Such Ecstatic Agony: The Conflicted Self in the Life and Art of Carlo Gesualdo

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Topic of Study

Demythologizing Carlo Gesualdo: examining the life, culture, and influence of the Prince of Venosa and his contributions to music history.
Research Questions

• What defines Mannerist art, and distinguishes it from Renaissance art?

• How was political life structured during Gesualdo’s life (1566-1613)?
Research Questions Continued

• What philosophical and aesthetic considerations informed Gesualdo’s compositions?

• How did Gesualdo’s social standing and political obligations influence his work?

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Literature Review

• Gesualdo lived during the end of the Italian Renaissance, allowing him to be exposed to Renaissance ideas.

• However, Gesualdo can most accurately described as a Mannerist composer (Rowland 23).
Literature Review Continued

• Gesualdo’s compositions were different. They denied his audience a modal center.

• Gesualdo’s work emphasized inaccessibility and irresolution (Rowland 43).
Mannerism was not the creation of an entirely new artistic vocabulary. Rather, Mannerism negated and subverted the ideals that influenced it (Kirchman 4).

Accordingly, Gesualdo used the madrigal as his form to alter and subvert (Rowland 26).
Literature Review Continued

• 16\textsuperscript{th} Century Italian politics: a liminal state filled with tension and uncertainty (Kirchman 1).

• Gesualdo shirked and demonstrated a carelessness in regards to his social status (Newcomb 418).
Proposed Methodology

• This paper will be informed through a careful reading of texts by artists, composers, critics, theologians, and other cultural figures from the Renaissance.

• The paper will also use recent scholarship, such as Glenn Watkins’ Gesualdo: The Man and His Music, Alfred Einstein’s The Italian Madrigal, and Claude Palisca’s Studies in the History of Italian Music and Music Theory.
Future Plans

• Majority of research and writing will be done over the summer and into early fall of 2012.
• HNRS 4951 next semester.
• From scholarship to art.
Questions?
