

Book Review: *Tune thy musicke to thy hart: The art of eloquent singing in England 1597-1622* by Robert Toft

Lisa Szeker-Madden

1995

Fermata

UVic Libraries ePublishing Services

© 1995 Szeker-Madden.

Original citation:

Szeker-Madden, L. (1995). [Review of the book *Tune thy musicke to thy hart: The art of eloquent singing in England 1597-1622* by Robert Toft]. *Fermata*, 1, 64-67.

Downloaded from UVicSpace Research & Learning Repository

dspace.library.uvic.ca



**University
of Victoria**

Libraries

BOOK REVIEW

Robert Toft. *Tune thy Musicke to thy Hart: The Art of Eloquent Singing in England 1597-1622*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. vii, 194 pp. ISBN 0-8020-2848-9.

The close association between music and rhetoric, particularly in seventeenth-century England, has long been recognised in modern scholarship. As early as 1980, Gregory Butler observed that contemporary sources explicitly equate the figures of verbal rhetoric with a parallel group of musical figures.¹ The affinity between rhetoric and music goes beyond the *Figurenlehre*, for contemporary treatises confirm that the principles governing rhetorical methods of delivery also were incorporated in seventeenth-century performances of English vocal music.² Robert Toft's *Tune thy Musicke to thy Hart: The Art of Eloquent Singing in England 1597-1622* provides a new perspective: it combines discussion of rhetorical figures and rhetorical methods of performance in a single study. As Toft observes in his introduction,

the purpose of the book is to extrapolate from historical documents, both musical and non-musical, in order to re-create the style of song delivery known in England between 1597 and 1622, the years which mark the publication of the first and last books of lute songs.³

This is achieved primarily through a consideration of the rhetorical principles which so dominated the culture of seventeenth-century England. Of the five elements of traditional rhetoric, however, Toft concentrates only on the third and the fifth, namely, *elocutio* and *pronunciatio*.⁴

¹Gregory Butler, "Music and Rhetoric in Early Seventeenth-Century English Sources," *Musical Quarterly* 66 (1980): 53-64. The connection between the figures of textual rhetoric and those of musical rhetoric receives additional support from several other recent studies, namely Robert Toft, "Musicke a Sister to Poetrie: Rhetorical Artifice in the Passionate Aires of John Dowland," *Early Music* 12 (1984): 190-194; Robin H. Wells, "The Ladder of Love, Verbal and Musical Rhetoric in the Elizabethan Lute-Song," *Early Music* 12 (1984): 173-189; Brian Vickers, "Figures of Rhetoric/Figures of Music?" *Rhetorica* 2 (1984): 1-44; Robin H. Wells, "John Dowland and Elizabethan Melancholy," *Early Music* 13 (1985): 514-28.

²See Dene Barnett and Ian Parker, "Finding the Appropriate Attitude: Stage Gestures and the Baroque Singer," *Early Music* 7 (1980): 65-69.

³Toft, *Tune thy Musicke to thy Hart: The Art of Eloquent Singing in England, 1597-1622*, 9. Hereafter, this source will be referred to as *Tune thy Musicke*.

⁴In order, the five parts of rhetoric are: 1) *inventio*, the invention of ideas and the selection of suitable topics for a discourse; 2) *dispositio*, the arrangement of the topics and ideas of the discourse; 3) *elocutio*, the embellishment of the ideas of a discourse through the addition of rhetorical tropes and figures; 4) *memoria*, memorisation of the elements of the first three stages; 5) *pronunciatio*, the correct delivery of the discourse, in other words, the application of a proper tone of voice and the insertion of appropriate

Book Review: *Tune thy Musicke*

Toft devotes the first chapter of the book to *elocutio*. Here, Toft cites a number of contemporary sources which confirm the existence of two types of rhetorical figures. The first type consists of tropes, such as metaphors, which alter the regular meanings of words. The second type consists of schemes, which elevate the discourse above the ordinary through the creation of artificial patterns, such as repetitions. A further classification concerns the relative persuasiveness of the various tropes and schemes. According to Toft, seventeenth-century composers and poets employed only the most emphatic rhetorical figures in their compositions.

His discussion of *elocutio* is of particular significance to analysts, for it demonstrates the extent to which rhetorical artifice dominated the music of the period in question. Toft's numerous analyses verify the high level of rhetorical sophistication in the texts of the English lute songs, a sophistication that was recognised and even enhanced by the composers of these works. Moreover, Toft's consideration of musical-rhetorical figures reveals that the lute-song composers used rhetoric to manipulate both the melodies and the *concentus* (vertical sonorities) of their compositions.

The next chapter is concerned with *pronunciatio*. According to the contemporary sources cited by Toft, this stage of rhetoric employs two elements: voice and gesture. *Pronunciatio* involves choosing the proper tone of voice for the various passions of a work. It also entails the correct observance of both the verbal and musical points of punctuation, as well as the accurate interpretation of the rhetorical figures present in a composition. Equally important to vocal *pronunciatio* is Toft's discussion of ornamentation. His directions are derived exclusively from extant contemporary sources, and he provides several useful tables which exemplify each of the ornaments appropriate to this type of music. In contrast, gesture requires the application of suitable hand and finger movements to each word that "is eminent and emphatical."⁵ Again, this process is facilitated through Toft's inclusion of a number of contemporary diagrams depicting each of the various gestures and their meanings.

gestures. While Toft, in *Tune thy Musicke*, p. 5, briefly outlines the five parts of traditional rhetoric, he neglects to cite the sources from which his definition of these parts is derived, nor are any references for Toft's definition of traditional rhetoric offered in the glossary. For more on the five parts of rhetoric as discussed in primary sources, see John Newton, *The English Academy*, 2nd edition, (London, 1693), 147; Quintillian, *Institutione Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler (London: William Heinmann, 1958), III.iii.1. For more recent discussions of this topic, see *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Rhetoric and Music;" Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), 6-7, 64-66; Lee A. Sonnino, *A Handbook to Sixteenth Century Rhetoric* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 1-12.

⁵Toft, *Tune thy Musicke*, 109.

Book Review: *Tune thy Musicke*

Performers will find *pronunciatio* of special importance, since it offers solutions to a number of performance-related issues that surround this body of music. In the first place, Toft convincingly argues for the use of original prints and manuscripts, since modern editions often obscure the punctuation in such a way as to make an historically-accurate performance virtually impossible. Secondly, a singer's application of the principles of *pronunciatio* eliminates the monotony usually associated with performances of these strophic airs. Indeed, the inclusion of different passions, figures, punctuation, ornaments, and gestures in each stanza guarantees variety in the singer's delivery.

In the final chapter of the study, Toft applies his methodology to two specific airs by John Dowland: "Sorrow, Sorrow Stay" and "In Darkness let mee Dwell." While his analysis of both the texts and the music of these works is not new—he reiterates the analyses of his "Musicke a Sister to Poetrie: Rhetorical Artifice in the Passionate Airs of John Dowland"⁶ which was published a decade ago—Toft's detailed instructions regarding a rhetorical performance of these airs is both new and useful. Performers not only will appreciate this chapter for its precise application of the principles discussed in the previous two chapters, but they also will enjoy Toft's non-prescriptive approach, since "the principles of eloquent speaking and singing may be applied in a wide variety of ways."⁷

In spite of this study's usefulness to performers and music analysts, scholars of rhetoric will note an omission that undermines the effectiveness of the entire book. Specifically, in his introduction, Toft declares:

My arrangement of the material has been inspired by the method of schooling William Kempe prescribed for children. Kempe suggested young scholars study "grammar," "Rhetoricall ornaments," "pronunciation and gesture," and "Logike" in the course of their education. But as my book mainly concerns the techniques of delivery, I have narrowed Kempe's plan to suit my purpose, omitting "Logike."⁸

Because of the Ramist rhetorical principles which dominated education during this period, however, "Logike" actually represents the general heading for *inventio* and *dispositio*, while "rhetoricke" represents the general heading for *elocutio*, *memoria*,

⁶This article originally appeared in *Early Music* 12 (1984): 173-189.

⁷Toft, *Tune thy Musicke*, 134.

⁸Toft, *Tune thy Musicke*, 11.

Book Review: *Tune thy Musicke*

and *pronunciatio*.⁹ By electing to ignore "Logike" in this study, Toft in effect eliminates the first two stages of traditional rhetoric from his methodology, creating a curious self-contradiction. Toft claims at the end of chapter one that "once singers understand the purpose of figures, they are in a position to generate in listeners those passions that are present in the text."¹⁰ Yet, contemporary sources confirm that without an understanding of *inventio*, the precise purpose of the rhetorical figures in a work will remain hidden from the analyst.¹¹ Thus, while Toft claims that an application of his methodology raises the affectivity of a performance, he fails to equip the performer and analyst with the means necessary to achieve this task.

With the ever-increasing interest in historically-informed performances, Toft's book will certainly be useful to performers and scholars of early music. Nevertheless, because he has narrowed the scope to suit his purpose, this work provides a mere stepping-stone to rhetorical issues where it could have provided the first truly comprehensive study of music and rhetoric in the Elizabethan and Jacobean lute song.

Lisa Szeker-Madden
University of Victoria

⁹For more on the infiltration of Ramist rhetorical principles in Elizabethan England see Howell, 127, 134-137; Sonnino, 1-12; T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakespeare's Small Latin & Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), 2:1-31; Rosamund Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 281-330. It is more than curious that Toft makes no mention of Ramist rhetoric nor of its importance in England during this period.

¹⁰Toft, *Tune thy Musicke*, 52.

¹¹See, for example, Newton, 147-148; Zachary Coke, *Art of Logick* (London, 1654), 218-220; Jean-Pierre de Crousaz, *La Logique* (London, 1724), 218.