Introduction

Cum omnia fecerimus, multum habebimus; universum habebamus (When we will have done all that we can do, we shall have much; but once we had all).

Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* XIV.2 (90)

The idea that there was a time when men and women lived in perfect harmony with nature and with themselves, though rooted in classical antiquity, was one of the most fertile products of the Renaissance literary and artistic imagination. This book explores one specific aspect of this idea: the musical representation and stylization of the myth of Arcadia in sixteenth-century Italy. Renaissance culture strived to keep this utopia alive. It was not an easy task: it meant to assign a content to happiness, and a meaning to suffering. Music played a fundamental role in the construction and preservation of this collective illusion.

For us, it is difficult to understand what made Arcadia, its shepherds, nymphs, and their melancholic loves so appealing to early-modern societies. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino allegedly claimed that Battista Guarini's *Il pastor fido* posed as great a threat as the protestant reformation. The story goes that "in 1605 Cardinal Bellarmino, meeting Guarini at Rome, told him plainly that he had done as much harm to morals by his *Pastor fido* as by their heresies Luther and Calvin had done to religion."[1] But what danger lurked in a play of shepherds and nymphs? Pastoral's veiled eroticism is likely to have troubled more than one church official, especially those who believed that the seductive power of fantasy could spin society's moral compass out of control. Without directly mentioning Guarini or his play, Daniello Bartoli thought that there was sufficient anecdotal evidence of the poisonous bite of pastoral tragicomedy:

I would here have you by way of answer take notice of those two unfortunate sisters, that the first time they read a famous tragicomedy of the like nature, newly published

[1] Walter Greg, *Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama* (London: Bullen, 1906), 203. The encounter between Guarini and Bellarmino is narrated in Alessandro Guarini, "Vita del cavalier Battista Guarini," in *Supplementi al Giornale de' Letterati d'Italia* (Venice: Gabriello Hertz, 1722), 179–180, on which see also Vittorio Rossi, *Battista Guarini ed il Pastor Fido: Studio biografico critico, con documenti inediti* (Turin: Loescher, 1886), 249.

in print, became so good proficients in impurity, that they presently set up school, converting their house into a Stews, and divulging themselves for whores; of so many married people, as heard the said pastoral recited … whereas they came chaste, there was none but went thence contaminated with dishonesty, and practicing that loose liberty of love in such as please them (of which they there heard the precepts, and saw the examples) discovered unfaithfulness.[2]

There is some irony in our historical perception. Pastoral fiction, we think, staged an idea of primeval innocence. Bellarmino and Bartoli, like many others before them, saw pastoral as a subversive genre.

For now we can suspend our moral judgment. However, we must credit the party of the detractors with one thing. The pastoral vogue of the late Renaissance indeed accounted for a small Copernican revolution. Hundreds of musical settings flooded an already crowded market of vocal music. It is difficult to find a madrigal book printed after 1580 that does not contain more pastoral texts than we would want to read. The new genre of opera, subversive in its own right, fell prey to the same pastoral/mythological vision of existence. Of course, this was hardly an exclusively musical passion. Pastoral invaded the visual arts, theater, and poetry with equally irresistible effects. But there was something special about the way that music contributed to the articulation of the value system associated with the Arcadian ideal, in part because music was an integral part of the myth itself. Thus, this study begins with the observation of two anomalous events, anomalous in the sense that they do not seem to be entirely explainable within accepted models of musical historiography.

The first event may be thought of as an exemplary case of asynchronicity of historical time. There is a significant chronological gap between the literary and musical histories of the pastoral. The humanistic revival of pastoral poetry reached its apex at the end of the fifteenth century and continued to enjoy a wide popularity, with ups and downs, throughout the sixteenth century. Curiously enough, and contrary to what happened, for example, in the visual arts, the polyphonic madrigal was not seriously affected by this trend until the 1570s, when a new appetite for everything pastoral began to transform its forms and contents. By the end of the 1580s, musical settings of pastoral verse had saturated the printing industry as well as the lifestyle of Italian courts. What was the reason for this early musical disinclination towards such a suasive region of the early modern

[2] Daniello Bartoli, *Dell'huomo di lettere difeso et emendato* (Rome: Heredi di Francesco Corbelletti, 1645), 183–184. English translation from *The Learned Man Defended and Reform'd … Written in Italian by the Happy Pen of P. Daniel Bartolus, S. J. Englished by Thomas Salusbury* (London: R. W. Leybourn, 1660), 179–180.

imagination? And what prompted such a radical change between the 1570s and 1580s?

The second event is related to the pastoral setting of early opera. Ottavio Rinuccini's libretti for *Dafne* and *Euridice* were in all respects pastoral/mythological fables. But Rinuccini did not see it quite this way; he famously claimed that his theater was inspired by the desire to restore the musical spirit of ancient tragedy. There was a fundamental paradox in this claim. Throughout the Renaissance, pastoral theater was a highly controversial genre. The problem was that pastoral theater did not exist in classical antiquity. In the language of sixteenth-century literary criticism, this meant that there was no legitimate model for pastoral theater. This was also the paradox of the pastoral setting of early opera. How was it that the only theatrical genre that did not exist in antiquity became one of the main sources for the reconstruction of classical drama? How did Rinuccini and his fellow intellectuals and composers manage to make their pastoral fables pass for a modern equivalent of ancient tragedy?

While the main goal of this book is to trace the history of the encounter between music and pastoral imagery in sixteenth-century Italy, the historiographical thread governing its narrative derives from the need to solve these seeming anomalies; or, to put it another way, from the need to provide a historical account in which the phenomena that I have just described would cease to appear as anomalies.

Despite the role that singing shepherds and fleeing nymphs played in shaping the musical culture of the late sixteenth century and the strategies of self-fashioning associated with it, modern musicology has paid little attention to this tradition. This is something more than a simple omission. The cause is to be found in a general disaffection with pastoral poetry actively cultivated by a prominent current of literary criticism, a current that, for better or worse, managed to replace Bellarmino's and Bartoli's moral concern with a comparably austere aesthetic censure. Pastoral was condemned as an aberration of taste, as a naive game of a bored society. Along these lines, Alfred Einstein characterized the pastoral trend in late-Cinquecento music as "the disease that had attacked the taste of the time."[3] What followed was a long and dragging convalescence.

Things significantly changed in the second half of the twentieth century. A new interest in the opposition between country and city, utopia and reality, idyllicism and primitivism, nature and art, embedded in the myth of Arcadia, has given rise to a number of studies – by now uncountable – on the cultural

[3] Alfred Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal*, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), vol. II, 543.

significance of pastoral imagery. The emphasis has shifted from purely literary issues to the meaning of the persistence of the pastoral metaphor in Western societies. But a metaphor for what? Since then, the enigma of the pastoral has grown into a cluster of ideas central to Western culture – difference, primitivism, civilization, idyllicism, escapism, regionalism, nostalgia. The enigma remains, but for many it is now clear what perhaps has always been felt: Western culture used pastoral fiction as a metaphor of human existence, as a way to articulate discourses about human nature and its relation to the world.

"In pastoral" – William Empson once wrote – "you take a limited life and pretend it is the full and normal one."[4] The Renaissance cult for pastoral was something more and something less. It was something more, because it thrived on an inimitable knowledge of classical models, even when such models began to be regarded as a liability rather than an asset. It was something less, because Renaissance culture did not necessarily share the existential horizon that I evoked in the previous paragraph. The problem of reconciling nature and culture impinged on an ambiguous conceptual distinction that was to find a more sharply divergent formulation in Hobbes and Rousseau. Either men are naturally good, until civilization corrupts them; or their state of nature equals a state of savagery and violence that can be overcome only with the imposition of a social contract. However, what was distinctive about the Renaissance discourse on the "state of nature" was the fusion of the ancient pastoral tradition with the modern philosophy of love. As a result, a slightly different cluster of ideas and practices gradually congealed around the myth of Arcadia: the encounter between high and low cultures, the norms of *decorum*, the psychology of court sociability, the ritualization of social distinction, the puzzle of self-representation, the snarls of sentimental life, and, above all, the paradox of love. This last one largely subsumed all the others. These are also the ideas that inform this book.

Pastoral literature's enormous popularity is not in itself sufficient to explain why so much music was devoted to recreate, or recapture, the passions and emotions of a fictional prototype of "natural man." And it is not sufficient to explain how the humanistic vision of an ethically superior pastoral society (superior because sheltered from the alienating complexity of civilization) mutated into a society of men and women "proficients in impurity." The late Renaissance elite's tendency to turn the lived reality into a reality imagined in Arcadia may look like an open invitation to self-deception. But nobody was that naive. The real issue is not self-deception but self-representation. Pastoral did not offer an easy way out from oneself,

[4] William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: New Directions, 1974), 115.

but a symbolic space within which to play oneself. Throughout the book I will return to the idea that pastoral fiction fulfilled the basic instinct of self-representation. For all its influence and mystique, classical theater could not supply a viable model of human behavior with which the social elite could easily identify itself. In the end, it was the shepherd, not the tragic hero, who assumed the role of symbolic alter-ego for individuals educated in the *politesse mondaine* of the Renaissance courts. To an important extent, what made such creatures into symbols of a modern perception of the self was their understanding of the nature of love, an understanding developed through decades of Petrarchist and Neoplatonic exercises. This was what ancient tragedy and comedy could not fully supply: a fictional universe in which the Renaissance discourse on human desire could be represented in a dramatic form.

Italy's cultural elite could count on other semantic areas of self-representation, most importantly the chivalric ethic of epic poetry, and the Petrarchist identity of the self/lover. However, pastoral fiction in part marginalized the former, and in part absorbed the latter in a collective vision. This second aspect of the symbolic use of the pastoral was particularly important. That Renaissance pastoral developed in symbiosis with the contemporary elaboration of a phenomenology of love is a known fact among literary scholars.[5] Music, as I will try to demonstrate, adds a new and, to a large extent, essential dimension to the intertwined histories of both phenomena. But the real focus of this study is rather the social bond forged through the sharing of poetry and music under the sign of a fictional Arcadian setting, and activated by the collective memory of an existential condition defined by the experience of love suffering. Therefore, a large part of this book is devoted to showing how the pastoral model of a community of singers and poets contributed to turn the radical inwardness of the Petrarchist self into a socially shared (and often musical) experience, in accord with the demands of sixteenth-century court etiquette. Indeed, it is not inaccurate to describe the musical stylization of the pastoral lifestyle as a projection of the performative side of the Renaissance discourse on love. This meant to accept to show oneself to be emotionally vulnerable, and to prize the ability to translate such vulnerability into aesthetic objects. Both behaviors were regarded as signs of a superior sensitivity, one of the highest points in the curve of human civilization (to dare to be emotionally vulnerable is to have the courage to know oneself), despite the fact that this was a society that often chose

[5] See for example Louise George Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), and Roberto Gigliucci, *Giù verso l'alto: Luoghi e dintorni tassiani* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2004).

to stage its claim to civilization through the metaphor of the unreflective sophistication of early men. With this in mind, it is the inherent musicality of the pastoral myth that is worth pausing over in the remaining pages of this Introduction.

Music permeated Arcadia at more than one level of imagination. Its presence was emblazoned in the tutelary rule of Arcadia's goat-god, Pan. Half-human and half-animal, his musical talent, paired with his ferine sexual instinct, evoked an ominous link between desire and the irrational power of music. According to Ovid, Pan pursued the nymph Syrinx. Desperate to escape him, she asked her sisters to change her form. She was turned into marsh reeds. Pan, who could still hear the nymph's lamenting voice in the wind blowing through the reeds, cut them and bound them together into the musical instrument known as syrinx or panpipes (*Metamorphoses* I, 689–713). In one of the various versions of the story of Echo, Pan incited the shepherds to kill and dismember the nymph Echo because he was jealous of her ability to sing and imitate both human and natural sounds (Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* 3.23). Like Marsia, he was eventually defeated by Apollo in a musical contest (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XI, 146–180).

However mysteriously seductive the music of Pan and of his fellow satyrs may have appeared, it was the human side of Arcadia's sonorous landscape that most influenced Renaissance musical practices. Pastoral fiction was in itself a meta-musical fantasy. The humanistic imitation of Theocritus and Virgil brought back to life a model of human interaction based on the mutually beneficial exchange of poetry and music. This is what shepherds do from immemorial times. They respond to life's circumstances and trials with the regenerating and consolatory power of their art. It is not that they naturally speak in music: Virgil never made such a claim. Quite on the contrary, their performances are carefully prepared and contextualized as social rituals. Renaissance culture may not have developed a systematic theory of music behavior. But the classical pastoral eclogue supplied specific examples of how music making could assume specific functions within the context of a society in which poetic and musical literacy was regarded as a precondition to the human ability to cope with one's own existential condition. It was a model of society that aligned almost perfectly with the aristocratic ideology of the period. Indeed, the Renaissance obsession with the pastoral underscores the uncanny similarities that linked court society with the behavioral codes associated with Virgil's shepherds. Enormous cultural differences notwithstanding, they both aspired to a model of human bonding defined by two fundamental principles: the cult of emotions (especially love-related emotions), and the management of the same emotions through the performative pleasure of music and poetry.

The idea that the level of civilization of a society could be defined by the musical education of its members had a "historical" foundation in Polybius (*Historiae* 4.20–21). And this society happened to be his description of Arcadia. His digression on the Arcadians' customs resembles an attempt at comparative sociology. What Polybius sought to explain was why different peoples developed different societal habits even when confronted by similar environmental challenges; and why some peoples seem to have condemned themselves to a perpetual state of savagery. The comparison concerned the Arcadians and the Cynaetheans:

> Since the Arcadian nation on the whole has a very high reputation for virtue among the Greeks, due not only to their humane and hospitable character and usages, but especially to their piety to the gods, it is worth while to give a moment's consideration to the question of the savagery of the Cynaetheans, and ask ourselves why, though unquestionably of Arcadian stock, they so far surpassed all other Greeks at this period in cruelty and wickedness. I think the reason was that they were the first and indeed only people in Arcadia to abandon an admirable institution, introduced by their forefathers with a nice regard for the natural conditions under which all the inhabitants of that country live. For the practice of music, I mean real music, is beneficial to all men, but to the Arcadians it is a necessity.[6]

Polybius' digression illustrated the civilizing role of music. It was the Cynaetheans' decision to abandon this practice that pushed them into a spiral of regressive behavior, incapable of overcoming the harshness of nature (and of their own human nature) with the softening, tempering, and ultimately humanizing force of *mousikē*:

> The Cynaetheans, by entirely neglecting these institutions, though in special need of such influences, as their country is the most rugged and their climate the most inclement in Arcadia, and by devoting themselves exclusively to their local affairs and political rivalries, finally became so savage that in no city of Greece were greater and most constant crimes committed.[7]

Polybius was not as influential for the musical Arcadianism of the Italian Renaissance as one might expect. The author who made the most of the alleged historicity of this testimony was again Battista Guarini. In the heat of the debate against tragicomedy, he invoked Polybius' authority to defend the "verisimilitude" of his shepherds' poetic language.[8] But Polybius spelled

[6] Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. William Roger Paton, 6 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1922), vol. II, 349.
[7] *Ibid.*, 353.
[8] Battista Guarini, "Compendio della poesia tragicomica tratto dai duo Verati," in *Il pastor fido e il Compendio della poesia tragicomica*, ed. Gioachino Brognoligo, Scrittori d'Italia 61 (Bari: Laterza, 1914), 253–254.

out a more suffused commonplace about what was to become the post-classical myth of Arcadia. Music was a sign of a special state of being. Whether construed as a sign of a newly found political beatitude, of the appeasement of the senses, or of a higher perception of oneself, the constant presence of music in the symbolic space of the Arcadian myth functioned as a second-order signifier, signaling the somewhat unique nature of the lives represented through the filter of pastoral fiction. By the same token, the failure to sing, the lack of music, could become a sign of a humanity falling back to barbarity, a humanity "devoting [itself] exclusively to [its] local affairs and political rivalries." It is easy to reformulate the sense of these words in the terms of the traditional opposition between *otium* and *negotium*. And it is useful to do so, because this terminology brings to the forefront the link between the musical ethos of pastoral lifestyle and the musical ambiance of the aristocratic *otium* cultivated by Renaissance court society. In that society, pastoral song enjoyed a multiplicity of meanings, and this book does not aim at distilling from it an unequivocal interpretation of its ultimate meaning. My goal is rather to show the extent to which the unique musicality of the pastoral myth, it all its versions and variations, affected the forms of musical signification of Renaissance Italy.

This last point brings us back to the first of the two anomalies described at the beginning of this Introduction. If music played such an important role in the pastoral vision of Renaissance society, why was the premiere form of secular music of the time, the madrigal, only marginally affected by it until the last quarter of the sixteenth century? The answer is that the musical history of the pastoral was not the history of a delayed reception. It was rather the history of an eclipse, whose obscuring effect was largely due to the marginalization of musical practices that for a variety of reasons became opaque to modern historiography. In the early decades of the sixteenth century, pastoral and the musical values associated with it entered a process of cultural redefinition *vis-à-vis* the two main strands of Cinquecento classicism: the Petrarchist ideal of lyric poetry, and the model of theater derived from Aristotle's theory. Theater proved to be a particularly controversial issue, because there was no ancient model of pastoral drama on which modern theater could be legitimately founded. In the end, pastoral re-emerged as a dramatization of the Petrarchist discourse on love, bringing with itself the musical practices and styles shared by the Renaissance elites. Ironically enough, it also continued to supply a utopian and musical alternative to the Petrarchist determinism of love suffering.

The way we decide to interpret the relationship between the mask of the shepherd and its Petrarchist double also determines the true measure of the utopian discourse that accompanied the musical stylization of the Arcadian

dream. Much depended on the extent to which people were willing to accept Petrarch's idea that both poetry and music are forms of self-medication: "Cantando il duol si disacerba" (Singing, pain becomes less bitter), a line that will tellingly reappear in the middle of a pastoral romance involving the entire Roman aristocracy in the 1590s. If it is true, as Augustine and Petrarch believed, that language begins with desire, and that desire generates language,[9] the Renaissance obsession with love poetry becomes a gigantic monument to the inadequacy of language to soothe desire. That it may be possible to fall silent, if even for a moment, and enjoy the pure pleasure of poetry and music as the only redeeming value of language was the lesson of ancient shepherds.

[9] Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 75.

Part I
Music in Arcadia: An Unsettled Tradition