



Extract No. 35

Ohimè! se tanto amate
Published 1603 (from Libro IV de madrigali, no. 12)

Claudio Monteverdi

SUMMARY

Text and Context

- serious piece of sophisticated poetry
- not for casual performance by amateurs in the home – rather for professional performance in court, etc.
- Translation. Note the metaphor between pain/death and sex/climax.

Texture

- Standard five unaccompanied
- Influence of the Florentine Camerata
 - much less contrapuntal than earlier work (e.g. de Rore)
 - almost entirely syllabic - text at the forefront of the listeners attention
- 1-4: largely homophonic dialog between tenor/alto and canto/quinto over sustained bass notes - plaintive, lachrymose (“Alas”)
- 5: recitative-style three-part homophonic figure – impatient
- 6-8: both ideas combined – imitative – represents more than one emotion at the same time – new!
- 9-19: largely homophonic five-part texture
- 20-29: trio between canto, alto and tenor
- Theme developed in a fuller five-part texture
- 39-43: more involved texture
 - still homophonic basis
 - added complexity - more independent inner lines.
- 44-46: full five-part texture
- 47-51: three-part, 52-55 two-part over bass pedal - repetitive nagging
- 65-68: similarly to the beginning - overlapping 'Ohime' figures



Structure

- Through-composed (i.e. no verse/refrain)
- 'Ohime' melodic figure - unifying device
- Development of motives:
 - 1-4: overlapping 'Ohime' dialogue
 - 5: 'ensemble recitative'
 - 6-8: ideas are combined
 - 10-11: questioning two bar phrase
 - developed up a minor third in 12-13
 - and again (up a perfect fourth) in 14-15
 - 20-29: trio section
 - developed up a perfect fourth and in a fuller five-part texture
 - 39-43: new section, new key - B-flat major
 - 48-51: four bar motif in canto/quinto/bass
 - 52-55: alto/tenor
 - 58-61: alto/tenor/bass
 - 62-65: canto/quinto/alto/tenor (over a bass pedal)
 - 66-68: overlapping 'Ohime' figures

Melody

- 'Ohime' motif - falling minor third – sighing
- This motif is passed around and between the different parts throughout the piece.
- 49-51: sequence of descending minor thirds – false relations
- Awkward melodic lines – not suitable for amateurs
 - 16: bass
 - 56: alto



Harmony

- 'Seconda pratica'
- Treatment of dissonance – ironic pain and anguish
- Abandons traditional rules of harmony
- 1-4: home key hard to identify
 - 1: g minor tonality laid down by the bass/tenor/alto
 - the canto/quinto unprepared dissonance (a dominant seventh over a tonic bass note)
 - resolves to D major
 - 3: sudden shift to B-flat major (false relation between the quinto F-sharp and the Alto F-natural)
 - even more searing dissonance (sharpened dominant seventh) – tritone between bass and canto
 - resolves to F major.
- 10 d minor established
- 10-11: imperfect cadence (IVb – V) - questioning
- 12-13: same figure developed in the relative major
- 14-15: develop up another fourth - impatient, incessant nagging
- 16-17: particularly outlandish harmony
 - F major at the outset
 - dissonant second in the bass
 - does not resolve - jumps down a seventh
 - A major
 - dissonant second in the tenor part
 - leaps down a fifth
 - 17: dissonant second in the soprano part
 - quitted via a descending leap of a fifth
 - parallel sevenths between quinto and bass
 - 19: resolve to home key (D) - Tierce de Picardie - release of harmonic (sexual?!) tension.
 - 24-27, 33-36: More seconds and sevenths
 - note clusters at 24⁴ and at 34²
- 39: B-flat major, plus dancing, faster rhythms – more positive
- 47: nagging, repeated chords
 - descending minor third 'Ohime' figure in descending sequence harmonized in thirds and sixths - series of false relations
 - bass 49³ with quinto 49³ is just the first of many examples in this passage
 - most remarkable – alto 56¹ with canto 56² nearly two octaves above
- Last line: bass pedal, gradually increasing note lengths, interlocking suspensions
 - slowing of the lover's pleading - lost cause
 - unusual perfect cadence - IIIb – I
 - wearisome character – given up