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THE GRASS-SNAKE IN VERONA: ON MADRIGALS SET TO MUSIC
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Over the last fifty years, the prevalence of semiotic studies has produced, in addition to undeniable achievements in the understanding of some dynamics in literature and discourse, a considerable number of different terminological systems. Julia Kristeva first coined the term *intertextuality* in her 1967¹ essay as a means of analysing and discussing the intersections between literary texts and between enunciations, and she applied this concept to two different fields of study (literary criticism and linguistics). Therefore in subsequent scholarship this term has been characterised by a “dangerous polysemy”,² with the inevitable implication that scholars often use the same word, *intertextuality*, in reference to different concepts, or different words in reference to the same concept of “intertextuality”.³ Nevertheless, this terminological variety may also be the result of two opposite speculative leanings. Essays by Kristeva, Riffaterre and Eco employ various different terminologies in regards to different aspects of intertextuality, with very detailed definitions that attempt to form a semiotic theory that includes as much discursive phenom-

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1. Julia Kristeva, “Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman”, *Critique* 33 (1967): 438-65.

2. Segre, “Intertestualità”, 574 and 582; Algirdas Julien Greimas e Joseph Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (Paris: Hachette, 1979), 194.

3. I especially refer to works with a methodological intent: Kristeva, “Bakhtine”; Michael Riffaterre, “La trace de l’intertexte”, *La Pensée* 215 (October 1980), Id. *La Production du texte* (Paris: Seuil 1979), especially the essay “Semiosi intertestuale: Du Bellay, ‘Songe’ VII”, 149-66; Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982); Cesare Segre, “Intertestuale – interdiscorsivo. Appunti per una fenomenologia delle fonti”, in *La parola ritrovata. Fonti e analisi*, ed. Costanzo Di Girolamo and Ivano Paccagnella (Palermo: Sellerio, 1982), 15-28, then with the title “Intertestualità e interdiscorsività nel romanzo e nella poesia”, in Id., *Testo e romanzo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984), 103-18 and in Id., *Opera critica* (Milan: Mondadori, 2014), 573-91 (reference edition); Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula* (Milan: Bompiani, 1979) and Id., *Sulla letteratura* (Milan: Bompiani, 2002).

ena as possible. Conversely, Genette and Segre propose a terminological simplification – characterised, especially in Segre, by an appreciation of Bakhtin's theories – with the aim of equipping scholars with useful interpretative tools that are, as far as possible, unambiguous.⁴

This analysis of the intertextual links between some Trecento madrigals will apply Genette and Segre's concept of intertextuality: the presence of a text in another text through use of citation or allusion. Indeed, this definition clearly circumscribes the field of research, and it is also productive for the analysis of poetic texts of different periods, as Segre, Maria Corti and Gian Biagio Conte's studies have demonstrated.⁵

The texts set to music in the Italian Ars Nova are particularly appropriate for intertextual analysis. These compositions often include verbal or metric prosodic connections (especially in their rhymes and in the choice of rhyme scheme) with other Trecento lyric texts without music,⁶ or with other Ars Nova compositions. At times, these connections create small sylloges, usually called "cycles",⁷ composed of a series of texts deeply interrelated from a thematic-lexical point of view.

4. A good summary of different terminological systems is in Andrea Bernardelli, "Il concetto di intertestualità", in *La rete intertestuale. Percorsi tra testi, discorsi e immagini* (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2010), 9-62 and Id., "The Concept of Intertextuality Thirty Years On: 1967-1997", *Versus. Quaderni di studi semiotici* 77/78 (1997): 3-22; Id. *Che cos'è l'intertestualità* (Rome: Carocci, 2013); Id., *Intertestualità* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1998); Marina Polacco, *L'intertestualità* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1998).

5. See, for example, Maria Corti, "Intertestualità", in *Per una enciclopedia della comunicazione letteraria* (Milan: Bompiani, 1997), 15-32; Ead., "Una tipologia dell'intertestualità", in Ead., *La felicità mentale. Nuove prospettive per Cavalcanti e Dante* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), 61-71; Cesare Segre, "La favola della luna (Ariosto, 'Sat.', III, 208-31) e i suoi precedenti", in *Book Production and Letters in the Western European Renaissance. Essays in Honour of Conor Faby*, ed. Anna Laura Lepschy, John Took, Dennis E. Rhodes (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1986), 279-83, now with the title "I pazzi e la luna dietro al monte (Ariosto, «Sat.», III, 208-31)" in Segre, *Opera critica*, 625-30; Gian Biagio Conte, *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974). Even if it is precedent to the creation of the term *intertextuality* by Kristeva, it is worth mentioning a fundamental essay on Dante's poetry by Gianfranco Contini, "Un'interpretazione di Dante", in Id., *Un'idea di Dante* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), 69-111 [previously published on *Paragone* (October 1965), and in Id., *Varianti e altra linguistica, Una raccolta di saggi (1938-1968)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), 369-405].

6. See Guido Capovilla, "Ascendenze culte nella lingua poetica del Trecento. Un sondaggio", *Rivista di Letteratura italiana* 1 (1983), 233-70, 433-89.

7. In addition to the "biscia cycle", the subject of this essay, see the well-known cycles "del parlaro": Piero, *A l'ombra d'un parlaro* and *Sovra un fiume regale*; Jacopo da Bologna, *O dolze apres'un bel parlaro fiume* and *Un bel parlare vive su la riva*; Giovanni da Firenze, *Appres'un fiume chiaro* and *O parlaro gentil, se dispogliato* (see Nino Pirrotta, "Marchettus de Padua and the Italian Ars Nova", *Musica Disziplin* 9 (1955): 57-71 at 69-70 and Robert Nosow, "The *perlaro* Cycle Reconsidered", *Studi musicali*, n.s. 2/2 (2011): 253-80); and "delle ninfe Euganee": Piero/Jacopo da Bologna, *Sì come al canto de la bella Iguana*; Giovanni da Firenze, *Nascoso el viso stava fra le fronde*; *Pianze la bella Iguana* (Anonymous). Antonio Calvia identifies a couple of madrigals set to music by Nicolò del Preposto linked by the presence of the syntagma "bruna vesta" and with a strong thematic connection to Giovanni Boccaccio's *Filistrato* (Antonio Calvia, "Un dittico visionario nella veste musicale di Nicolò del Preposto", in *Cara scientia mia, musica*, *Studi per Maria Caracci Vela*, ed. Angela Romagnoli, Daniele Sabaino, Rodobaldo Tibaldi, and Pietro Zappalà (Pisa: ETS, 2018), 1027-66, and his essay in this volume).

Sometimes the intertextual nexus is a simple mnemonic echo, intentional or not, of a well-known text used (especially by mediocre poets) as a source of metric *iuncturae* to create a new poem. In this case, the reuse of a poetic text could concern specific rhyme-words, the initial or final hemistich of the hendecasyllable or even entire verses. This kind of intertextuality, related to the signifier (rhyme and syntagmatic accents) of *iuncturae* or of chains of rhymes taken from another text, is essentially “formal” and poets do not use it to create a dialogue or a thematic connection with previous texts. Nevertheless, the study of these intertextual echoes is useful to determine the author’s cultural *milieu* (especially when he is anonymous) and to recreate his “library”.⁸

In other poems, like the madrigals I will analyse later, intertextual links are more substantial and are employed by poets to create semantic and thematic connections with one or more previous texts. In these cases, recognising the intertextual links is often essential to understanding the whole meaning of the text, which is only ascertainable by turning our attention to the quoted text and to the meaning of the intertextual quote in its original context.⁹

For example, the so-called “biscia cycle” is composed of the madrigals *Nel bel zardino*, *Posando sopra un’aqua*, and *Soto l’imperio*, that were set to music by da Jacopo da Bologna, and the madrigal *Donna già fui*, that was set to music by Giovanni da Cascia:¹⁰

Jacopo, *Nel bel zardino*

Nel bel zardino che l’Atice cenge	
vive la bisa fera venenosa,	
che zià fo dona bela e amorosa,	3
donando a mi fedel ottima luce.	
Spezò la fede e tene via deversa,	
sì che de dona in serpe fo reversa.	6

8. For more information on this argument, see Harold Bloom, *The Anatomy of Influence* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2012), for some examples of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian poetry see Domenico De Robertis, “Petrarca interprete di Dante (ossia leggere Dante con Petrarca)”, *Studi danteschi* 61 (1989): 307-28; Capovilla, “Ascendenze culte”; Andrea Afribo, “Sequenze e sistemi di rime dal secondo duecento ai *Fragments*”, in Id., *Petrarca e petrarchismo. Capitoli di lingua, stile e metrica* (Rome: Carocci, 2009), 119-57.

9. In addition to the studies by Nosow and Calvia (see note 7), some useful methodological advice for the *Ars Nova* texts set to music can be found in Maria Caraci Vela, “Per una nuova lettura del madrigale *Aquila altera / Creatura gentile / Uccel di Dio* di Jacopo da Bologna”, *Philomusica online* 13 (2014): 2-58 and Maria Sofia Lannutti, “Polifonie verbali in un madrigale araldico trilingue attribuito e attribuibile a Petrarca: *La fiera testa che d’uman si ciba*”, in *Musica e poesia nel Trecento italiano. Verso una nuova edizione critica dell’«Ars nova»*, ed. Antonio Calvia and Maria Sofia Lannutti (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2015), 45-92.

10. The texts are according to Giuseppe Corsi, ed., *Poesie musicali del Trecento* (Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1970).

Cum più la fuzi, più me dà di morso,
né remedio ge trovo né secorso. 8

Jacopo, *Posando sopra un'aqua*

Posando sopra un'aqua, en sonio vidi
tramutars'una dona in fera bissa,
che tut'al volto me se zitò fissa. 3

Ligomi per li piedi cum la coda
e questa serpe me mordea sì forte,
ch'io me svegliai poco lonci da morte. 6

Atorno 'l collo me lassò una stropa,
che per incanti mai no se desgropa. 8

Jacopo, *Soto l'imperio*

Soto l'imperio del posente prince,
che nel so nom' ha le dorate ale,
regna la bisa el cui morso me vince 3
sì, che da lei fugir nula me vale.

La me persegue e 'l cor mio segnoreza;
poi como dona instesa se vageza. 6

Come ch'io la remiro pur s'acorze,
i ochi doneschi e chiude e via sen fuze;
ma como serpe toscosa porze 9
de foco fiamma che m'aceca e struze.

L'animo ha crudo e sì aspra la scorza,
ch'amor en lei per mi più non ha forza. 12

Custei me fe' zà lume più che 'l sole;
cum più zò me ricordo più me dole. 14

Giovanni, *Donna già fui*

Donna già fui leggiadra innamorata,
facendo al servo mio dolce sembante;
or sono in biscia orribil tramutata 3

sol per uccider questo falso amante:
non so come 'l suo cor mai lo sofferse,
ch'a dirmi villania si discoperse. 6

Com'io di tormentarlo sia ben sazia,
tornerò donna e renderògli grazia. 8

The four madrigals, when considered individually, have independent meanings based on different variants of two widespread *topoi* in Trecento poetry: the theme of the loved woman compared to a wild animal (especially

because of her pride),¹¹ and the theme of the woman with no mercy for her lover (typical of courtly love poetry since the troubadours).¹² However, when the four texts are considered together, they show some common *iuncturae* and words that cannot only be explained by their thematic affinity, and therefore they suggest the presence of an intertextual dialogue between the poets:

Table 1: Intertextual references in *Nel bel zardino*, *Donna già fui* and *Posando sopra un'aqua*

<i>Nel bel zardino</i> (Jacopo) v. 2-3 vive la bisa fera venenosa, / che zìa fo DONA bela e amorosa v. 6 de DONA in serpe fo reversa	<i>Donna già fui</i> (Giovanni) vv. 1, 3 DONNA già fui leggiadra innamorata / [...] or sono in biscia orribil <i>tramutata</i>	<i>Posando sopra un'aqua</i> (Jacopo) v. 2 <i>tramutars'</i> una DONA in fera bissa
<i>Nel bel zardino</i> (Jacopo) v. 7 più me dà di morso v. 6 serpe	<i>Soto l'imperio</i> (Jacopo) v. 3 el cui morso me vince v. 9 serpe	<i>Posando sopra un'aqua</i> (Jacopo) v. 5 me mordea sì forte v. 5 serpe
<i>Nel bel zardino</i> (Jacopo) v. 4 donando a mi fedel ottima luce v. 2 vive la bisa v. 7 cum più la fuзи, più me dà di morso	<i>Soto l'imperio</i> (Jacopo) v. 13 Custeì me fe' zà lume più che 'l sole v. 3 regna la bisa vv. 3-4 el cui morso me vince / sì, che da lei fugir nulla me vale	

Furthermore, the recurrence of the word “biscia” (Visconti’s heraldic symbol *par excellence*)¹³ in all of the texts and the precise historical and geographical references in the first verses of Jacopo’s *Nel bel zardino che l’Atice cenge* (v. 1) and *Soto l'imperio* (vv. 1-2 “Soto l'imperio del posente prince, / che nel so nom’ ha le dorate ale”) suggest that this cycle could allude to a specific event or person.

11. For some examples see Niccolò Soldanieri, *Un bel girfalco scese a le mie grida*; Cino Rinuccini, *Un falcon pellegrin dal ciel discese*; Cino da Pistoia, *Saper vorrei s’Amor, che venne acceso e Ciò che procede di cosa mortale*; Matteo Frescobaldi, *Una fera gentil più ch’altra fera*. An overview of texts united by the topos of the woman-falcon can be found in Francesco Filippo Minetti, “Autobiografico, o autobiograficamente rivisitato, il madrigale *Mostrò-mmi Amor* intonato da Francesco Landini?”, in “*Col dolce suon che da te piove*” *Studi su Francesco Landini e la musica del suo tempo. In memoria di Nino Pirrotta*, ed. Antonio Delfino and Maria Teresa Rosa Barezzi (Florence: SISMEL - Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1999), 429-52.

12. As a paradigmatic example for this topic see Dante’s *Così nel mio parlar vogli’essere aspro*.

13. The presence of heraldic symbols is very common in vernacular and Middle Latin encomiastic and political poems of the Trecento. For Visconti’s “biscia” or “vipera” some examples can be found in *Valorosa vipera gentile. Poesia e letteratura in volgare attorno ai Visconti fra Trecento e primo Quattrocento*, ed. Simone Albonico, Marco Limongelli and Barbara Pagliari (Rome: Viella, 2014) and in Maria Antonietta Marogna, “La vipera viscontea in versi latini trecenteschi”, in *L’antiche e le moderne*

Many scholarly interpretations of these texts are formed based on the presence of the Visconti's emblem and on the only available historical and geographic reference: a passage of Filippo Villani's *Liber de origine civitatis Florentinae*, which mentions that Jacopo and Giovanni were together at Mastino II della Scala's court in Verona.¹⁴ Since Mastino died in 1351 and Jacopo composed a motet and two madrigals (one of them dated 1348)¹⁵ in honour of Luchino Visconti (who also died in 1351), the common hypothesis is that the two musicians were together in Verona between 1349 and 1351.

Genevieve Thibault has attempted an interpretation of Jacopo's *Soto l'imperio*.¹⁶ She concludes that vv. 1-2 "posente prinze / che nel so nom' ha le dorate ale" contain an allusion to Galeazzo II Visconti (lord of Milan in 1354), because his name includes the word *ale*, and she therefore posits that Jacopo came back to Milan after the death of Mastino II della Scala. However, Giuseppe Corsi, in his anthology *Rimatori del Trecento* (1969),¹⁷ suggests that the four madrigals are only linked via the theme of a woman that turns into a grass snake, and he does not offer any interpretation for the whole textual cycle. He only puts forward two suggestions: the first concerns the possibility that Giovanni's *Donna già fui* is a "woman's reply"¹⁸ to Jacopo's *Nel bel zardino*; the second is an identification of the "posente prinze / che nel so nom' ha le dorate ale" (*Soto l'imperio* vv. 1-2) with Mastino II della Scala who, as an Imperial vicar, was allowed to include the imperial eagle in his emblem.

In two essays published in 1976 and 1988,¹⁹ Enrico Paganuzzi outlines an

carte. Studi in memoria di Giuseppe Billanovich, ed. Antonio Manfredi and Carla Maria Monti (Rome-Padua: Antenore, 2007), 397-417.

14. «Iohannes de Cascia, cum Mastini Della Scala tiranni veronensis atria questus gratia frequentaret et cum magistro Iacobo bononiensi artis musice peritissimo de artis excellentia contenderet, tiranno eos muneribus irritante, mandralia plura sonosque multos et ballata intonuit mire dulcedinis et artificiosissime melodie, in quibus quam magne, quam suavis doctrine fuerit in arte manifestavit». (Filippo Villani, *De origine civitatis Florentie et de famosis civibus*, ed. Giuliano Tantruli (Padua: Antenore, 1997), 408).

15. The motet is *Lux purpurata radiis/Diligite justitiam* and the madrigals are *Lo lume vostro* and *O in Italia*. A second motet in honor of Luchino and attributable to Jacopo is actually incomplete (we have only the *triplum Laudibus dignis*). For an analysis of these texts and a summary of the *status quaestionis* see Elena Abramov-Van Rijk, "Luchino Visconti, Jacopo da Bologna and Petrarch: Courting a Patron", *Studi Musicali*, n. s. 3 (2012): 7-63.

16. Genevieve Thibault, "Emblèmes et devises des Visconti dans les oeuvres musicales du Trecento", in *L'Arts Nova Italiana del Trecento III*, ed. F. Alberto Gallo (Certaldo: Centro di Studi sull'Arts nova Italiana del Trecento, 1970), 131-60.

17. Giuseppe Corsi, ed., *Rimatori del Trecento* (Turin: UTET, 1969).

18. Corsi, *Rimatori*, 1012.

19. Enrico Paganuzzi, "Il Trecento", in *La musica a Verona*, ed. Enrico Paganuzzi and Pierpaolo Brugnoli (Verona: Banca mutua popolare di Verona, 1976), 33-70 and Id., "La musica alla corte scaligera", in *Gli scaligeri 1277-1387. Saggi e schede pubblicati in occasione della mostra storico-documentaria allestita dal Museo di Castelvecchio di Verona (giugno-novembre 1988)*, ed. Gian Maria Varanini (Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1988), 527-32.

interpretation that satisfies the meanings of all four madrigals, and he hypothesises that the metamorphosis of the woman into a grass snake alludes to a woman who married a Visconti, and thus acquired his emblem. Since the expression “zardino che l’Atice cenge” points to a setting around the city of Verona, Paganuzzi connects the four madrigals to the marriage between Beatrice Della Scala (also known as Regina), Mastino II’s daughter, and Bernabò Visconti, which took place in 1350. He supports his hypothesis with these arguments:

1) the text refers to the woman’s brightness (*Nel bel zardino* v. 4 and *Soto l’imperio* v. 13), which aligns with Dante’s description of Beatrice;

2) v. 3 of *Soto l’imperio* “regna la bisa el cui morso me vince” includes an allusion to the name Regina, from the verb *regna*;

3) the text mentions a spell that is cast on a rope so that it cannot be untied (*Posando sopra un’aqua* vv. 7-8), which is an allusion to Beatrice’s reputation as a witch;

4) the “posente prince” refers to Mastino II, according to Corsi’s interpretation.

Paganuzzi asserts that the incomplete nature of the madrigals may explain the lack of a happy ending (necessary, due to the happy context of the narrative) and the discrepancy in the number of musical settings (three texts set to music by Jacopo, and only one by Giovanni). Carleton and Nosow accept this interpretation, and they add some new arguments to support it. Carleton says that the image of a pitiless grass snake that wins over its lover constitutes a form of Visconti propaganda, aimed at instilling fear in the neighboring *signorie*.²⁰ This intimidation was possible due to the diffusion of these madrigals in Verona (according to Paganuzzi), outside the Visconti’s domain.

However, contrastingly, Nosow proposes that *Posando sopra un’aqua* be excluded from the cycle.²¹ He only finds intertextual links between *Donna già fui* and *Nel bel zardino*, whereas he interprets *Posando sopra un’aqua* as belonging to a “different category of lyric”, due to the fact that in this last madrigal the metamorphosis takes place in a dream. According to Nosow (who incidentally quotes *Soto l’imperio* in a note), *Nel bel zardino* tells of Bernabò Visconti’s lament, burdened by the woman / grass snake / Beatrice Della Scala, whereas *Donna già fui* constitutes Beatrice’s answer to Bernabò, and the final sentence “renderolli graçia” signifies both the concession of mercy to her lover and the woman’s homage to her new lord.

20. Sarah Carleton, “Heraldry in the Trecento Madrigal” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009).

21. Nosow, “The Perlaro Cycle”.

Not all of Paganuzzi's arguments are convincing. Beatrice's reputation as a witch – in addition to being unflattering – cannot be applied to an event that happened in 1350 (her marriage to Bernabò), because it derives from an accusation that Gian Galeazzo levelled against Bernabò in 1385, during the trial which determined his removal from the political scene.²² The alleged allusion to the name Regina at v. 3 of *Soto l'imperio* is also somewhat tenuous, and frankly I do not find Paganuzzi's argument convincing. Nevertheless, the madrigals' implied meaning is the fundamental obstacle to Paganuzzi's interpretation. Only in the madrigal set to music by Giovanni, where the woman speaks, does her metamorphosis into the grass snake have positive connotations, whereas in the other three, set to music by Jacopo, the metamorphosis is clearly negative, and in two cases (*Nel bel zardino e Soto l'imperio*) the lover states his regret for the time when the woman was devoted to him and used to be his source of light. These meanings are not very appropriate for the celebration of a marriage.

Even Carleton's argument is problematic. If we consider that Bernabò is the woman / grass snake's lover, it is not plausible that he is scared by his wife's heraldic metamorphosis. Even a hypothetical display of power in the Della Scala family's domain is not consistent with the characterisation of Mastino II as "potente prince", and an exhibition of this kind would have been counter-productive on the occasion of a marriage that was supposed to strengthen the peace stipulated in 1343 after the war between Mastino II and Luchino Visconti. For these reasons, I think that Carleton's interpretation cannot be considered plausible.

The text and music of a lyric song (a madrigal, caccia or ballata) sometimes derive from different creative acts that are distinct in time and space. In other words, it is not necessarily the case that the text and the music were composed at the same time or in the same context. The text and music of the polytextual madrigal *Aquila altera / Creatura gentile / Uccel di Dio*, for example, were clearly the result of separate compositional endeavours,²³ and the text of the trilingual madrigal *La fiera testa* is attributable to Petrarca and set to music twice, once by Nicolò del Preposto and once by Bartolino da Padova.²⁴ Therefore,

22. «Item quia, quum tradidisset illustrem filiam suam Dominam Catharinam Domino Comiti in uxorem, ipsi Dominae Catharinae fecit fieri incantationes et sortilegia, quibus stantibus ipsa non poterat concipere. Et mortua Domina Regina, propalatis dictis sortilegiis, et distinctis, et interfectis, dicta Domina Catharina infra tres menses concepit» (*Annales Mediolanenses*, ed. Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Vol. 16 [Milan: Societas Palatina, 1730], col. 798).

23. Caraci Vela, "Per una nuova lettura".

24. Lannutti, "Polifonie verbali" and Maria Caraci Vela, "Le intonazioni polifoniche de 'La fiera testa che d'uman si ciba': problemi di contestualizzazione e di esegesi", in *Musica e poesia*, 93-141.

we cannot assume that the texts of all four madrigals were composed when both Jacopo and Giovanni were in Verona, and in any case, it is possible that the two composers met elsewhere before, at the Visconti's or even at Scaliger's court, or at one of the other courts in northern Italy.

For these reasons, my own interpretation will avoid supposition of this nature and instead focus primarily on the meaning of the four madrigals, on the basis of just two certain details: 1) that the texts include an allusion to the Visconti's emblem, the grass snake, once in a positive light (Giovanni, *Donna già fui*), and three times in a negative light (Jacopo); and 2) that the metamorphosis takes place in a Veronese setting. In fact, this last detail only occurs in two of Jacopo's madrigals (*Nel bel zardino* and *Soto l'imperio*), and is particularly notable when read taking into account other texts and iconographic documents. The verb *cingere* (to surround or encircle) can be employed in geographical contexts to refer to the enclosure of an area or to a position beside an enclosed area, as we can see in these verses taken from Fazio degli Uberti's *Dittamondo* (especially numbers 2 and 3):²⁵

- 1) [L'Italia] dal settentrion la chiude e **cinge** / la Germania e con quella s'intende (I.xi.94-6)
- 2) [la Toscana] dal mezzogiorno la **cinge** e afferra / lo mar Mediterano; poi Apenino / di vèr settentrion chiude la terra (III.vi.19-21)
- 3) [L'isola di Creta] libico mar dal mezzodì la **cinge** (IV.vii.65)
- 4) La Spagna Portogallo serra e **cinge** (IV.xxvii.88)

Therefore, the expression "che l'Atice cenge" could refer to an area to the east or the west of the river.²⁶ However, the expression "bel zardino" occurs in two other madrigals set to music by Giovanni and related to Scaliger's court:²⁷

1) In *Nascoso el viso*, which belongs to the so-called Anguane's cycle (a mythological creature of the popular tradition of north-eastern Italy): vv. 1-2: "Nascoso el viso stava fra le fronde / *d'un bel zardino*";

2) In *La bella stella*, Lancillotto Anguissola's enigmatic madrigal there is an allusion to a "*bel giardino* adorno / di bianchi gigli di sotto e d'intorno".

25. Fazio degli Uberti, *Il Dittamondo e le Rime*, ed. Giuseppe Corsi, 2 vols. (Bari: Laterza, 1959).

26. For some insight into the mapping of river courses in Northern Italy in the fourteenth century, see the map preserved in Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 1960, f. 267v.

27. The texts are according to Corsi, *Poesie musicali*.

In any case, the passage in *Soto l'imperio* vv. 1-2, “Soto l'imperio del posente prince / che nel suo nom' ha le dorate ale”, removes any doubt because this periphrasis refers, according to Corsi, to an exponent of the Della Scala's family. This text is comparable to the statues of the Arche Scaligere, that show Cangrande and Mastino II with winged helmets, and to this celebrative *ballata minore*, taken from Gidino da Sommacampagna's metric treatise, which would appear to support Corsi's hypothesis:²⁸

Arder d'amor mi face
quel Can che fuga la Lupa fallace.

Questo bianco Mastino
con l'ale d'oro sempre vola in alto;
l'excelso paladino
ch'el guida sempre tende al summo smalto.
Però sansa diffalto
sempre luy servirò de cuor verace.

It is also possible that the expression “bel zardino che l'Atice cenge” (*Nel bel zardino*, v. 1) refers not to the Della Scala's domains, but to the city of Verona, which in this period was characterised by the presence of several urban green areas, especially after the construction of the city walls by Cangrande in 1325, that enclosed large fields reserved for arboriculture.²⁹

The simultaneous depiction in these texts of a grass snake, representative of a Visconti, described as imperious and merciless even if in a Scaligerian *milieu*, and the portrayal of one Della Scala family member in flattering terms (described “posente prince”) would seem to be a contradiction. However, in the colourful history of fourteenth-century northern *signorie*, characterised by continuous and unexpected changes of alliance, it is possible to identify an event that may help to reveal the meaning behind these four madrigals.

In the first 30 years of the fourteenth century, Mastino II della Scala was able to take advantage of an alliance with Milan, Florence and other *signorie* of northern Italy against John of Bohemia.³⁰ In 1335, he was the most pow-

28. Gidino da Sommacampagna, *Trattato e Arte deli Ritrimi Volgari*, ed. G. P. Caprettini (Vago di Lavagno: La Grafica Editrice, 1993).

29. On this topic see A. Conforti Calcagni, “Giardini scaligeri ed altro verde urbano nel Trecento”, in *Gli scaligeri 1277-1387*, 261-6.

30. In 1330, John of Bohemia, son of Emperor Henry VII, went to Italy driven by imperial designs, and took advantage of the confusion caused by continuous wars between the rising *signorie* of Northern Italy. Brescia, threatened on the west by the Visconti and on the east by the Della Scala family, was the first city that declared its loyalty to John, followed by Bergamo, Lucca, Parma, Reggio and Modena. In 1331, John went back to Bohemia, where he was defeated in a war against an

erful lord of Italy and one of the most powerful lords in Europe, according to Giovanni Villani:

Che il Mastino avea minacciato che innanzi il mezzo maggio prossimo [1336] verrebbe a vedere le porte di Firenze con III^m armadure a cavallo, per abattere l'orgoglio de' Fiorentini; ed erali possibile, ch'elli era signore di Verona, di Padova, di Vicenza, di Trevigi, di Brescia, di Feltrò, di Civita Belluna, di Parma, di Modona, e di Lucca; e aveano di rendita l'anno di gabelle de le dette X cittadi e di loro castella più di VII^c migliaia di fiorini d'oro, che non ha re de' Cristiani che lli abbia se none il re di Francia, senza l'altro loro séguito e amistà de' Ghibellini, che mai non fuoro tiranni in Italia di tanta potenza (l. XII, cap. XLV).³¹

However, on June 21, 1336, Florence and Venice formed an alliance in order to challenge the power of the Della Scala family, and they waged war against Mastino II. Initially, the Visconti did not take part because they were dealing with the stabilisation of the territories gained in the war against John, as well as some family infighting. In 1334-5, Lodrisio Visconti organised a conspiracy against the triumvirate in charge, formed by Azzone, Luchino and Giovanni Visconti. The conspiracy failed, and Lodrisio was forced to seek refuge in Verona in 1336, where he tried to reorganise a new attack against the triumvirate with the aid of Mastino II, who probably provided him with financial aid. The chronicler Peter Azario, who is usually rather impartial, wrote:³²

Preterea post multos annos dominus Ludrixius Vicecomes, filius quondam domini Petri germani prefati domini Mathei, in Sepri et apud Gallerate castrum Crene erexit valde pulcrum, multum homines Seprii gravando. [...] Et tandem se gessit pro molesto quod Veronam fugit.³³

As a result of Lodrisio's presence in Verona and the threat of war against Milan with Mastino II, the Visconti broke their alliance with Mastino, stip-

alliance led by Louis IV the Bavarian. While John was dealing with this problematic situation, in Italy, Florence, Mastino II della Scala, the Visconti, Mantua, Ferrara and Robert of Anjou made an alliance to conquer the cities that were under John's protection and to divide Northern Italy into different zones of influence, on the basis of a mutually agreed pact. However, Mastino II broke the deal and went on to conquer some areas of Northern Italy, even threatening Florence through control of the Apennines between Parma and Lucca.

31. Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Porta, (Parma: Guanda, 1995), III, 100.

32. On the chroniclers of the Visconti and their relationships with power see Sharon Dale, "Fourteenth-Century Lombard Chronicles", in *Chronicling History. Chroniclers and Historians in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Sharon Dale, Allison Williams Lewin, Duane J. Osheim (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 171-95.

33. Petri Azarii *Liber gestorum in Lombardia*, ed. Francesco Cognasso (Bologna: 1926-39), 33 Muratorius, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Vol. 16 P. 4, 33.

ulated in 1332, and joined the anti-Scaligerian league alongside Florence and Venice. In 1337, the league arrived at the gates of Verona with 4000 knights led by Luchino Visconti. Therefore, Mastino II, cornered, was forced to attack the enemy in an open field with only 3000 knights. Despite significantly outnumbering Mastino's army, Luchino refused to fight and left for Milan, which may either have been the result of a secret agreement with Mastino II, or due to the desertion of some of his knights. Whatever the reason, the war continued without the participation of the Visconti until its conclusion in 1339; after which, the Scaliger realm was reduced to the territories of Verona and Vicenza only.

Immediately after the end of the war, Lodrisio Visconti, still exiled in the Scaligerian lands and financially supported by Mastino II, recruited some mercenary troops near Verona and Vicenza and waged war against Milan. This allowed Mastino II to be rid of the dangerous presence of the mercenaries and at the same time to weaken the Visconti. Different chroniclers report Mastino's involvement; Pietro Azario says that

Azo [...] maioritatem suorum equestium tenebat in Brixia, timendo ne prefatus dominus Mastinus civitatem Brixie recuperare studeret quam perdiderat et cuius domini Mastini consilio prefatus dominus Ludrisius se gerebat;³⁴

Galvano Fiamma says that³⁵

Anno Domini 1337 [recte 1339] fuit bellum de Parabiago inter Dominum Lodrisium Vicecomitem, qui cum magno exercitu, auxilioque Domini Mastini de la Scala Azonem dominio privare conabatur.

and Giovanni Villani says that

Messer Loderigo Visconti, consorto di meser Azzo Visconti signore di Milano e suo ribello, andò a Vincenza con sua moneta, e col favore e moneta di meser Mastino, il quale per levarsi delle sue terre la detta gente stati suoi avversari, e per mandarli adosso a meser Azzo suo nimico, fece condocere al detto meser Loderigo la detta compagna (l. XII, cap. XCVII);³⁶

whereas the *Annales Mediolanenses* report that Mastino II may have attempted to double-cross the Visconti:

34. Ibid.

35. Gualvanei de la Flamma *Manipulus Florum*, ed. Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Vol. 11 (Milan: Societas Palatina, 1727), col. 736.

36. Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, III, 206.

Nam Dominus Mastinus auctor hujus mali ficte scipserat Domino Azzoni, quod sibi cavere deberet, quia gens alienigena cito invaderet statum suum.³⁷

In February 1339, Lodrisio crossed the Adda with 2000 knights, according to Villani, an amount more or less confirmed by Fiamma, who reports 2500 knights, 800 infantrymen and 200 crossbowmen. Lodrisio's attack was a serious threat to Milan, especially when the troops led by Luchino were defeated near Parabiago, and Luchino himself was captured by Lodrisio. The final battle happened near Parabiago again, on February 21. Galvano Fiamma reports that both formations used the Visconti's grass-snake and eagle emblem as a banner, and adopted two different battle cries to distinguish themselves: the Milanese shouted "miles sancti Ambrosij", while Lodrisio's troops cried "ruithband Heinrich".³⁸ While the authenticity of this anecdote is unclear, it shows that the Visconti in power in Milan, with which Fiamma sympathises, perceived this battle as a conflict between two factions of the same family, both of whom fought under the same banner. Milan won the war and Lodrisio was imprisoned until Luchino's death, after which he was taken into the service of Giovanni and Galeazzo II Visconti as a skilled captain, until his death in Milan in 1364.

I propose that the texts of the four madrigals discussed in this study in fact refer specifically to these events between 1336 and February 1339, and I consider that the woman subject who metamorphoses into a merciless grass snake acts as a metaphor of Lodrisio's betrayal, particularly because Lodrisio contributed to the family's political and military rise during Matteo I's tenure. According to this hypothesis, it is possible to explain why the verses refer to a woman who was well disposed and loyal to her lover in the past (*Donna già fui* vv. 1-2 "Donna già fui leggiadra innamorata, / facendo al servo mio dolce semblante" and *Soto l'imperio* vv. 13-4 "Custei me fe' zà lume più che 'l sole / cum più zo me ricordo più me dole"), while in *Nel bel zardino* we find a reference to Lodrisio's treachery (vv. 3-6 "che zìa fo dona bela e amorosa, / donando a mi fedel ottima luce. / Spezò la fede e tene via deversa, / sì che de dona in serpe fo reversa"). Moreover, Lodrisio conspired many times against his own family,³⁹ and this sly and duplicitous behaviour is effectively por-

37. *Annales Mediolanenses*, col. 713.

38. Muratorius, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Vol. 12 P. 4, Gualvani de la Flamma *Opusculum de rebus gestis*, ed. Carlo Castiglioni, (Bologna: 1938), § 166: "Luchinus autem princeps totius exercitus ad campum se contulit inter Parabiagum et Canegrate: cui ex adverso Lodrisius se obtulit. Et quia amborum vexilla erant viperea cum aquilis, et ut milites discerneretur a milite, nostri milites clamabant: 'miles scanti Ambrosij'; alij milites clamabant: 'ruithband heinrich'".

39. Lodrisio was even involved in the conspiracy that caused the temporary exile of Galeazzo in November 1322. In addition to this, the *Annales Mediolanenses* say that «Eodem Anno [1339] et

trayed in *Soto l'imperio* vv. 5-10, by the fickle, elusive and deadly grass snake. The reference to Mastino II della Scala as "potente prince" may further suggest that the texts of these madrigals should be dated between 1336 and June 1337, before the drastic reduction of his territories due to the anti-Scaligerian league. From this perspective, it is possible to situate Giovanni's composition of madrigal's musical setting (the only madrigal where the woman's metamorphosis into a grass snake has positive connotations) in the Veronese territory and to see in it as a delineation of the woman's metamorphosis that is favourable to Lodrisio.

If we analyse the texts and the relationship between text and music in more detail, it is possible to identify elements that may help to reveal the chronological order of at least two of the madrigals. The rhyme scheme of *Donna già fui* is ABA BCC DD. This scheme is very rare in Trecento poetry and it is only employed in one other madrigal setting by Giovanni (*O perlaro gentil*), in the other three madrigals by Jacopo (*O dolze appres'un bel perlaro*, *Straccias'i panni* and *O in Italia felice liguria* with double *ritornello* DD EE) and in four of the five madrigals by Giovanni Dondi. The scheme was known as *madrigale-rispetto* because of its affinity with the rhyme scheme of the *rispetti* and *strambotti* of the Quattrocento, composed with eight hendecasyllables in alternate rhymes or four hendecasyllables ABAB followed by two couplets CC DD (the last scheme is typical of Tuscan *strambotti*, also called *rispetti*). Guido Capovilla, in his fundamental essay on the madrigal,⁴⁰ shows that it is inaccurate to refer to these madrigals as *rispetti ante litteram*, since they are explicitly called madrigals in their manuscript sources and they are transcribed as a pair of three verses followed by a couplet. This particular rhyme scheme is in fact connected to the experimentalism typical of Lombard-Venetian poetry, and it is also linked to the use of a *sirma* with a CDC DEE scheme in sonnets by Fazio degli Uberti, Antonio Beccari and Niccolò de' Rossi.

In any case, it is very unusual that six of the nine madrigals with ABA BCC tercets have an *enjambement* between the third and fourth verse and a syntactical subdivision of 4 + 2, as we can see in Giovanni Dondi's *Altera donna et gentil per natura* (vv. 1-4),⁴¹ *Se per sofrir e star sempre* (vv. 1-6),⁴² *Tanto sum*

mense Januarii Dominus Lodrisius Vicecomes, qui erat bannitus a Civitate Mediolani, et contra Dominum Azzonem Dominum Mediolani semper machinabatur, in animum duxit improvise et manu hostili Civitatem Mediolani invadere» (*Annales Mediolanenses*, cols. 712-3).

40. Guido Capovilla, "Materiali per la morfologia e la storia del madrigale 'antico', dal ms. Vaticano Rossi 215 al Novecento", *Metrica* 3 (1982): 159-252.

41. "Altera donna et gentil per natura, / di margarite hornata et d'or vestita, / bella amorosa più d'altra creatura, / spregiata vidi et da pochi gradita;" (Giovanni Dondi dall'Orologio, *Rime*, ed. Antonio Daniele [Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1990], 89).

42. "Se per sofrir et star sempre costante / a sostener una grave percossa, / mazor cha carcho chi

stato, che quel ch'io non voglio (vv. 3-4),⁴³ Giovanni da Cascia's *Donna già fui* and *O perlaro gentil* (vv. 3-4)⁴⁴ and Jacopo's *O dolze appres'un bel parlaro* (vv. 1-4).⁴⁵ In terms of the musical setting, both Giovanni's *O perlaro gentil* and Jacopo's *O dolze appres'un bel parlaro* have a melodic structure that is typical of a madrigal, with an A section that is repeated on two tercets and a B section sung on the *ritornello*, whereas *Donna già fui* has no musical repetitions, and is therefore *durchkomponiert* (or through composed), a characteristic usually employed in the finest compositions.⁴⁶ These structural relationships between text and music can be summarised in the following example:

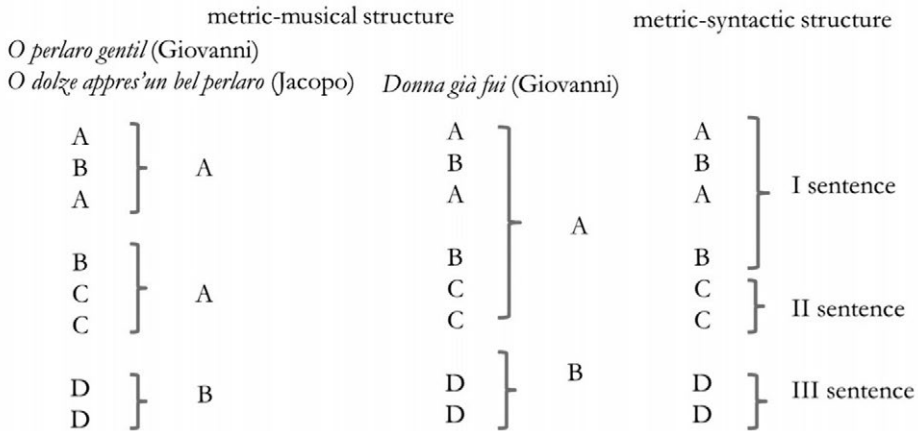


Figure 1: Madrigal settings with an ABA BCC DD rhyme scheme

With this in mind, we can better understand the rhyme scheme and the melodic structure of Jacopo's *Soto l'imperio*. Adopting the rhyme scheme ABA BCC DED EFF GG, with two syntactic *enjambements* between vv. 3 and 4 and vv. 9 and 10, this madrigal literally doubles the rhyme and syntactic schema of Giovanni's *Donna già fui*. The doubling is clear even in the musical composition: Jacopo doubles the voices over the *tenor*, composing a three-voice

porti leffante, / de' l'huom aver alcun merito possa / nel mondo pieno d'angososi pianti, / prender el de' quostui per tuti quanti" (Dondi dall'Orologio, *Rime*, 109).

43. "mi vien trovando, onde molto mi doglio, / quel che a me è più conforme: dov'i' / ..." (Dondi dall'Orologio, *Rime*, 113).

44. "nel tempo novo dolce 'nnamorato / ritorneranno li fiori e le fronde" (Corsi, *Poesie musicali*, 17).

45. "O dolze apres'un bel parlaro fiume, / speso lavi le man, le gambe, i pedi / de questa rea for d'ogni bon costume, / a cui de fedel cor tuto me dedi" (Corsi, *Poesie musicali*, 40).

46. For the music, see W. Thomas Marrocco, ed., *Italian Secular Music*, Polyphonic Music of the Fourteenth Century, Vol. 6 (Monaco: Éditions de L'Oiseau-Lyre, 1964).

madrigal, and he does not adopt a *durchkomponiert* structure, but instead sets the first six verses to music in section A (like Giovanni), which is repeated twice. Therefore, in *Soto l'imperio* Jacopo both imitates and doubles Giovanni's melodic structure, as outlined in the following example:

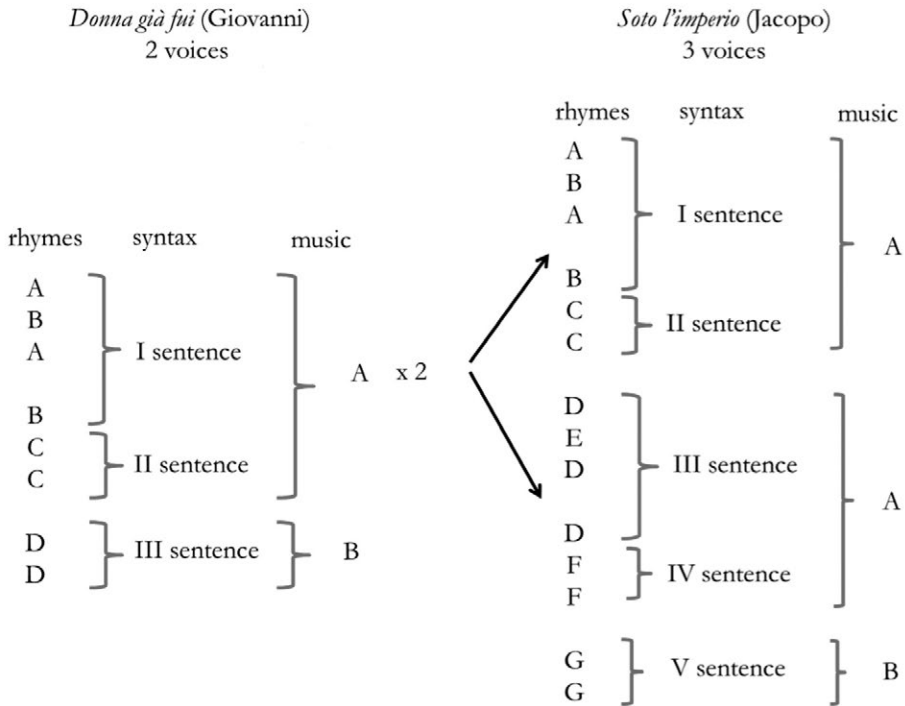


Figure 2: Structural relationships between *Donna già fui* and *Soto l'imperio*

Moreover, due to the repetition of the melodic section A, the synonyms “biscia” at v. 3 and “serpe” at v. 9, are sung to the same melody in all the three voices, which further highlights the textual doubling:

20

Soprano: a - le, Re - gna la bi - scia
fu - ce, Ma' co - me ser - pe

Alto: - le, Re -
- ce, Ma'

Bass: nel suo no.m'al.te do.ra.te a - le, Re - gna la bi.scia
- chi don.nes.chi chiu.d'e via s'en fu - ce, Ma' co - me ser.pe

il cui mor - so mi vin -
tes - si - co - sa por -

- gna la bi - scia il cui mor - so mi vin -
co - me ser - pe os - si - co - sa por - - ce, Si
- ce, Di

vin
por

Example 1: Jacopo, *Soto l'imperio*, mm. 18-25
(Marrocco, *Italian Secular Music*, Vol. 6, 153).

In the three madrigals by Jacopo the word “serpe” is always employed as synonym of “biscia”, and it is always found in the poetic verses sung on the repetition of melodic section A (*Soto l'imperio* v. 9; *Nel bel zardino* v. 6; *Posando sopra un'aqua* v. 5). The composer may have used this synonym in order to portray the allusion to the Visconti heraldic grass snake negatively, by matching the heraldic imagery invoked by the word “biscia” with the synonymic “serpe”, which is associated with concepts of betrayal and fraud, because of the reference to the *serpens* in the book of Genesis. This employment of the words “biscia” and “serpe” with the aim of implying either positive or negative connotations to the Visconti emblem was probably common in political literature of the Trecento. From a non-exhaustive examination of Latin and vernacular texts, I have observed that when an author positively mentions the Visconti or their emblem, he only uses the words *bissal/biscia*, *vipera/vipra/bivera* or *anguis*; whereas in texts hostile to the Visconti the words *serpel/serpente/serpens* are more commonly employed.⁴⁷

The analysis of the relationships between the text and music, and of the intertextual links between *Donna già fui* and *Soto l'imperio* show not only that these madrigals form part of an exchange between Giovanni and Jacopo, but also that Jacopo's *Soto l'imperio* represents an answer to Giovanni's *Donna già fui*. On the basis of the intertextual links between *Nel bel zardino* and *Donna già fui*, I propose that *Donna già fui* constitutes an answer to *Nel bel zardino*, according to Nosow's and Corsi's hypotheses. From this perspective, vv. 4-5 of *Donna già fui* “Non so come 'l suo cor mai lo sofferse, / ch'a dirmi villania si discoperse” could be related to the accusation of betrayal expressed in *Nel bel zardino* v. 5 “Spezò la fede e tene via deversa”. It is interesting to observe

47. See for example Sacchetti's *L'alto rimedio di Fiorenza magna, Credi tu sempre, maledetta serpe, Non mi posso più tener ch'io non dica* (v. 38 “di liguria la gran serpe”), *Quel re superno che ogn'altro avanza*, and the texts mentioned in A. Lanza, *Firenze contro Milano. Gli intellettuali fiorentini nelle guerre con i Visconti (1390-1440)* (Anzio: De Rubeis, 1991).

that, despite their different rhyme schemes, these madrigals have the same syntactic structure 4+2+2 and present a chiasmic syntactic and thematic disposition in the first four verses:

1. Nel bel zardino che l'Atice cenge 2. vive la bisa fera venenosa, 3. che zià fo dona bela ed amorosa, 4. donando a mi fedel optima luce.		1. Donna già fui leggiadra innamorata, 2. facendo al servo mio dolce semblante; 3. or sono in biscia orribil tramutata 4. sol per uccider questo falso amante.
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In summary, I suggest that the madrigals were composed in this order:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|----------|--|
| 1) <i>Nel bel zardino</i> | Jacopo | The metamorphosis of a loyal woman into a treacherous grass snake may allude to Lodrisio Visconti's betrayal and his escape in Verona in 1336. |
| 2) <i>Donna già fui</i> | Giovanni | The author of the text appropriates the allegory present in <i>Nel bel zardino</i> , but reframes it in a positive light. The woman / snake's cruelty is a consequence of a "villania" (a reference to <i>Nel bel zardino</i> ?) witnessed by her slave. |
| 3) <i>Soto l'imperio</i> | Jacopo | This madrigal reaffirms the subject of <i>Nel bel zardino</i> , with an emphasis on Lodrisio's duplicity and dangerousness. |

Unfortunately, it is not possible to explain the allegorical meaning of Jacopo's *Posando sopra un'aqua* and its role in this intertextual dialogue. However, despite the common subject and the presence of the words "fera bisca" and "serpe", this madrigal has some characteristics that distinguish it from the other three madrigals: it does not have a syntactic structure 4 + 2; the metamorphosis occurs in a dreamlike dimension; and the lover is passively subjected to the effects of the transformation. But it is of course also possible that the narrative of *Posando sopra un'aqua* is dependent on an allusion to an event that I have not been able to identify⁴⁸ or, as Paganuzzi suggests, due to the loss of one or more madrigals in the cycle.

In terms of the other three madrigals, *Nel bel zardino*, *Donna già fui* and *Soto l'imperio*, we might question whether the allusions to events that happened in the second half of 1330s imply that their respective musical settings were composed in those years, perhaps at the same time as the poetry. It is unlikely that the answer is the same in all three cases. *Donna già fui* and *Soto l'imperio*

48. The insistence on the topic of physical duress (v. 4 "Ligomi i piedi" and vv. 7-8 "Atorno 'l collo me lassò una stropa, / che per incanti mai non se desgrova") may suggest a reference to the capture of Luchino Visconti by Lodrisio during the battle of Parabiago in 1339. But this hypothesis is somewhat tenuous and it is not supported by sufficient textual references.

both include relationships between the text and music; that is to say that in both madrigals, specific rhymes and syntactic structures convey a particular meaning in connection with the music they are set to. In this case, it is plausible that the composition of the text and music was the result of a single creative act. The situation is different in the case of *Nel bel zardino*, as Jacopo's musical setting does not reveal any connections to the other madrigals. Therefore, three different scenarios are possible: 1) the madrigal poetry was initially circulated without music, and Jacopo composed the musical setting at a later time; 2) the madrigal was immediately set to music by Jacopo; 3) the madrigal was immediately set to music by Jacopo or another composer but the music has not been preserved, and Jacopo's musical setting preserved in the witness was composed afterwards. In a recent essay, Maria Caraci Vela showed that the presence of frequent parallel perfect consonances may be typical of the earliest Italian Ars Nova compositions.⁴⁹ In fact, the early dating of *Donna già fui* and *Soto l'imperio* is compatible with Caraci's hypothesis, since these musical settings have the greatest number of parallel perfect consonances in the entire corpus of Jacopo and Giovanni's madrigals. Conversely, the musical setting of *Nel bel zardino* has less than five parallel perfect consonances and it would appear to have been composed at a later date, so we cannot exclude the possibility that this madrigal was set to music some years after Lodrisio's betrayal. After all, as Caraci says, "nel caso dei grandi madrigali (o mottetti) politici o d'occasione, la riflessione veicolata dalla musica supera la contingenza storica e va al di là del singolo personaggio o evento che può averla suscitata, e l'opera si presenta, così, rileggibile e reinterpretabile in contesti diversi".⁵⁰

49. Caraci Vela, "Le intonazioni polifoniche", 93-124.

50. Caraci Vela, "Per una nuova lettura", 51.

ABSTRACT

After a short introduction concerning the concept of “intertextuality”, this essay analyses the relationship between the four madrigals of the so-called “biscia cycle”: *Nel bel zardino*, *Posando sopra un’aqua*, and *Soto l’imperio*, set to music by Jacopo da Bologna; and *Donna già fui* set to music by Giovanni da Cascia. The author describes the intertextual links between these madrigals, and discusses the interpretations and datings proposed by Corsi, Paganuzzi, Carleton and Nosow. Since no one hypothesis is entirely convincing, the author proposes a new theory that suggests that the poetic texts make allegorical references to the war between Lodrisio Visconti and Milan in 1339.

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