Linked to the diffusion of literary Petrarchism, the circulation of the Italian madrigal in England began at the end of the sixteenth century and lasted through the middle of the next. It represents a part of a broader cultural transfer of Italian culture in transalpine societies. Marenzio’s music played a fundamental role in this phenomenon: his books, as well as pieces published in anthologies, are the most important export from Venetian printers to the North.¹

Starting in the 1580s, Italian madrigals were published also by printers from the Northern countries. In Antwerp, Pierre Phalèse issued several anthologies, *Harmonia celeste* (1582/3), *Musica divina* (1583), *Symphonia angelica* (1585), and *Melodia olympica* (1591). In collaboration with Pierre Bellère, he was also the first to publish a series of Marenzio’s «Complete Works»: the *Madrigali a cinque voci in un corpo ridotti* (1593) and the *Madrigali a sei voci in un corpo ridotti* (1594). Kauffmann did the same in Nurnberg with his *Madrigalia quinque vocum* in 1601, and *Madrigalia sex vocum* in 1608. All these works were published in the original Italian.

The «Englished Madrigals» edited here take a very different approach. They preserve the original music, but the texts are translated into English. Four such anthologies were published at the end of the century: *Musica Transalpina*, First Book (1588) and Second Book (1597), edited by Nicolas Yonge; *The First Sett of Italian Madrigalls*, edited by Thomas Watson (1590); and the *Madrigals to Five Voices Selected out of the Best Approved Italian Authors*, possibly edited by Thomas Morley (1598).

The English madrigals of the I a 4 and IV a 6 are mostly included in Yonge’s *First Sett*, with only one appearing in the second book of *Musica Transalpina*. This edition of the madrigals is based on these two prints. *The First Sett of Italian Madrigalls Engished* is almost entirely dedicated to Marenzio. The pieces translated are drawn from the *Primo libro dei madrigali a cinque voci* (1580), the *Madrigali a quattro voci* (1585) and the *Quarto libro de’ madrigali a sei voci* (1587).

Remembered today mostly for the *First Sett*, Thomas Watson (1555-1592) was a celebrated poet and classical scholar at the Elizabethan court.² He dedicated the print to

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Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex and a favorite of Elizabeth I until his arrest in 1599 and his subsequent execution in 1601 for treason. Like many noblemen, he was also a poet, participating in court entertainments and writing lyrics for the masques. But in the madrigals Watson also celebrates two other leading figures of contemporary political and intellectual life, Philip Sidney, and Francis Walsingham, of whom Devereux could have been the political heir. Sidney was one of the most prominent poets of the Elizabethan age. Killed in a 1586 battle against Spain in Flanders, he became the epitome of the courtier, celebrated as the perfect gentleman in many poems and music. Walsingham was the principal secretary to Elizabeth I from 1576 to his death in 1590, thus a leading political figures at the court. The two gentlemen are hidden under the poetic names of Astrophil and Meliboeus, and appear in texts such as When Meliboeus’s soul / Now twinkling stars (contrafactum of Di nettare amoroso ebro la mente / Sonar le labra, from the IV a 6) and When first my heedless eyes beheld with pleasure from the I a 4, originally Petrarch’s canzone Non vidi mai dopo notturna pioggia. Here, the errant stars mentioned in Petrarch are subtly evoked by the introduction of two new characters, Astrophel (=«he who loves the stars ») and Stella (=star), a clear reference to Sidney’s most famous poem, Astrophil and Stella.

The madrigals included in The First Sett are chosen from poetical texts written by the finest Italian poets and set to music by the most famous madrigal composer of the time. As Watson himself mentions in the title, the texts have been freely translated «not to the sense of the originall ditties, but af[ter] the affection of the noates». He translates concepts rather than words in an artful and remarkable way. The general spirit of the Italian verses remains, but it is completely rewritten to better fit the music. In Veggo, dolce mio bene, verse 2 reads «Nel volger de’ vostri occhi». The concept of the beloved’s eyes appears only at the end of Watson’s Farewell, cruel and unkind in verses 9–10: «In whose fair face are p[laced] | Two heavenly stars, wherewith heaven is disgraced». In the same poem, Watson introduces the mythological figures of Amaryllis and Phyllis, not present in Petrarch.

Watson’s free translations allows him to recreate the sophisticated relation between words and music present in Marenzio’s settings. The task is not easy, since English pronunciation and declamation are so different from the original Italian. He plays subtly with the use of melismas, for instance suppressing the ones present in

3 Cecchi, “Delicious air and sweet invention”, 300-301.
Marenzio’s setting to fit the longer syllables of the English version. He also position the text differently with the music, creating new repetitions or suppressing others. In the above-mentioned *Farewell, cruel and unkind*, an example of both these practices can be seen at bars 6–7 (tenor and bass voices): Marenzio put three syllables, «nel volger», whereas Watson fits six of them on the same notes «alone will I wail me». In this case, he suppresses the melisma as well as the repetition present in Marenzio’s version. From time to time he slightly changes the music to fit the syllabation, and transforms several note values into smaller or longer durations to fit the English words to the notes.4

At first sight, it seems that Watson takes a lot of freedom with the original text and music; in reality, his version is a faithful translation—as faithful as a translation can be—of the affective imagery of the words and, more importantly, of the relationship between words and music.

Publications such as *Musica Transalpina* and *The First Sett of Italian Madrigalls Englished* would launch the vogue of the madrigal in England by making it accessible to English speakers. These Anglicized anthologies would lead to the creation of an original English madrigal. Emulating the Italian model in their own language, almost every English composer would contribute to the genre by the end of the century.

English madrigals from the I a 4 and IV a 6:

*Watson, The First Sett*

- When first my heedlesse eyes (=*Non vidi mai*, I a 4)
- Farewell cruel & unkind (=*Veggo dolce mio ben*, I a 4)
- Faire Sheperds Queene (=*Madonna sua mercé*, I a 4)
- Every singing Byrd [sic!] (=*Vezzosi augelli*, I a 4)
- Alas, what wretched life is this? (=*Ahì dispietata morte*, I a 4)
- O merry world (=*I lieti amanti*, I a 4)
- Zephirus breathing (=*Zefiro torna*, I a 4)
- O hear me, heavenly powers (=*Talché dovunque vo, tutte repente*, IV a 6)
- In chains of hope and fear (=*Né fero sdegno mai, Donna, mi mosse*, IV a 6)
- When Meloboeus’ soul, flying hence, departed / Now twinkling stars do smile, and dance (=*Di nettare amoroso ebro la mente / Sonar le labra, e vi restaro i segni*, IV a 6)
- Unkind, o stay thy flying (=*Crudel, perché mi fuggi*, IV a 6)
- The Fates, alas (=*Questa ordì il laccio, questa*, IV a 6)

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4 See the critical apparatus of the music for an exhaustive list.
- So sayth my faire and beautifull (=*Dice la mia bellissima Licori, IV a 6*)

**Bibliography**


