzelletta*. Nevertheless there are examples of *strambotti* for three voices,

contradiction can however be explained by the fact that the additions to the basic structure of *cantus-tenor* were dictated by chordal or harmonic feeling,⁶³ whereas in the artistic tradition the tendency was to build in a linear and contrapuntal manner. Furthermore it is quite clear that the fourth part, the *contratenor altus*, was an optional extra omitted in the type of performance which most faithfully adhered to the customs of the unwritten tradition, in which the song was accompanied by the *tenor* and *contratenor bassus* played on a single stringed instrument.⁶⁴

Vincenzo Calmeta, whose volatile and gossipy interest in contemporary events is invaluable to us, informs us of the esteem in which the various types of *frottola* pieces were held. This he does in a tract which takes the form of advice given to 'youths who take delight in works in the vernacular, not for the style of composition, but the better to prevail through them in their amorous endeavours'.⁶⁵ Prose composition, for which Boccaccio is the suggested model, is of no interest to us here. But then Calmeta goes on to consider those young lovers 'who, being accustomed to take pleasure in the art of singing, wish by their songs (particularly if they can sing in diminution) to entertain their ladies'. He advises them that 'they must busy themselves with *stanze*, *barzellette*, *frottole* and other pedestrian styles, and not rely upon subtleties and inventions... which when associated with music are not only overshadowed, but obstructed in such a way that they cannot be discerned'.⁶⁶ Others, however, might want to aim higher than the 'pedestrian styles'; these

in their manner of singing must imitate Cariteo and Serafino [Benedetto Gareth and Serafino Aquilano]; who in this exercise have been foremost in our day, and have striven to accompany their rhymes with easy and simple music, that the excellence of their witty and sententious words might be better understood; for they have the judgement of a discerning jeweller, who, wanting to display the finest and whitest pearl, will not wrap it in a golden cloth, but in some black silk, that it might show up better.

Such advice, given under the title 'Which of the vernacular poets' styles is to be taken as a model',⁶⁷ outlines an aesthetic of music which distinguishes between the pleasure to be drawn from purely musical elements and the subtler and more refined one derived from the interaction of poetic and

not only in the manuscripts mentioned above but also in the *Libro quarto* (1505) of Petrucci's series, which has the unusual title *Strambotti, ode, frottole, sonetti, et modo de cantar versi latini e capituli*.

⁶³ As a rule the duo formed by *cantus* and *tenor* is a self-sufficient musical structure without the addition of the other parts, and clearly establishes itself as the original nucleus of the piece; deviations from this rule are due to the composer's knowledge that he was to add at least a *contratenor bassus* to the basic structure. The chordal nature of the piece was emphasized by forming the first added part with such notes which would best complete the harmonies outlined by the original duo; the addition of a fourth part, the *contratenor altus*, merely added a richer sound without changing the harmonic substance. To be sure, the basic *cantus-tenor* structure can also be detected in many of the most sophisticated works of fifteenth-century polyphonic art; here, however, the clear definition of vertical harmony gives way to contrapuntal thinking, which is already present in the shaping of the *tenor* line and further developed by the addition of the other parts.

⁶⁴ This practice is clearly shown by the title of two collections by Petrucci, *Tenori e contrabassi intabulati col sopran in canto figurato per cantar e sonar col lauto* (*Libro primo* 1509 and *Libro secundo* 1511) and also by Bartolomeo Tromboncino's letter published by Alfred Einstein in *The Italian Madrigal* (Princeton 1949), vol. I, p. 48.

⁶⁵ *Prose e lettere... inedite*, pp. 20ff.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

musical values. In the case of the former, music which had the most 'air' or 'spirit' was preferred. This could be dance music, in which, as already seen, even Lorenzo the Magnificent took pleasure; or popular melodies, which might possibly have been used to accompany poetry as deliberately popular in tone and form as that which constitutes a sizeable part of the literary production of Poliziano's circle; or simple melodies with a clearly designed and balanced interplay of lines, which were typical of the *stanze*, *barzellette* and *frottole*; or 'singing in diminution' with its almost instrumental virtuosity; or fully instrumental music played on the lute, organ or the *instrumentum*, better known later as the *clavicembalo* or *gravicembalo* (harpsichord). But where the poetic values were important, music was required to give up some of its prerogatives, and to exert them only to the extent necessary to enhance and intensify the poetry. Therefore, continues Calmeta, 'we must praise the good judgement of those, who in singing put all their effort into expressing the words well...and have them accompanied by the music in the manner of masters accompanied by their servants,...not making the thoughts and emotions subservient to the music, but the music to the emotions and thoughts'.⁶⁸

Calmeta's young lover who wishes 'to entertain his lady [with his singing] and to insert amorous words into that music' appears in *Orfeo* in the person of Aristaeus, the wealthy 'youthful shepherd' with a servant. But, perhaps because Aristaeus is also 'a son of Apollo', Poliziano preferred the literary *ballata* form for his song to the more popular *barzelletta*. The fact that by the time of the *Orfeo* the true *ballata* form was archaic may also have influenced his choice: it survived only in Florence, and not even the recrudescence of Petrarchism in the sixteenth century succeeded in reviving it. (Instead it was absorbed into and replaced by the madrigal.)⁶⁹ In Aristaeus' song poetic expression tends to be subordinated to musical expression, even to the sensual blandishments of music. And as none of the few contemporary *ballata* settings which survive, essentially those by Arrigo Isaac of texts by Poliziano and Lorenzo dei Medici,⁷⁰ are composed on a *ballata* text made up entirely of hendecasyllabic lines like Aristaeus' song, we cannot use them as an indication of what his song was like. His invitation to Eurydice 'to learn to make good use of her beauty' was probably set in two-voice polyphony, with the *tenor* played by Mopsus' pan-pipes, which would have given it a more sensual appeal than the pure and noble notes of Orpheus' lyre.

I have already drawn a parallel between the final chorus of the Bacchantes and Lorenzo's *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*. A plausible reconstruction of the latter has recently been suggested, based on the existing three-voice setting of one of Lorenzo's *laude*,⁷¹ but the overall effect of this reconstruction

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ The poems called *ballate* in the *Madrigali del magnifico Signor Luigi Cassola* (Venice 1544 – though most of the texts must be much earlier than the date of publication) no longer retain any traces of the structure of either literary or popular *ballate*, while many of the madrigals set to music by Verdelot, Arcadelt and their contemporaries, though not regular *ballate*, do retain the characteristic return of the initial poetic theme almost in the form of a refrain. On this subject, see Don Harrán, 'Verse Types in the early Madrigal', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, XXII (1969), p. 27ff.

⁷⁰ Most of these appear to have been composed after 1512, in the period of the Medicean restoration.

⁷¹ Walter H. Rubsamen, 'The Music for "Quant'è bella giovinezza" and other Carnival Songs', in *Art, Science and History in the Renaissance*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore 1968),

is disappointingly sober and sedate, a result of a rather stolid rhythmic framework and a moderate tempo imposed by a brief passage of more rapid notes. Panic if not Bacchic high spirits are more successfully suggested by the similarly reconstructed music of Poliziano's well-known song *Ben venga maggio* (example I), whose rhythmic abandon and unusual cadences in which the dominant chord omits the third are truly impressive. These features might have been made even more striking and dramatic by spirited recitation and by being accompanied by instruments of the kind which Cortese described as 'offending the discriminating ear by the want of moderation in their notes and by their inordinate noise'⁷² rather than on the less aggressive lute.

In their depictions of Apollo, the Muses, Orpheus, or Arion, Renaissance painters and engravers felt free to indulge in extravagant archaeological reconstructions of classical instruments, or of what they imagined were classical instruments. The result was often a fantastic form, highly improbable from a musical or acoustical point of view. Alternatively, they could reproduce instruments in current use, especially since contemporary men of letters often called these by classical names. For the staging of Poliziano's *Orpheus*, there was no choice but to opt for this second solution, as his instrument had not only to be the visible symbol of his poetic activity but also to accompany his singing. He must therefore have appeared carrying one of the real instruments with which he is most represented: a lute, or a *viola* shaped like the Spanish *vihuela* and like it played by plucking the strings, or the instrument which throughout the sixteenth century and even later was commonly known in Italy as the *lira da braccio* (plates 5 and 6) and which was sometimes plucked, though more often bowed.⁷³ The odds are in favour of this last, since Baccio Ugolini is always described as 'singing to the lyre', though without specific details about his instrument. He himself once promised to sing the praises of the Marquis Ludovico Gonzaga⁷⁴ to the lyre,

pp. 163ff, rightly assigns to the *Trionfo* the music of the *lauda* 'Quanto è grande la bellezza' for three voices in Serafino Razzi, *Libro primo delle laudi spirituali* (Florence 1563), for only two voices in the Florence MS, Biblioteca Nazionale, Rossi-Cassigoli 395, fol. 5v–6 (dated 1522). It had previously been suggested that the *lauda* derived its music from the *Canzone delle Forese*, also by Lorenzo the Magnificent. Even before Rubsamen, Gallucci had reached the same conclusion in 'Festival Music in Florence'. Rubsamen in 'The Music for "Quant'è bella giovinezza"', p. 171, reproduces the inscription which precedes the text of the *Trionfo* in the Florence MS, Biblioteca Nazionale, Magl. VII, 1225, fol. 45: 'Song (*chançona*) composed by Lorenzo the Magnificent who in this carnival had performed the Triumph of Bacchus where they sang the songs written for the lute (*chançone chomposte da leuto*), reproduced below: they were very beautiful.' This seems to me to confirm that only the upper part was sung (probably by soloist and chorus alternately) and that the other parts were played. In Rubsamen's article the *Trionfo* is dated 1489, which by modern reckoning may become 1490.

⁷² The reconstruction of the music of *Ben venga maggio* from the *lauda*, *Ecco il Messia* (from Serafino Razzi, *Libro primo delle laudi spirituali*, fol. 15) is also the work of Gallucci in 'Festival Music in Florence'. The printed edition of the *Laudi fatte e composte da più persone spirituali* (Florence 1 March 1485/6) contains various other *laude* by Feo Belcari, Francesco d'Albizo and Lucrezia dei Medici to be sung to the music of *Ben venga maggio*. *Ecco il Messia* is amongst those by Lucrezia dei Medici, and it must therefore have been written before 1482, the year in which Lorenzo the Magnificent's mother died. *Ben venga maggio* therefore either pre-dates *Orfeo*, or is its contemporary. The quotation about instruments is taken from Paolo Cortese, who uses it to refer to instruments to which he gives the classical names of *barbiti* and *pentades*; see Pirrotta, 'Music and Cultural Tendencies', pp. 149, 153 and 157.

⁷³ See note 56 above.
⁷⁴ From a Latin letter of 1459 which shows how cultured Ugolini was, reproduced in Del Lungo, *Florentia*, p. 309.

Ex. I Angelo Poliziano, *Canzone di Maggio*. Music of the *lauda*. Ecco il Messia, on a text by Lucrezia dei Medici. From the Florence manuscript, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Palatino 173, fol. 158r.

'versu ad lyram', so it is likely that he accompanied himself on the *lira da braccio* when singing his Sapphic ode in praise of Cardinal Gonzaga, Ludovico's son. As for the music, the closest parallel I can suggest is a setting by the Veronese Michele Pesenti of Horace's *Integer vitae scelerique purus* (*Carmina* I 22) (example II), which was published by Ottaviano Petrucci in the *Frottole*

Ex. II Michele Pesenti. Sapphic ode. Words by Horace. From *Frottole libro primo* (O. Petrucci, Venice 1504), fol. 44r (the alto part partially omitted).

libro primo of 1504, almost a quarter of a century after *Orfeo* was written.⁷⁵ Despite the fact that the composer, Michele Pesenti, was one of the most lively and inventive of the so-called *frottola* composers, Horace's text is treated with great sobriety, under the influence of a persisting stylistic convention. It is more difficult to find such a parallel for the two elegiac distichs 'by Ovid, arranged for the occasion' which Orpheus sings after Pluto has agreed to the return of Eurydice. Marchetto Cara's music for Propertius' *Quicumque ille fuit*

⁷⁵ Previously printed in Rudolf Schwartz, *Ottaviano Petrucci, Frottole, Buch I und IV* (Leipzig 1935), p. 34 and in *Le Frottole nell'edizione principe di Ottaviano Petrucci*, transcr. Gaetano Cesari, ed. Raffaello Monterosso (Cremona 1954), vol. I, p. 35. It is preceded by another Latin ode also composed by Pesenti on a text attributed to Tebaldeo, which indicates that the musician belonged to the Ferrarese or Mantuan circle. My transcription, like subsequent ones, halves the values of the original notes and places the bar-lines not according to metre but to what seems to me the most likely interpretation of the rhythm. The arrangement of the words beneath the notes, and the suggestion of possible repetitions of the words, follow the same criterion. Furthermore, for music thought to have been played on the lute, lyre or similar instruments, the *contratenor altus* has been omitted (see note 63 above).

Ex. III *Strambotto*. Anonymous words and music. From the Paris manuscript, Bibliothèque Nationale, Rés. Vm.⁷ 676, fols. 33v–34r (alto part omitted).

Ben se-ria tem-po... (ben se-ria tem-p')or

mai che fin pone-sti, Cru-del, [a

que-sta... cru-del] a que-sta

tan-ta lu-ce za.

(*Elegies* II 12) was not published until 1517. Not only is the gap between it and *Orfeo* too great for it to provide us with an analogy, but it also has a long interlude (or repetition of the second line) between one distich and the next, which is quite unsuited to the urgency of the situation in *Orfeo*.⁷⁶ All we can

⁷⁶ It was published in Andrea Antico, ed., *Frottole libro tertio* (Rome 1517?), which also includes a different setting of *Integer vitae* by Bartolomeo Tromboncino. A modern edition of the entire collection has been published, based on the 1518 edition, *Canzoni sonetti strambotti et frottole. Libro tertio* (Andrea Antico 1517), ed. A. Einstein (Northampton, Mass. 1941).

do therefore assume a musical setting which followed the principles of plain declamation as applied by Pesenti in his Sapphic ode.

Orpheus' second Latin song celebrates the victory just won by his singing – but by what kind of song? We have already seen that it was a *strambotto*, of which hundreds of examples survive, albeit from a later date. Here I shall restrict myself to three examples, chosen to represent three of the different trends in the varied literature of *strambotti*. The first (example III), whose text and music are both anonymous, is taken from a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Rés. Vm.⁷ 676), dated 1502 and originating in one of the courts of Northern Italy, Mantua or Ferrara perhaps, or one of their client courts.⁷⁷ The music has an irregular rhythm to which it is difficult to fit the text, which leads me to think it belongs to a type of popular or pseudo-popular *strambotto*, in which moments of plain almost hesitant recitation alternate with passages of pointed rhythmic drive and even with short bursts of vocalization (what Calmeta would have called 'singing in diminution').

My second example comes from the same manuscript, from a small group of settings of texts almost certainly by Serafino Aquilano, who was one of the two poets singled out by Calmeta from amongst his contemporaries as models for those who wished 'to rise above the common throng' and 'succeed in impressing [their poetic expression] not only on amorous hearts but on learned ones too'. The music of *Ite, suspir(i), là dove Amor vi mena* (example IV) is anonymous, as is that of the other texts attributed to Serafino, and does not appear in any other manuscript or printed source. Bearing in mind that Aquilano was in Mantua in 1495, it is possible that this was the music that the poet used to sing, and that he himself composed it.⁷⁸ If so, Aquilano fully deserved the praise he received not only for his poetry but also for his music. The *strambotto* has an expressive melodic line with clearly defined contours, and retains something of the rhythmic contrasts observable in my previous example, though here they fit better into the more balanced structure. I could also give an example of the work of Cariteo, Calmeta's other model, for a *strambotto* is included under his name in Petrucci's *Frottole libro nono* (1509, new style). On the whole its style is one of smoother declamation than is the case in the other two *strambotti* already examined, though it too indulges in some simple melismata.⁷⁹ But I would rather draw on another contemporary manuscript for a *strambotto* setting which, because it is closer to Poliziano's own circle, might better reflect the style of the songs in *Orfeo*. This is the music for one of the few known *strambotto* texts which are attributed to the singer who played the part of Orpheus, Baccio Ugolini (example V); a sole anonymous version survives in the Biblioteca Trivulziana of Milan, in manuscript 55 which itself consists largely of a collection of *strambotti*.⁸⁰ It begins simply and

⁷⁷ Nanie Bridgman, 'Un manuscrit italien au début du XVI^e siècle à la Bibliothèque Nationale', *Annales musicologiques*, I (1953), pp. 177ff, gives an accurate description and discusses its content.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 185 and 186.

⁷⁹ A facsimile is to be found as an illustration for W. Rubsamen, 'Frottola', in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. IV, cols. 1025–26.

⁸⁰ Knud Jeppesen, 'Über einige unbekannte Frottolehandschriften', *Acta musicologica*, XI (1939), pp. 81ff, was the first to give its content and its concordances. Transcriptions and comments on the compositions it contains are to be found in Remo Giazotto, 'Onde musicali nella corrente poetica di Serafino dall'Aquila', in *Musurgia nova* (Milan 1959), pp. 3–119, which also includes the music of Baccio Ugolini's *strambotto* (pp. 36–7). I have been unable to trace the source which attributes the text to Ugolini. A new edition of the entire MS is included as an appendix in K. Jeppesen, *La frottola* vol. III (Copenhagen 1970), pp. 141–324.

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Ex. IV *Strambotto*. Words by Serafino Aquilano. From the Paris manuscript, Bibliothèque Nationale, Rés. Vm.⁷ 676, fols. 74v-75r (alto part omitted).

I - te, su - spi - ri, là... [i - te, su - spi - ri]

do - ve A - mor vi me - - - na

Et di - te che per le - i mia vi - ta... [mi - a]

vi - ta, mia vi - ta] ha tol - - - ta

evenly like the music of Cariteo's *strambotto*, but it is even more restrained, with just a hint of melodic inflexion, and therefore closer to the classical simplicity of the Horatian ode set to music by Michele Pesenti. Remembering the improvising at which Ugolini excelled, as conceded even by the hypercritical Paolo Cortese,⁸¹ one may go so far as to imagine that this might be one of

⁸¹ *De cardinalatu*, Bk III, fol. 164v.

Orpheus, singer of *strambotti*

Ex. V *Strambotto*. Words attributed to Baccio Ugolini. From the Milan manuscript, Biblioteca Trivulziana, 55, fols. 15v-16r (alto part omitted).

La mor - te tu mi da - i pel mi - o ser -

- vi - - - re E per ser - vir - tian - ch'i - o

vo - glio la mor - - - te.

vo - glio la mor - - - te.

the melodic formulas which he adapted as necessary to other *strambotto* texts with all the adjustments required each time by the different mood and different accentuation of each text. Such adjustments, we must always bear in mind, were needed even in the singing of a single *strambotto* to fit the same melody to all four distichs.

Whether the music in the Trivulziano codex is really by Baccio Ugolini, and to what extent it reflects the songs he performed on the lyre as Orpheus, are questions to which no definite answers can be given. I can only indicate what Poliziano himself may have expected from the heroic songs of his Orpheus, by quoting some passages from one of his letters, which bear witness to his reactions as a listener to music. The letter in question is addressed to Pico della Mirandola, some ten years after *Orfeo*, and was probably written in Rome.⁸² It is a description of music heard during the course of a banquet, offered by Paolo Orsini according to a custom typical of that time. Even more typical is the

⁸² It is included in Bk XII of the collection of Poliziano's letters, and can refer, at the earliest, to the voyage to Rome which took place in 1488 for the marriage of Piero dei Medici to Alfonsina Orsini.

fact that as long as he is talking about polyphonic music, Poliziano limits himself to describing the sensual (indeed even visceral) pleasure produced by the voice of one performer, Fabio Orsini, the eleven-year-old son of the host. But his enthusiasm knows no bounds when Fabio goes on to sing in a solo performance:

No sooner were we seated at the table than [Fabio] was ordered to sing, together with some other experts, certain of those songs which are put into writing with those little signs of music [it is difficult to render the sense of contemptuous diffidence conveyed by that 'quaedam...notata Musicis accentuunculis carmina'],⁸³ and immediately he filled our ears, or rather our hearts ['immo vero in praecordia'], with a voice so sweet that (I do not know about the others) as for myself, I was almost transported out of my senses, and was touched beyond doubt by the unspoken feeling of an altogether divine pleasure. He then performed an heroic song which he had himself recently composed in praise of our own Piero dei Medici...His voice was not entirely that of someone reading, nor entirely that of someone singing; both could be heard, and yet neither separated one from the other; it was, in any case, even or modulated, and changed as required by the passage. Now it was varied, now sustained, now exalted and now restrained, now calm and now vehement, now slowing down and now quickening its pace, but always it was precise, always clear and always pleasant; and his gestures were not indifferent or sluggish, but not posturing or affected either. You might have thought that an adolescent Roscius was acting on the stage.⁸⁴

Calmata was not alone in insisting prophetically that the music should be 'subservient to the emotions and thoughts' expressed by the words. We find the same idea reasserted by Poliziano and developed to form the basis of a style midway between spoken language and song and which relied for its shades of expression on the performer's flexibility. The basic concepts of monodic reform – the dependence of the music on the text, the recitative or *representative* style, the *sprezzatura* of the performance – had not only been formulated but had even been put into practice more than a century before the birth of opera.

⁸³ The expression recalls the one used by Poliziano about Piero dei Medici (see note 54 above).

⁸⁴ Poliziano's letter is not alone in describing such intensity of 'recitative' or 'representative' delivery. A few decades earlier Antonio di Guido, a surprisingly cultured and poetically talented Florentine strolling player (*cantimpanca*), had amazed learned audiences; his singing was able to render remarkably vivid tales which, merely read, appeared totally insignificant. More recent than Poliziano's letter is Baldassare Castiglione's praise of the singer and composer Bidon for the style of his performance 'so artful, so sensitive, so forcible and excited (*concitata*), with such variety of tunes as to capture and enflame the souls of all his audience' (*Il cortegiano*, I, xxxvii). Angelo Colocci, too, wrote of Serafino Aquilano: 'They recognize the uniqueness of his delivery, but [stress] that he strove to adjust the words to the [sound of the] lute to impress them more forcefully on the souls of the people, as Gracchus had adjusted his lyre in the Senate, now to enflame, now to appease' ('Apologia', in *Le rime di Serafino de' Ciminelli dall'Aquila*, Bologna 1894, p. 27).

2 Classical theatre, *intermedi* and *frottola* music

There is a group of theatrical works, dating from the last twenty years of the fifteenth century and first twenty of the sixteenth, which Italian literary scholars refer to as *drammi mescolati*, hybrid dramas. These works, performed occasionally in conjunction with the more frequently staged Latin comedies in vernacular translations, include mythological plays such as Niccolò da Correggio's *La fabula de Caephalo* and Baldassare Taccone's *Danae*, as well as dramatizations of classically derived stories: both Matteo Maria Boiardo and Galeotto del Carretto based plays on a tale by Lucian, writing respectively *Timone* and *La comedia di Timon greco*, while the latter also wrote *Le nozze di Psiche e Cupidine*, taken from Apuleius, and a self-styled tragedy, *Sofonisba*, for which he drew upon Livy, and which he dedicated to Isabella d'Este Gonzaga, as he had his *Timon greco*. The term *drammi mescolati* also covers a few other plays, based on stories by Boccaccio, such as Bernardo Accolti's *Virginia* and *Filostrato e Panfila* by Antonio Cammelli 'il Pistoia', who dedicated it to Ercole I d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, and sent a copy of it to the duke's daughter the Marchioness of Mantua.¹ These plays were called 'hybrid' because, as the coiner of the term explained, their authors 'sought insofar as possible to impose a certain classical regularity or at least some semblance of classicism on the free ways of popular sacred theatre'.² In other words, the authors recognized and imitated some of the more obvious features of classical plays: the prologue, the presentation of the plot, the envoi, and the division into acts, usually five. At the same time, however, they contrived to base their choice of metre, their use of multiple sets and the development of the plot on the traditions of religious theatre, which ignored the requirements of the unities of time and action.

I have already expressed, and need not restate, my reservations about the presumed dependence of Poliziano's *Orfeo* on 'the ways of popular sacred theatre', an idea based on features which are, if anything, typical of the contemporary approach to theatre in general rather than to either sacred or secular theatre in particular. What we now need to do is take a fresh look at the 'classicism' of which the 'hybrid dramas' supposedly fall short. I cannot see how we can reasonably expect to find 'classical regularity' in this period of theatrical activity, since its basic theories and their practical applications

¹ The best source for a detailed survey of this particular period and this aspect of Italian cultural history is still the chapter 'Le corti dell'Italia superiore alla fine del secolo', in Vittorio Rossi, *Il Quattrocento*, 3rd edn (Milan 1933), pp. 523ff. More specific information about the authors and performances of the plays is provided by Pyle, 'Poliziano's "Orfeo" and other "favole mitologiche" in the context of Late Quattrocento Northern Italy' which includes the text of 'Pasithea' by Gasparo Visconti, possibly never performed and with no directions calling for music.

² Rossi, 'Le corti dell'Italia', *Il Quattrocento*, p. 531.