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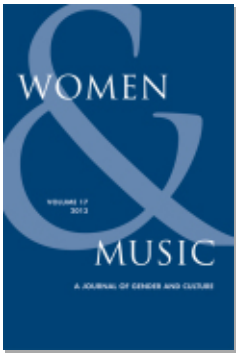

Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture, Volume 13, 2009, pp. 54-65 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press
DOI: 10.1353/wam.0.0027

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The literal translation of *Amor nello specchio* is "love in the mirror," although "love reflected" provides a better sense of the phrase's meaning. The play by that name was first published in Paris by Giovan Battista Andreini in 1622 and has recently come to occupy a remarkable position in the work of scholars and theater practitioners.[1] The magnetic pull of this particular text is attributable to the twists and turns of the commedia plot. The main character, Florinda, is initially in love with her own reflection. After some time she transfers her affections to the beautiful Lidia, and by the end of the play she has settled on Lidia's identical twin brother, Eugenio, a self-described hermaphrodite played by a woman in drag.

This romp through variously configured sexual relations is fascinating for its frank depictions of female sexuality—Florinda consummates each of her three love affairs—and also for an ending that remains sexually and delightfully ambiguous despite the specter of resolution into compulsory heterosexuality. At the same time, the "real-world" backdrop to the play's performance and publication complicates further the shifting erotic allegiances staged as *Amor nello specchio*. The playwright, Giovan Battista, was both author and actor, although his character, Lelio, filled a fairly minor role. In this play Lelio is sharply rejected by a self-obsessed Florinda and after a failed attempt at seduction by magical incantation abandons the feminine temptations of romantic love in favor of a career in the military. Not only Lelio but all

1. Giovan Battista Andreini, *Amor nello specchio* (Paris: Della Vigna, 1622). This article is based on my dissertation work, now completed, on Virginia Ramponi Andreini. The dissertation, "La Florinda: The Performance of Virginia Ramponi Andreini," was defended in May 2008, New York University.

the male characters of this play are shunted sideways, with the dramatic interest of *Amor nello specchio* securely centered on the female characters. The lead, Florinda, was played by Virginia Ramponi Andreini, wife of Giovan Battista and a renowned singer and actress in her own right, while her onstage lovers, Lidia and the (male) hermaphrodite, Eugenio, were both played by her husband's real-life lover, Virginia Rotari.[2] In performance, then, the shifting sexual configurations of *Amor nello specchio* embodied and reconstituted the scandalous ménage à trois of the actors' offstage love lives. Add to this an onstage masturbation scene, some cross-dressing, and the temporal interval of nearly four hundred years that separates the early modern play from our postmodern moment, and it is clear why this text proved and proves so fascinating.

Previous scholarship has valued *Amor nello specchio* for the compelling exegetical unfolding of male fantasies of female sexuality, with Siro Ferrone's *Attori mercanti corsari* (1993) and Piermario Vescovo's "Narciso, Psiche e Marte 'mestruato.' Una lettura di *Amor nello specchio* di Giovan Battista Andreini" (2004) the most notable examples.[3] Understood thus, Giovan Battista's stylistic maturity is achieved at the expense of his female companions, with the characters of Florinda and Lidia repeatedly understood to ventriloquize the artistic product of a male author. *Amor nello specchio* is seen as both symptom of and transcendent signifier for Giovan Battista's extramarital affair: literary mastery routed through the penis. This model of reception is present also in the program notes of the two modern stagings the work has received, both directed by Luca Ronconi (1987 and 2002), and in a 1999 Italian film entitled *Amor nello specchio*, a period drama very loosely based around the play and on the historico-biographical circumstances that preceded its publication.[4] The film was directed by Salvatore Maira, who, with Anna Michela Borracci, published a modern edition of the original play in 1997; the edition includes an introduction by Maira that lightly revises an article first published in 1994.[5] The film exists, therefore, in a weird historiographic relationship with the 1622 text and with modern scholarship on the work, functioning as an attempt to imagine and explain the conditions of the play's conception.

In contrast with these authors and directors, my interest lies elsewhere. In relation to the improvised practice and formulaic conventions of commedia dell'arte performance, questions of authorship are inherently problematic.[6] Stock characters were the norm, and each actor brought a repertoire of gestures, sounds, and phrases to his or her performance. For Virginia Andreini that character was Florinda, and her performances as such were freighted with an embodied history in excess of the words transcribed under her husband's name.

The text of *Amor nello specchio* is marked by myriad moments of visual mirroring, overtly

2. Virginia Ramponi Andreini (1583–1630/31) played a brief, if significant, part in the history of early opera. She performed in a number of early musical theatrical works, most of which are unfortunately lost. Her most notable and commented-on role was that of Arianna in Claudio Monteverdi's eponymous opera of 1608. Very little is known about Virginia Rotari. For more information on both women please refer to my dissertation.

3. Siro Ferrone, *Attori mercanti corsari. La commedia dell'arte in Europa tra cinque e seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993); Piermario Vescovo, "Narciso, Psiche e Marte 'mestruato.' Una lettura di *Amor nello specchio* di Giovan Battista Andreini," *Lettere Italiane* 56 (2004): 50–80.

4. Salvatore Maira, dir., *Amor nello specchio*, 104 minutes (Italy: Dolmen, 1999).

5. Giovan Battista Andreini, *Amor nello specchio*, ed. Salvatore Maira and Anna Michela Borracci (Rome: Bulzoni, 1997); and Salvatore Maira, "Ermetismo e libertinismo in *Amor nello specchio* di G. B. Andreini: Pretesti per una beffa strutturale," *Esperienze Letterarie* 19, no. 2 (1994): 47–72.

6. The question of authorship in Giovan Battista's published play texts is complicated. In several instances it is clear that publication occurred only after the play had spent numerous years in the performing repertoire of the troupe, and in one instance (*Li dui Lelii simili*, published in 1622) Giovan Battista acknowledged that the play was based on a scenario by his father, Francesco Andreini. Siro Ferrone, writing on the actor Tristano Martinelli *detto* Arlecchino, has mounted a convincing argument for Giovan Battista's work as transcription rather than composition; however, Ferrone is reluctant to extend his conclusions to other actor-character pairs, regarding Arlecchino as a special case. I take up these issues in much more detail in my dissertation.

manifest in the composition of the three couples: Florinda with herself, Florinda with another woman, Florinda with a man who looks like—and was played by—that same other woman dressed in drag. Literal mirrors also structure the mise-en-scène, reflecting and refracting the narrative along its exaggerated trajectory. The proliferation of visual doubles fills the literal and metaphorical space of play and performance; the resultant "text" is dense with meaning and allusion. This richly kaleidoscopic surface can, however, conceal the extent to which the performance relied on originary bodies and, indeed, on sound. In this article I am interested in the noise of *Amor nello specchio*, in creating a space for the sounding body of Virginia Andreini, and in listening for the ways in which sexuality echoes and resounds. To do so I examine two early scenes that contrast Florinda's disdain for men with her delight in herself (act 1, scene 3 and act 2, scene 1) and juxtapose these with the treatment of sexual consummation in Florinda's other two relationships (act 4, scene 3 and act 5, scene 7). My focus on aurality traces a persistent articulation of sexuality through vocality: as the object of Florinda's affections shifts outward from self to other, her mode of expression shifts from sound to semantics, from music to language.

In act 1, scene 3 Florinda makes her first appearance. Arriving home, she finds one of her many male suitors, Guerindo, along with his servant and her maid, Bernetta, outside the door. Instantly, Florinda and Guerindo fall to arguing over the respective merits of the female and male sexes, with Florinda leaping into the fray: "Sir Guerindo, I detest the cursed male sex to such an extent that I would be content to have been born blind and deaf so as to not see or hear them; please leave, and never again be seen in my presence."[7] Florinda runs verbal rings around her opponent as they perform a comic, rapid-fire version of what, in literary form, is called the *querelle des femmes*.[8] Her arguments are protofeminist, as antimale as they are profemale, and they illustrate both a dangerous rhetorical proficiency and Florinda's role as representative of a particular genre of character. In the opening scene itself Guerindo refers to the prima donna as "questa ingrata Florinda" (1.1.59). His choice of phrase makes explicit the link between this character, "Florinda," and other *ingrate* performed by Virginia-Florinda throughout her career.

Virginia's performance in Mantua in 1608 as a literal *ingrata* in Claudio Monteverdi's *Ballo delle ingrate* is but one instance of her incarnation of a stock character common both to the commedia dell'arte and to the broader canvas of Italian literary history. Across time and genres the *ingrata* is consistently beautiful, and she is flirtatious or acerbically argumentative. Her tale is told and retold as a warning to other women, and she herself is repeatedly chastised into happy heteromonogamy or condemned to eternal suffering in the afterlife.[9] As a protofeminist or femme fatale, the *ingrata* is didactic, simultaneously comic and terrifying, and her performance of sexual autonomy is understood as vain or selfish. The character of Florinda in *Amor nello specchio* condenses the man-hater and the hypersexualized *ingrate* stereotypes into one potent performance. Within a context of perennial arguments over the propriety of professional actresses in particular and public women in general, the excesses of Florinda's performance and characterization prefigure the catharsis of the

7. "Signor Guerindo, abborrisco tanto questo sesso maledetto dell'uomo che per non vederlo, che per non udirlo, mi contenterei d'esser nata cieca e sorda; di grazia, non mi comparite giamai alla presenza" (Andreini, *Amor nello specchio*, ed. Maira and Borracci, 1.3.62 [references are to act, scene, and page numbers for the modern edition of the play]).

8. The *querelle des femmes* references a large body of Renaissance literature debating the perceived merits and faults of the female sex. While many of the authors involved in these debates espoused protofeminist views, for the most part it remains unclear which authors agreed wholeheartedly with their own arguments and which saw the issue as an exemplary format with which to showcase their rhetorical skill.

9. The bones of the *ingrate* and *ingrati* myths are laid out by Tim Carter, "New Light on Monteverdi's *Ballo delle ingrate* (Mantua, 1608)," *Il Saggiatore Musicale* 6 (1999): 63–90, esp. 76–78.

"happy ending" in which the confusions and complications of the plot resolve into normative heterosexual marital arrangements.

At this stage in the narrative, however, resolution is a long way off. Having bettered Guerindo with rhetorical flair, Florinda is left alone onstage. She draws a mirror from her breast and reveals to the spectators the underlying reason for her lack of interest in the numerous men who court her. Gazing at her reflection, Florinda invokes Cupid and Narcissus, while the sentiments that she is feeling grow more ardent and impassioned. The thread of her monologue starts to disintegrate: her phrases become fragmentary, repetitive exclamations heighten the erotic tension, and Florinda fast reaches the point where she is incapable of normal speech. Put crudely, the scene stages a climactic moment of mirrored masturbation that culminates as Florinda "continually cries aloud [her] pleasure."[10] As a performance of physical and sexual self-sufficiency, the masturbatory Florinda enacts in gestures the agential excess that she had previously enacted in words. This is a woman in no need of a man.

While I certainly do not want to discount the sexually titillating or even pornographic elements of Florinda's autoeroticism, I do want to underline the continuity between the Florinda-who-hates-men of the scene's beginning and the Florinda-who-loves-herself during the scene's end. Both can be understood through tropes of monstrous female agency and self-sufficiency that could be understood as vain; both represent the *ingrata*.

Florinda's reference to Narcissus makes overt the narcissism of her own self-absorption. He surfaces in a claim that she has, in fact, outdone him: "Much more glorious than yours is my fate, o enamoured Narcissus."[11] Where Narcissus was uncertain as to the origin of the beautiful image he found so captivating, Florinda is happily complicit in her act of self-adoration; where his pride in his own beauty was fueled by the unreciprocated desire he awoke in others, she would happily dispose of such unwelcome attention. Most importantly, while Narcissus's infatuation culminated in his (literal) death, Florinda exploits a metaphor beloved of madrigal writers to celebrate a willing "death," or orgasm, rising like the phoenix from the ashes of her burning desire only to die once more.[12]

In the Ovidian tale the story of Narcissus is interwoven with that of Echo—a narrative redoubling reflected across the sensory axis of sight and sound. Where Narcissus is caught up in a closed circuit of reflected visual referents, Echo is an auditory mirror of repeated sound; in both cases their bodies waste away in unrequited love. The division of sight and sound is mythologically mapped across a gendered divide—the male gaze and the female voice. Narcissus's fate is sealed when he fails to rest his gaze upon an appropriate object; Echo's because words that sound well in male speech become sexually wanton in the mouth of a woman. Adriana Cavarero, reading the myth of Narcissus and Echo, underlines the doubled punishment that Echo undergoes. In the first instance Echo is a voluble and linguistically talented nymph "who has total command of the language, possessed of a typically feminine rhetorical talent. She is able to distract Juno with her chattering while the other nymphs bed Jupiter." It is the subsequent punishment handed down by Juno that transforms Echo into the curious being who "cannot

10. "Narrando i' vo festante; / e grido ognor felice" (1.3.65).

11. The passage continues: "Ben assai più di te gloriosa è la mia sorte, o innamorato Narciso, poiché s'alla limpida fonte specchiandoti t'invaghisti, onde te stesso amasti, t'amsti perché bello, t'insuperbisti perché vago in te stesso credevi d'essere face di mille cuori, strale di mille petti; ma io sola di me medesma vaga, per apprezzar me stessa, ciascuno disprezzo" (Because if at the limpid fountain regarding your reflection you inveigled yourself, such that you loved yourself, you loved because you were beautiful, you took pride in yourself because you knew yourself to be the face inscribed in a thousand hearts, the arrow that pierced a thousand breasts; but I alone admire myself, to appreciate myself alone I despise all others) (1.3.64).

12. "Però dolci le pene / narrando i' vo festante; / e grido ognor felice / arde in un vetro chi è d'Amor Fenice" (1.3.65).

12 ATTO

mile, ad altrui si celi, à me sola si scopra, à mè sola diletti.

O vetro non vetro: ma sfera doue si raggira Amore.

O vetro non vetro: ma gemma più viua del Sole.

O vetro non vetro: ma strale, che dolcemente per gli occhi m'in piaghi.

O vetro non vetro: ma fiamma, dou' ardendo Fenice, e nasco, e moro.

O vetro non vetro: ma Cielo, doue quest' occhi sono le stelle, anzi la Luna, e l' Sole.

Partiti Florinda, e de gli Amanti à scorno così parla.

Non per ch' io viua amante
Entr' vn lucido vetro
E di vetro il mio bene,
Ch' il vetro Amor fà diuenir diamante;
Però dolci le pene
Narrando i' vò festante;
E grido ogn' hor felice
Arde in vn vetro chi è d' Amor Fenice.

Fig. 1. Giovan Battista Andreini, *Amor nello specchio* (1622), conclusion of act 1, scene 3.

speak first; but cannot remain silent."[13] Under such circumstances she encounters the beautiful Narcissus, bound to echo back his words. The dialogue that ensues, characterized by Narcissus's words and echoed replies, is entirely a figment of his own imagination: as he will later mistake his own reflection for another, he mistakes the aural reflection of his own words for the semantic utterances of another; in both cases, the mistakes lead to death. In one case the body perdures in the form of a flower, a visual icon of beauty without breath or sound; in the other the body withers away entirely: "Her sleepless cares waste away her wretched form; she becomes gaunt and wrinkled and all moisture fades from her body into the air. Only her voice and her bones remain: then only voice; for they say that her bones were turned to stone."[14]

If Florinda outdoes Narcissus, she also outdoes Echo, combining the female voice with a deliberate misappropriation of the male gaze. As Florinda avoids the fragmentation of senses, one from another, neither does her body waste away. Rather, in performance Florinda's body, or, better, Virginia Andreini's body, was forcefully present in all its recalcitrant materiality: self-centered, somatic, and sexually explicit. It was present, too, in sound.

As Florinda's sexual enjoyment is heightened, so too is her linguistic mode; she slips out of prose and into the rhythms and repetitions of poetry. The layout of the text makes a clear typographic distinction between at least three modes of linguistic communication. The most obvious distinction is between plain and italic fonts. Interestingly, those moments in the play where sung performance is explicitly indicated by the context are also printed in italics—although while it is clear that the sung texts were italicized, it is not proof that all italicized texts were sung.[15] Within Florinda's monologue, however, two such typographic distinctions are made. The final section of italicized text is preceded by a section in plain typeface that, through the repetitions of "O vetro non vetro" and the emphatic force of each new line, is visually and rhythmically distinct from the prose that precedes it and the italicized verse that follows. The contours of the printed text expend some effort to indicate a difference that should be apparent in the sonic impact of performance. The changes in sounding rhythms represent the changes taking place within Florinda's body, a hot excitement that alters her interior state and the sonic force of

13. Adriana Cavarero, "Echo; or, On Resonance," in *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, 165–72 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 165, 166.

14. Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005), 54–55.

15. See, for example, 3.7.107, where an italicized portion of text is marked with the explicit instruction "Salteranno fuor così cantando e danzando" (Thus, they jump out, singing and dancing). In contrast, in 5.4.131 it is clear that a portion of italicized text given to the character Bernetta should be sung only because of a later comment by her interlocutor, Eugenio: "Bell'umore, canta" (She's happy, she sings).

its exterior manifestations. As the performance spectacularizes the affect of sound beyond mere semantic content, Virginia-Florinda performs an Echo effect, staging the conjunction of the female voice and female sexuality as song.

It is my contention that the tripartite typographic distinction marks visually an aural shift from prose, through rhythmically marked poetic declamation, to song. While there are no known settings of this particular text, the poetry is organized into two metrically regular verses, aligning the poem with repertoires of popular and improvised song. Later "mirror arias," such as Handel's "Myself I Shall Adore" from *Semele* (which comes dangerously close to the masturbatory pleasure posited by *Amor nello specchio*), frequently feature echoic vocal ornaments either as a direct invocation of the Ovidian association of Echo and Narcissus or as a musical representation of visual reflections. It is possible that Virginia-Florinda's performance of "Non perch'io viva amante" exploited a similar conceit. Echo arias were certainly popular, occurring frequently as a trope of *intermedi* scenarios. While some utilized explicit poetic referents by repeating the last syllables of certain phrases within the poetic meter, others echoed entire lines or individual melodic ornaments.[16] I have talked about Virginia's performance of an Echo effect as the embodied representation of female vocality and sexuality as reflected and refracted by the trope of Narcissus and Echo. It is useful to note that the scene of mirrored masturbation may also have quite literally performed an echo effect through the structural elements of Florinda's song.

The second of Virginia-Florinda's soliloquies, in act 2, scene 1, is an echo of Florinda's earlier appearance, with her first suitor, Guerindo, replaced by another, Lelio. Once Florinda disposes of him in a battle of wits, she is again left alone onstage, where she waxes lyrical about her relationship with her reflection. In this second appearance her sexual pleasure is invoked but not literally performed. Before her monologue reaches a climax Florinda departs: "Let us go to another place, crying aloud: 'I love, I love!'"[17] Where the figure of Echo was invoked by the live and sexualized vocality of Florinda's earlier scene, the figure is explicitly refigured here. The passage is worth quoting at some length, and, given the complexity of the Italian pronouns, I have included the original text along with the translation:

> Questo è 'l ritratto di colui ch'adoro; e 'n questo al presente vagheggio colui che, Proteo d'Amore, s'io mesta sono, egli è mesto, se lieta lieto, e s'io piango, pur ei piange. Anzi, novella Eco amorosa, non in antro, ma in questo specchio sta nascosto colui ch'al moto solo delle mie labbra, senza pur udir picciolo suono di voce, alle mie voci risponde, e che 'l vero io discorra, imagine bella, Eco gentile, ch'io seco favelli, ch'egli cortese mi rispondea. "O bella imagine di colui ch'adoro, ami pur la tua Florinda, non è così?" Ed ella col gesto dice sì. "La lascerai giamai?" Ed ella dice: "Mai." "Sarai della tua amata disamante?" Ed ella dice: "Amante." "Se l'abbandoni nel morir farà le guance smorte"; ed ella dice "Morte," cioè che non mi lascerà se non per morte. "Io baciar ti vorrei; dimmi tu voglio o non voglio." "Voglio." "Or che tu vuoi ti bacio." Oh com'è dolce! Oh come tutte le canne d'Ibla, tutte le manne vengono tributa-

16. The range of musical affects that fell into the category of "echo aria" was broad. In Orfeo's act 5 echo aria, "Vuoi vi doleste," from Monteverdi's 1607 opera, for example, the echoed portions of the text are short and infrequent (the echo speaks but three times, each no more than two or three short syllables); in "Echo," attributed to Bellerofonte Castaldi, Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS Mus. G.239, 10–19, the echo is extensive and structurally vital, repeating the last two syllables of each poetic line and the relevant vocal ornaments. In both these examples the echo converses with the speaking subject. In contrast, in "Dalle più alte sfere" (from the *intermedi* to *La Pellegrina*, staged in Florence in 1589) the echo effects of the song's finale were generated by repeating syllables and melodic cells within the ornamented melodic line. See the discussion of Vittoria Archilei's 1589 performance in Nina Treadwell, "She Descended on a Cloud 'from the Highest Spheres': Florentine Monody 'alla Romanina,'" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16, no. 1 (2004): 1–22.

17. "In altro luogo andiamo, gridando: 'Io amo, io amo!'" (2.1.81).

rie a riversciar sovra questo specchio tutti i liquori. Questo, questo è l'amor acquistato senza fatica, quest'è colui che perder non potrò, se non al perder della vita. Quest'è colui che leggiero, in altrui non rivolgerà l'amore. Quest'è colui che 'l petto al mio petto aggiungendo, dall'angosce del parto mi farà viver sicura. Oh benedetto Amore, oh fortunato modo d'amare! Dei tre diletti maggiori che 'n amor si gusti, io tutti appieno gli godo; e s'uno di quelli è 'l mirar la cosa amata, l'altro l'udirla e l'ultimo, e il maggiore, è 'l goderla.

E io Florinda sempre miro, sempre ne' dolci moti della bocca tacita l'ascolto, e ad ognor nel seno stringendola io la godo.

[This (mirror) is the portrait of he whom I love; and in this, at present, I admire he who is Proteus of Love, if I am sad, he is sad, if happy, happy; and if I cry, he even cries. What's more, new amorous Echo, not in a cave, but in this mirror is hidden he, who at the movement alone of my lips, without hearing even the smallest sound of my voice, at my speeches responds, such that truly we converse, beautiful image. Gentle Echo, I speak with him, and he politely responds. "O beautiful image of he whom I love, you love your Florinda so, isn't that so?" and she, with gestures, says, "That's so." "Will you leave her ever?" And she says, "Never." "Will you be the enemy of your lover?" And she says, "Lover." "If you abandon her, she will become as pale as death." And she says, "Death," that is, that she will not leave me except for death. "I would like to kiss you; tell me 'I don't want that' or 'I want that.'" "I want that." "Now that you want me to, I will give you a kiss." Oh how sweet she is! Oh, it's as if all the reeds of Ibla, all the manna, came as tributaries to pour all their liquid over this mirror! This, this is the love acquired without effort, this is he whom I could not lose, unless I lost my own life. This is he who will not lightly turn his love to others. This is he who that loving me, unoffended, conserves my virginal flower. This is he with whom I can unite breast to breast, and yet live without the anxiety of childbirth. Oh blessed Love, oh fortunate way of loving! Of the three highest delights that one tastes in love, I enjoy all to the full; and if one of these is to see the beloved thing, the other is to hear her, and the last, and greatest, is to enjoy her.

And I am always watching Florinda, always, in the sweet movements of her silent lips I listen to her, and at all times, holding her to my breast, I enjoy her.] (2.1.80–81)

For Piermario Vescovo, Florinda's curious alternation of masculine and feminine pronouns is indicative of a secret and fearful desire for the opposite sex.[18] This assumption is, I believe, too literal. Italian is a gendered language and boasts a long poetic tradition that exploits nouns and pronouns in order to ambiguate the gender of the speaker or his or her beloved. In the first part of the passage above "colui ch'adoro" (he whom I love) is a rhetorical gesture. The generic potential of the vacant placeholder "amante" (lover) is gradually filled by the specificity of the particular *amante* Florinda has chosen. The "bella imagine di colui ch'adoro" (the beautiful image of he whom I love) is feminine (for "imagine," a feminine noun), and "she" speaks with Florinda in echoic response. The paradoxical conditions of Florinda's fulfilled ideal return to the generic masculine "colui," but when, in the final line of the passage quoted here, the lover is finally named, she, too, is Florinda. At this point the parts of Florinda's speech match up, for the first time, with a sexually gendered body rather than a grammatically gendered metaphor: "Io la godo" (I enjoy her).

Linguistic games aside, the text of the play leaves little doubt that Florinda regards her beloved image as female. When in act 2, scene 6 her autoerotic reverie is interrupted by an errant reflection, she is horrified by the possibility that a male face might violate the sacred depths of her mirror.[19]

18. Vescovo, "Narciso, Psiche e Marte," 54.
19. "Giuro al cielo, se non mi fosti o specchio così caro, che gittandoti al suolo in mille parti io ti frangerei; adunque Florinda dello specchio fuori è nemica degli uomini,

The long passage quoted above also contains an interesting transposition of echo from the realm of sound to that of sight. This is an echo that responds to the movement alone of Florinda's lips without hearing even the smallest sound of her voice. Yet despite this integral change, the other characteristics of echoic conversation remain. The "bella imagine" "speaks" through the repetition of words her interlocutor chooses, a repetition characterized by a temporal lag such that only her last syllables escape from under the superimposed question and sound (or seem) therefore like a reply: "Thus separated from their context, they take on a different meaning. They are a forced and unintentional repetition, but they can appear like a response."[20] Like the mythic Echo in dialogue with Narcissus, Florinda's exchange of words with her mirror is lascivious and inviting. But where Narcissus failed to recognize the sound of his own words and was horrified at their recontextualized import, Florinda delights in both, carefully constructing her sentences so as to initiate the desired response.

The scene is riddled with contradictions. Florinda's visual interactions with her mirror happen at the speed of sound; she takes delight in *listening* to the "sweet *movements* of her *silent* mouth." The sheer impossibility is, however, irrelevant. As in the earlier scene, in which Narcissus was invoked only to be outdone, Florinda's self-sufficient sexuality overrides the normally irreconcilable split between eye and ear.[21] In performance her body is looked at and listened to; the conversation enabled by a visual echo is described in sounding language. While only one of these two scenes stages a literal orgasm, they both stage the female body in the act of boundary transgression. The character of Florinda represents both Narcissus and Echo—masculine eye and feminine voice—in sexually successful incarnations. There is little danger that her all-too-present body will waste away.

For twentieth- and twenty-first-century observers, the presence of a staged masturbation scene in a work dating from the early seventeenth century is outrageous and titillating, raising urgent questions about representation, censorship, and the repressive hypothesis.[22] In Salvatore Maira's film *Amor nello specchio* (1999) the masturbation scene takes on a crucial importance to the larger arc of the filmic narrative and provides a sharply visual rendition of the fantasized female body, sexually voracious and voyeuristically observed. While the film is fictional, it is structured around historical events and people: the Fedeli troupe, their trip to France, the *Amor nello specchio* (1622) script, and the affair that took place between Giovan Battista (called "Giovanni" in the film) and Virginia-Lidia (called simply "Lidia," as Virginia-Florinda is called "Florinda"). The film fantasizes a context within which such a play—so shocking to modern sensibilities—could have come about. The resultant story can be summarized as follows: the young and beautiful Lidia attempts to join the troupe and so to fulfill her lifelong dream of becoming an actress. While first rejected because of her inexperience, she stows away with the luggage and then seduces Giovanni, successfully gaining inclusion in his plans for a new production. Florinda is jealous. She decides to take her revenge by seducing Lidia and thus simultaneously depriving her husband of his wife and of his new lover. This she does, achieving her aim through the power of her performance of the masturbation scene from Giovanni's evolving script. The two

e colà dentro poi con gl'istessi uomini sta congiunta?" (I swear to God that if you were not so dear to me, oh mirror, I would throw you to the ground and break you into a thousand pieces; given that outside the mirror Florinda is enemy to all men, and here inside she has been joined with one of them?) (2.6.88).

20. Cavarero, "Echo," 166.

21. "The eye and the voice, which so tormented Plato, thus encounter one another in the Latin fable. And as with Plato, in Ovid's text there is no shortage of mirroring effects or produced copies—Narcissus' reflected image, and Echo's reverberating voice. The story tells of their impossible reconciliation" (Cavarero, "Echo," 165).

22. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978).

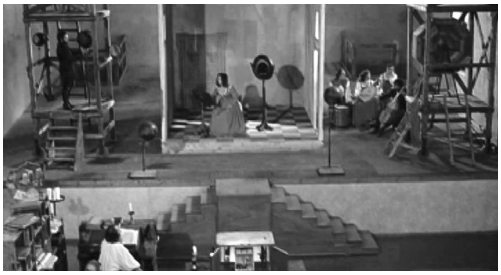


Fig. 2. Five stills from *Amor nello specchio* (1999), directed by Salvatore Maira. Used by permission.

women eventually flee the troupe together, although they do so only after he has written the central section of his new play in which the two female leads fall deeply in love. The company suffers financial hardship, having lost their two lead actresses, so that when they do return (the reason for their return is a little murky; perhaps Florinda decides that Giovanni has learnt his lesson, or perhaps both women missed him too much?), everyone is overjoyed, and Giovanni is finally able to pen a happy ending to the as-yet-unfinished manuscript of *Amor nello specchio*.

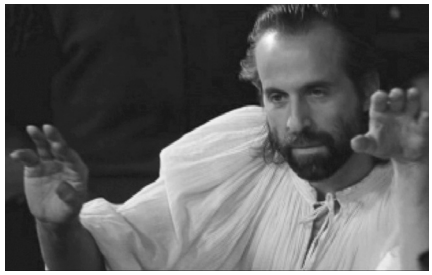
Within this storyline the pivotal importance of the masturbation scene cannot be overstated. As filmed, the scene is already a *comedia in comedia*, presented in rehearsal. The mise-en-scène allows Maira to theatricalize the mechanisms and technologies of spectacular production. The scene is carefully embedded within multiple frames: the camera cuts from the audience (made up of Giovanni, who acts as director, Lidia, and other members of the Fedeli troupe) to a model of the stage, a miniature mirror of the scene itself, empty, however, of the fleshy presence of the actress Florinda (played here by Anna Galiena). Her visual and physical absence is marked by the vibrant sound of her acousmatic voice, and as if in search of the sounding body, the camera pans upward, away from the stage model toward the stage to focus on Galiena-Florinda, her awkwardly garish stage makeup, and her heaving, prominently displayed bosom.[23] Initially, the boundaries of the stage are visible, and as the scene progresses, the camera cuts back and forth from an increasingly tight close-up of Florinda's face to members of her audience—most prominently (of course), Lidia and Giovanni. As Florinda approaches orgasm, the camera looks over her shoulder into the mirror and meets the actress's (Galiena's) eyes. She is performing for her audience, on-camera and off, rolling her eyes, flicking her tongue around her lips, groaning her words in a deliberately wanton display. Stills from this scene are shown in figure 2.

The scene takes places over a diegetic soundtrack of repetitive, quadruple-time dance music. In the early part of the scene measures of simple quadruple alternate with truncated one-beat cadences, emphasizing the repetitions of the music to create a seventeenth-century stuck-record soundtrack played on period instruments. Four musicians are visible, drum, lute, bass viol, and violin (although the violinist leans on her instrument and does not play); aurally, however, the instrumentation builds to include a recorder. At the end of the scene, as Florinda's verbalized climax disintegrates into heavy breathing, the instruments perform a clichéd final cadence (the bass viol marks a triplet anacrusis on the dominant, then descends to a first-beat final tonic), and the character Giovan Battista indulges in the supreme motion of artistic control, waving both hands in a conductor's gesture of closure, bringing the music and Florinda's solo performance to an end.

To my mind, Maira's rendition of this scene points to crucial differences between the erotic imagination of the seventeenth century and our

23. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).





own time, and these differences are best articulated by music. In my earlier discussion of Florinda's masturbation scene I commented on the music implied by the typographic differences. The soundtrack I posited (solo aria, perhaps incorporating echoic ornaments) is vastly different from that chosen by Maira (instrumental dance tune with obbligato heavy breathing). In early modern Italy the act of singing, with quickened breathing, visible and audible physical exertion (particularly of the throat), and an insistent foregrounding of the body, could be understood as similar to (or resembling) sexual behavior.[24] Musical performance could be understood to enact various behaviors associated with the erotic and, not only that, but to simultaneously stage this enactment before the eyes and inside the ears and bodies of the audience. Each performance was a live performance, with the heaving bosoms and heightened pulses of the performers on immediate display: to hear was to see, to hear was to be touched by their voices, to hear was to feel. For Florinda in *Amor nello specchio* (1622), to sing her moment of masturbatory pleasure as a lyrical outpouring of musical *jouissance* was to foreground the already present erotic potential of all musical performance and to literally represent the sexual pleasures of her body. Song staged the heaving breathing of erotic excitement. Furthermore, Florinda was played by Virginia Ramponi Andreini, a woman as famous (or more so) for her vocal and musical abilities as for her not inconsiderable dramatic skills. While other characters sing at various moments during the play, Virginia-Florinda does not. The masturbation scene is arguably her most important stage appearance and is therefore an appropriate place for musical performance. Indeed, I would argue that it was the sonic efficacy of Florinda's sounding and resounding pleasure that permitted its visual and physical presence on center stage: while all three of Florinda's eventual relationships are consummated, this is the only orgasm of the play's three to appear onstage.

Recognizing Florinda's staged orgasm as represented in sound, particularly musical sound, excavates a certain registral shift that accompanies the changes in her erotic allegiances. While Florinda and Lidia speak of their love for each other and exchange kisses onstage, their night together happens behind closed doors. In and of itself this scenographic omission is to be expected, yet, in contrast with the common (or heterosexual) offstage sex scene, Florinda and Lidia's protolesbian activities explicitly raise the question of what it was that occurred safely hidden from view. Rather than staging the love-making of the two female leads, *Amor nello specchio* stages instead the perennial inquisitive of lesbian sex: "What do they dooooo?"[25] The question

24. For a detailed exegesis of the various sexualized meanings of early modern song see Laura Macy, "Speaking of Sex: Metaphor and Performance in the Italian Madrigal," *Journal of Musicology* 14, no. 1 (1996): 1–34; and Bonnie Gordon, *Monteverdi's Unruly Women: The Power of Song in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

25. Suzanne G. Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight," in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 74.

is marked as comically inappropriate, relayed to the audience by the character of Florinda's fiercely heterosexual, sex-obsessed, and foul-mouthed maid, Bernetta:

> Well, how did you go? From here up [gestures to her waist] wonderfully, touching tits, chest, throat, giving kisses, and gossiping; but from here down [again, gestures to her waist], it couldn't have been worse; unless you did as talented lute players do, who are all the more excellent the closer their gently stroking fingers get to the rosetta.[26]

Florinda's response was silence—as if for her an as-yet-uninvented "lesbianism" was already the love that couldn't speak its name. Bernetta's elaborate euphemism is annotated in the modern edition by a queerly reticent footnote. The "double sense," we are told, "is evident."[27] This is a curious moment of academic nudge-nudge-wink-wink that points toward a coded avowal of "lesbian" sexual pleasure yet refuses to translate it, reinscribing the closet. It is, however, a metaphor that is worth elaborating: female genitalia was frequently referred to with floral metaphors, and the double entendre of Bernetta's comment plays both on the "little rose" of "rosetta" and the delicately carved sounding hole, or "rosetta," located in the "stomach" of the lute. Not only should we note the presence of metaphor to voice lesbian (or deviant) sexual practice, but note also that the metaphor is musical. It seems almost superfluous to add that Virginia Andreini was well known for her skill with plucked string instruments, both the lute and the Spanish guitar.[28] What, we might be tempted to ask, if Virginia-Florinda's musician hands were sex organs?[29]

Bernetta remains unsatisfied, however, with such possibilities and crudely elaborates her musical metaphor in conjunction with her mistress's silence to erase the lesbian sexual potential that she has herself evoked, touting with relief the impossibility of sexual satisfaction without men:

> You're right, you were neither lutes, nor musicians, but lyres, which sing sweetly only when the bow travels back and forth across their stomach; it is because of this that you speak of silence, and silent you must have been: you were a lyre without a bow.[30]

Bernetta's disrespectful patter brings into focus, if briefly, the ghostly specter of lesbian sexuality. The sweet song of lute and lyre stands in as the figurative allusion for Florinda's sung cries of pleasure, so literally staged as masturbation in act 1, scene 3. Where Florinda could represent her autoerotic sexual pleasure through the sublimated metaphor of musical performance, Bernetta's recourse to musical metaphorics represents the very nature of lesbian desire in its unrepresentability within compulsory heterosexuality. As she slips, with evident relief, away from the question of what two women might do to and for each other, Bernetta relegates lesbian sex to a linguistic closet of allusion and metaphor. Inviting the audience to laugh with her at the delusions of her mistress, Bernetta resuscitates the heteronormative arc of the drama as a whole without completely effacing the hermeneutic density of silence and metaphor that she herself has instantiated.

Florinda's third orgasm (her pleasure with

26. "E bene, come l'avete passata? Da qui in su benissimo, nel toccar tette, petto, gola, nel dar baci, nel cicalare; ma da qui in giù poi, non andò mai peggio; o pur avete fatto come i buoni sonatori di liuto, che tanto più sono eccellenti quanto più fanno delle scorse fino alla rosetta" (4.3.118).
27. "È evidente il doppio senso" (4.3.118n1).
28. In an earlier Andreini play, *Lo Schiavetto*, first published in 1612, the stage directions call for "a Spanish guitar or lute" for Virginia-Florinda's character. The prop is used in several scenes throughout the play. See Giovan Battista Andreini, *Lo Schiavetto*, in *Commedie dei comici dell'arte*, ed. Laura Falavolti, 57–213 (Turin: Tipografia Torinese, 1982).
29. Cusick, "On a Lesbian Relationship," 79.
30. "Avete ragione, on siete state né liuti né sonatori, ma lire, le quali tanto suonano dolci, quanto l'archetto passeggia loro in giù e in su su la pancia; per questo dite di tacere, e tacer dovete, perché sierte stata lira senza archetto" (4.3.119).

Eugenio) is narrated, however, in the first person (5.7.135–36). At the moment of "heteronormative" return she can publicly own and name her actions before the governor and an assembled crowd. This is not to say that Florinda herself has not previously been ready to declare her sexual and emotional allegiances—quite the opposite. In contrast with her claims of self-love and love for Lidia, however, the onstage crowd legitimizes her desire for Eugenio through their act of witness and reception. This final orgasm is not heard as embodied, material sound but is relayed in language and is comprehensible as such. The transition from literal music to metaphoric music to symbolic language mirrors her shift from autoeroticism to lesbianism to heteronormative marriage. By the end of the play Echo's sound is imbibed with semantic content, and the *ingrata* has abandoned her vain self-interest. Florinda concludes her autonarrative of lost virginity: "Now you have heard how Cupid castigates the proud."[31]

Yet despite the neatness of the play's conclusion, as all that was wrong is righted and happy heterosexuality reigns supreme, there are incongruous details woven into Florinda's curiously rich narrative confession. Despite her avowal that the "hermaphrodite" Eugenio proved himself "all man," his body remains that of Lidia (both were played by the same actress, in drag), and the two shuttle in and out of view in a series of quick changes that tie the loose narrative threads while ensuring that the siblings never appear onstage simultaneously.[32] The physical alternation of male and female look-alike bodies holds open the queer possibilities of Florinda's future. Eugenio looks and sounds like Lidia: the duet of their sex life together could only ever be scored for two sopranos, no doubt arranged for lute accompaniment.

The sounds of *Amor nello specchio* divert attention from the authorial specter of Giovan Battista Andreini and from the reductive biographical impulse with which scholars have tended to conflate the play's unique combination of narrative and cast. Listening for the performance of Virginia Andreini demonstrates how "questa ingrata Florinda" fits within the ambit of her professional role: one further iteration of the prima donna–virago character type, yet another sexualized vocal performance. At the local level this article offers a feminist reading of *Amor nello specchio* attuned to the gendered inferences of the text's densely knit invocations of Echo and Narcissus, sex and sound. More broadly, my focus on sound and song gestures toward a reading practice centered on the surviving play texts of the seventeenth century without ignoring the embodied and improvisatory context of the commedia dell'arte. Though the bodies and sounds of commedia dell'arte performance have wasted away, *Amor nello specchio* reminds us that to hear their echoes we need only listen for the sweet movements of their silent mouths.

31. "Eccovi adunque detto come Amor i superbi castighi" (5.7.136).

32. "Tutt'uomo egli era" (5.7.136).