Franchino Gafori and Marsilio Ficino

Citation

Permanent link
https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.InstRepos:37363313

Terms of Use
This article was downloaded from Harvard University’s DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA

Share Your Story
The Harvard community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Submit a story.

Accessibility
Professor Hilka’s transcript is likely to be of special convenience for some future editor of I$. There has further been deposited the writer’s typed transcript of C$, a manuscript of no particular excellence, together with a handwritten trial apparatus for the characteristic Prologue and Chapters 1 and 2.

FRANCIS P. MACOUN, JR

Franchino Gafori and Marsilio Ficino

The brilliant court of Lorenzo, the Magnificent, in Florence was rivelled in the last two decades of the fifteenth century in several other cities in the North of Italy. Not the least significant of these centers of Renaissance activity and humanistic culture was the court of Milan under the rule of Ludovico Sforza, commonly known as Il Moro. From 1481, when by an act of gross usurpation he supplanted his nephew, Gian Galeazzo Sforza (d.1494), he ruled Milan with an iron hand, cruel, vindictive, warlike, but also a patron of arts and letters, who invested his court with a splendor and with an atmosphere of culture entirely in keeping with the strange spirit of his age. His rule ended when he was captured by the invading French forces of Louis XII in 1500.

It was during the Moro’s reign that Leonardo da Vinci, coming from Florence, lived for sixteen years (1483-1499) in Milan. It was during this period that the University of Pavia, some twenty-two miles from Milan, became the greatest Italian rival of the University of Padua. The art of music was cultivated by the Sforza dukes long before the reign of Ludovico. Ludovico’s immediate predecessors had encouraged a lively musical activity at the court which was closely connected with the development of the art in the Cathedral of Milan.

In 1484 we find the first indication of the connection of Franchino Gafori (Gaffori, Gafurius, 1451-1522) with Milan. Engaged nominally as a singer, he assumed, either at once or very shortly, the office of Choirmaster of the Cathedral. Gafori is recognized today, by the side of Johannes Tinctoris (ca. 1446-1511), as one of the greatest musical theorists of the Renaissance. With his duties as Choirmaster of the Cathedral he combined, for some years at any rate, the office of Professor of Music at the University of Pavia. He often signs his name as ’phonasmus’ and ’musicis professor.’ He likewise composed music. A few manuscripts (masses, motets, etc.) are

1 The best account of the life of Gafori is to be found in the historical introduction of the facsimile of his Teorica Musica (Milan, 1937) edited by Gaetano Cesare (Roma, 1934).
preserved in the archives of the Cathedral, but he seems not to have risen to great eminence in this direction.

But that he was a great student and a scholar of no mean attainments is evident from his theoretical works. He seems to have had only a slight knowledge of Greek, for we know that he had a number of Greek treatises translated into Latin for his use. Of the breadth of his studies we have an example in a book deposited at present in the Harvard College Library. It is a copy of a part of the translation into Latin by Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) of the complete works of Plato.

Ficino, with his younger contemporary and protégé, Fico della Mirandola (1463-1494), made the Platonic Academy, founded at Florence by Cosimo de’ Medici and magnificently supported by Lorenzo, his grandson, the acknowledged center of philosophical studies in the second half of the fifteenth century. Ficino had been specifically commissioned by Cosimo to translate the whole of Plato into Latin. The work was finally put through the press in Florence by Laurentius de Alopa, Venetus, in the years 1484 and 1485. It was dedicated to Lorenzo. A complete copy consists of 562 leaves. The copy in question, which bears the place and the printer’s name but no date, includes 160 unnumbered leaves. It contains the Timaeus, the Critias, the Laws, the Eunomia, and the Letters. An apparently identical copy is owned by the British Museum.

The copy deposited at Harvard was once the property of Franchino Gaffori. Below the colophon we find the note, presumably in the possessor’s autograph: ‘Franchino Gaffori musicis professoris est hic liber; die vi maii 1480 emptus.’ Great interest is added to the volume by the fact that Gaffori made copious marginal notes. In addition to numerous passages of the text singled out for emphasis by the word ‘Nota’ in the margin, or by a pointing hand, there are more than one hundred and forty actual marginal notes or comments. They are written in the same hand as the possessor note at the end, and as a rule do no more than paraphrase a passage of the text.

Unfortunately these remarks on Plato or on Ficino (who wrote more or less lengthy commentaries or introductions to the separate works which he translated) do not reveal as much as we should like to know of what was going on in the mind of Gaffori as he read. Gaffori, who could, as is known, strike out vigorously at a rival in the field of music theory, seems never, while reading this book, to have fallen into a critical or disputatious mood. On the contrary, he seems to have been in a humble or even pious frame of mind. A very large number of the marginal annotations refer to moral sentiments or to religious utterances in Plato or in Ficino. ‘Here Plato invokes God at the beginning of his discourse,’ or, ‘Nothing is better than philosophy.’ In the Timaeus he selects such statements as the following: ‘Anima irrationalis est quasi vestigium animae rationalis.’ From a passage in Ficino’s commentary on the first letter of Plato he quotes: ‘Tutius est verbis divinis committendum quam litteris.’ There are, of course, a number of annotations of purely musical passages,
but they are not nearly as numerous as one might expect, and they are not very characteristic or very enlightening. For example, the second book of the Laws, in which Plato expounds his aesthetic theory of art as imitation, and dwells upon the significance of the choral ode for young and old, receives but scant attention in Gafori's marginal notes.

It would be interesting to discover whether Gafori was influenced by his reading of the Ficino Plato and changed any of his fundamental theoretical ideas. Gafori on the whole taught a straightforward Boethian theory of music, as did most of his predecessors and contemporaries. The Paduan professor of music, Ramis de Parcia, a Spaniard, was an exception. Gafori's nearest authorities, whom he quotes repeatedly, are Ugolino of Orvieto and one Anselmus Georgius of Parma. The latter is a little-known writer, apparently of the first half of the fifteenth century. The only known copy of his treatise 'De Harmonia,' which, like the Ficino Plato, has Gafori's possessor note on it, is now among the manuscripts in the Ambrosiana in Milan. It is not included in the great collections of Scriptores de Musica of Gerbert and Coussemaker.

Gafori published his first known theoretical work, the Theorica Opus, in Naples in 1486. A second edition, entitled Theorica Musica, was printed in Milan in 1492. By 1492 Gafori had surely read and annotated his Ficino Plato. Gaetano Cesare, the editor of the 1934 facsimile edition of Gafori's Theorica Musica, gives some indication of the passages which differ in the two editions of this book. From this it does not appear that Gafori departed in the later edition in any significant detail from his earlier position.

Twice, in the edition of 1492, he actually names and quotes Ficino. The first time, in Book 2, Chapter 3, he quotes the Latin translation of Plato's statement in the Laws, Book 2, that 'harmoniam esse ordinationem in ipsa vocecum per acutum et grave contemporantia,' with Ficino's explanation 'quam nos concentrum dicere solemus.' The other almost literal quotation (Book 2, Chapter 6) is from Ficino's commentary on the Epinomis to the effect that Plato often not only praises and admires arithmetic but maintains that arithmetic, more than any other discipline, sharpens the intellect, strengthens memory, and renders the mind most apt and prompt for all speculation and action.

More interesting than these results of Gafori's study is the observation, not hitherto emphasized, that Marsilio Ficino himself indulges in a little musical theorizing. The famous Platonist is reported to have had a certain amount of musical talent. We are told that he was able to sing his own verses to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument, designated as the 'plectrum.' This was probably some form of lute. It is further reported that he rarely attended a meeting of the Academy without bringing his plectrum with him. Like all other commentators on the Timaeus, from the earliest times to our own day, he becomes involved in a certain amount of musical theory and speculation. This accounts for his chapters in the Timaeuspreface: (28) Cur anima rei compositae paravitur: cur consonantiae
The Earliest Known English Playbill

IN 1931 Miss Eleanor Boswell discovered among the uncatalogued State Papers Domestic in the Public Record Office an English Broadside of 1684. This Broadside ante-dated by five years the William and Mary playbill found by the late W. J. Lawrence among the Verney Papers in 1911 and termed by him 'the oldest known English playbill.' There had been, however, in the Theatre Collection of the Harvard College Library since 1914 a small playbill (7½ by 5½ inches) — reproduced here approximately full size (Plate I) — which I believe to be more than twenty-seven years earlier than the James II bill in the Public Record Office.

This interesting Broadside, slightly imperfect, was acquired about 1830 for two guineas by William Upcott, the antiquary and collector, from Thomas Thorpe, the bookseller. Upcott had twelve copies of it lithographed for himself and his friends and then sold it to George Daniel, the miscellaneous writer and collector of theatrical curiosities. Daniel mounted it on one of the leaves of a Quarto volume bound for him in calf in 1832, and containing twenty tracts, broadsides, and clippings concerning Bartholomew Fair that he has assembled from various sources. When his library came up for auction at his death in 1864, this volume passed through the hands of Ellis, a dealer, into the possession of Henry Hunt; and as lot 489 in the great Hunt sale it was purchased in 1869 by the firm of Trepassy, who sold it to Robert Gould Shaw, founder of the Harvard Theatre Collection.

Without giving the date or the time, the playbill announces that at John Harris's Booth, in Bartholomew-Fair, next the Rope-dancers, is to be seen, The Court of King Henry the Second; And the Death of Fair Rosamond; With the merry Humours of Punchinello, and the Lancashire-Witches. As also the famous History of Bungy and Friar Bacon: With the


*W. J. Lawrence, The Elizabethan Playhouse and Other Studies, Second Series (Philadelphia, 1917), pp. 219, 241 (facsimiles of four William and Mary playbills, the oldest dated 9 November 1660).

Two of these copies are in the Harvard Theatre Collection.
CONTENTS

HAMILTON VAUGHAN BAIL, Views of Harvard to 1860: An Iconographic Study — Parts I-III 11, 185, 339

WILLIAM BERKHEIM, The Modern Language Center 396

JOHN H. BIRKS, The Story of Toby, a Sequel to Tytoll 118

WILLIAM H. BOND, Nance Oldfield: An Unrecorded Printed Play by Charles Reade 386

WILLIAM H. BOND, Wordsworth’s Thanksgiving Ode: An Unpublished Postscript 115

EDWIN G. BORING, The Library of the Psychological Laboratories 394

ETHEL B. CLARK, A Manuscript of John Keats at Dumbarton Oaks 90

I. BERNARD COHEN, A Lost Letter from Hobbes to Mersenne Found 112

ARTHUR H. COLE, The Business School Library and its Setting 332

C. LESLIE CRAIG, The Earliest Little Gliding Concordance 311

Exhibitions, 1946 213

REGINALD FITZ, President Eliot and Dr Holmes Leap Forward 212

EVA FLEISCHNER, Napoleon to His Mother: The First Draft of a Letter Written from School 244

LOUISE B. GRAVES, The Likeness of Emily Dickinson 248

ELMER M. GRIEGER, The Collecting of War Agency Material at Harvard 112

Guides to the Harvard Libraries 323

The Harvard Keats Memorial Studies 323

The Harvard-Newberry Calligraphic Series 262

PHILIP HoFFER, The Graphic Arts Department: An Experiment in Specialization 252

PHILIP HoFFER, A Newly Discovered Book with Painted Decorations from Willibald Pirkheimer’s Library 66

WILLIAM A. JACKSON, The Carl T. Keller Collection of Don Quixote 305

WILLIAM A. JACKSON, The First Separately Printed English Translation of Horace 238

WILLIAM A. JACKSON, Humphrey Dyson and His Collections of Elizabethan Proclamations 76

HAROLD S. JANTZ, A Funeral Elegy for Thomas Danforth, Treasurer of Harvard 113

FRANK N. JONES, Harvard’s Importation of Foreign Books since the War 256

OTTO KINKELDEY, Franchino Gaffori and Marsilio Ficino 379

RUPERT B. LILLIE, The Historica! Series of Harvard Dioramas 391

List of Contributors 127, 264, 399
THOMAS LITTLE, The Thomas Wolfe Collection of William B. Wisdom 280
ROBERT W. LOVETT, The Undergraduate and the Harvard Library, 1877–1937 221
PHILIP J. MCNIFF, Reading Room Problems in the Harvard College Library, 1942–1947 254
FRANCIS P. MAGOUN, JR, Photostats of the Historia de Prelibus Alexandri Magni (19) 377
KEYES D. METCALF, Foreword 5
KEYES D. METCALF, Spatial Growth in University Libraries 133
KEYES D. METCALF, The Undergraduate and the Harvard Library, 1765–1877 29
KEYES D. METCALF, The Undergraduate and the Harvard Library, 1937–1947 288
AGNES MONGAN, A Group of Newly Discovered Sixteenth-Century French Portrait Drawings 155
AGNES MONGAN, A Group of French Portrait Drawings—Addendum 397
New Catalogues of the Library of Congress 262
NATALIE N. NICHOLSON, The Engineering Library at Harvard University 387
MAXWELL E. PERKINS, Thomas Wolfe 269
FRED N. ROBBINS, Celtic Books at Harvard: The History of a Departmental Collection 52
HYDER E. ROOLINS, An O. Henry Cocktail 119
ADRIANA R. SALEM, The Purchases of a Seventeenth-Century Librarian 241
Sales of Duplicate Books 261
CLIFFORD K. SHIPTON, The Collections of the Harvard University Archives 176
CLIFFORD K. SHIPTON, The Harvard University Archives: Goal and Function 101
Staff Activities 260
The Theatre Collection in New Quarters 261
WILLIAM VAN LENNEP, The Earliest Known English Playbill 382
WILLIAM VAN LENNEP, John Adams to a Young Playwright 317
THOMAS WOLFE and MAXWELL E. PERKINS, The Last Letter of Thomas Wolfe, and the Reply to It 278