

An Encore for Shakespeare's Rare Italian Master

Ross W. Duffin

In the spring 1993 issue of this journal, Bette Talvacchia presents an admirably detailed re-examination of Shakespeare's citation of "that rare Italian Master, Julio Romano," the reported sculptor of Hermione's statue in *The Winter's Tale*. Some of the material she presented there is familiar from the discussion in *The Variorum Shakespeare* and elsewhere,¹ but having the arguments re-presented and augmented by Professor Talvacchia led me to notice something new about the way Julio Romano's artwork is represented in the text.

Much of the confusion, whether intentional or not on the part of the playwright, centers on the fact that Giulio Romano (1499-1546) is known by reputation and from his surviving work as a painter and an architect, rather than a sculptor. This has been handily explained away by a reference to Giulio's sculpting skill in the first edition (1550) of Vasari's *Lives*. At the same time, D.E. Baughn has suggested that Shakespeare may have intentionally conflated Giulio with another artist, the sculptor Giovanni Romano (ca. 1470-1512),² leading Leonard Barkan to see in the name itself, "the multiplicity of the arts, the rivalry among them, and the *paragone* of art and nature."³ I would like to suggest that there is yet another layer of ambiguity beyond that already recognized, namely, that Julio Romano is also the name of an Italian musician whose work was certainly known in England in the early 17th Century.

The statue is introduced in the play as follows: "a piece many years in the doing and now newly performed by that rare Italian master, Julio Romano, who, had he himself eternity and could put breath into his work, would beguile Nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape." (V.ii.104-108) The imagery of the first phrase is itself suggestive of music: "a piece many years in the doing and now newly performed..." A musical composition might be worked on for many years, certainly, and "performance" is a more typical description of musical activity—or even theatrical activity—than of painting or sculpture. It is also true that a singer "puts breath into his work" in giving voice to his song, so that particular imagery might be regarded as musical as well.

As for the name of the artist, Julio Romano, it seems to have gone unnoticed

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heretofore in discussions of this passage that the famous Italian singer, composer, and theorist, usually identified today as Giulio Caccini (ca. 1545-1618), was frequently referred to at that time as Giulio Romano.

If the musical “performance” imagery is acknowledged as a possibility, then this man must have been the artist referred to, or at least this particular name must have been chosen to add to the artistic ambiguity of the situation. Caccini alias Romano was known as a virtuoso singer at the court of Florence from about the year 1579. In 1600, he contributed to one of the first operas ever written, *L’Euridice*, and in 1602 published a landmark collection of songs combined with a groundbreaking treatise on singing, *Le nuove musiche*.⁴ (Some scholars regard this as the beginning of *bel canto*.) He also spent time at Ferrara, Rome, and even Paris. Caccini was unquestionably famous enough as a singer and composer to have come to the notice of English musicians, such as John Dowland, who traveled on the continent during this period. In fact, Dowland’s son, Robert, included two of Giulio’s songs from *Le nuove musiche* in his 1610 collection of songs, *A Musicall Banquet*. Even before that, however, the English composer Peter Philips wrote a keyboard piece based on the most famous song from Caccini’s 1602 collection, *Amarilli mia bella*. When Francis Tregian, a friend of the composer, copied that setting into his famous Fitzwilliam Virginal Book sometime in the second decade of the century, he wrote at the top, “Amarilli di Julio Romano,” and at the end, “Peter Philips 1603.” This shows that Caccini was recognized by English musicians under the name Julio Romano—note the orthography—from a date early enough in the 17th Century to accommodate virtually any dating of the *The Winter’s Tale*.

What is Julio Caccini alias Romano doing in Shakespeare’s play? I would propose that he is there precisely because he is alive and capable of “performing” and because his name is the same as the painter/sculptor—thus adding a layer of confusion and yet another art to the so-called “battle of the arts” in the play. Shakespeare’s choice of ambiguous language and a confusing artist’s name could well have been a sign that Hermione’s statue was not a statue, that the 3rd Gentleman who delivered that speech was deliberately being obscure and ironic, and that the question, often posed, as to whether Hermione really died ought to be answered in the negative. To solve such an established riddle by the splendid richness of a new uncertainty based on a possible musical reference may seem far-fetched. The reason I think Shakespeare capable of obtuse musical imagery at this point is because this is not the first time in this scene that he uses a veiled musical allusion.

Near the beginning of this same scene, the 1st Gentleman addresses the newly arrived 2nd Gentleman with the phrase, “The news Rogero?” (V.ii.23) This is Shakespeare’s only reference to the name of this otherwise unidentified

gentleman. It is also his only use of the name Rogero in his entire oeuvre, so he must have inserted it here for a reason. Rogero is, of course, the name of a ballad tune, and if the audience had missed that connection in passing, Shakespeare renders it unmistakable with the 2nd Gentleman's reply to the question: "Nothing but bonfires: the oracle is fulfilled; the king's daughter is found; such a deal of wonder is broken out that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it." (V.ii.23-27) It is important to remember that Shakespeare's audience was the same audience that waited so excitedly for the stage jigs that frequently followed the dramas, and that all the dialogue for the jiggs was sung to ballad tunes. The printed editions of jiggs, like the broadside ballads themselves, included no music, only tune citations by title. Thus, the audience could be expected to have recognized instantly this reference to one of the well-known tunes in the repertoire. Why would Shakespeare have wanted to allude to a specific, popular ballad at this point in the drama?

A general mention of ballads, certainly, would have recalled a number of previous scenes, especially those involving the ballad-monger Autolycus, who was actually onstage with the gentlemen at the time. But the citation of Rogero, I believe, was made for a particular reason.

Among the so-called Shirburn Ballads, collected between 1585 and 1616, are two to the tune Rogero.⁵ One of these, No. 44, is entitled, "All such as lead a jealous life." The introduction and the first four stanzas are given below:

The torment of a Jealious minde, expressed
by the Tragickall and true historye of one
commlye called 'the Jealous man of
Marget' in Kent

All such as lead a Jealous lyfe,
as bad as pains of hell,
Bend downe attentive eares to this
which I shall brieflye tell;
And, thereby, learne to live content,
in quiet peace and rest,
And harbor not suspicious thoughts
within a troubled brest.

Vnto all married men I write,
the which doth lead their liues
With proper women, fayre and fine,
their loyall wedded wiues:

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Beare not a bad conceite in them;
 suspect not without cause;
And, though a furious jealousye,
 breake not true lovers' laws—

As this olde man of *Margat* did,
 whose wife was yong and fayre,
And not soe fayre as vertuous found,
 yet still opprest with care.
Abroad, god wot! she could not goe,
 but he would watch her styll,
And follow her in everye place,
 for feare she did some yll.

If any man cast eye on her,
 the iecalous foole would sware
That she made him, in shamefull sort,
 a payre of horns to weare.
And, by this meanes, the woman liu'd
 in dayly woe and strife;
And, in the flowre of her youth, waxt weary
 of her lyfe.

The obvious parallel—and the reason Shakespeare must have alluded to the ballad here—is the unfounded jealousy of Leontes concerning his virtuous Hermione. The virtuous wife in the ballad winds up dead, as Hermione apparently is at this point in the play, but in *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione's resurrection gives Leontes a chance to see his error and apologize to her. To use a religious metaphor, he is redeemed by her resurrection. In the ballad, the jealous husband sees his error and repents, but irremediably—his wife is really dead. When Rogero is mentioned in the play, however, the audience still thinks Hermione is dead, and the mention of the tune serves to make the connection to “All such as lead a jealous life.” The familiarity of that ballad to the audience would have led them to anticipate an unhappy ending—even in the face of Perdita's recent discovery—thus heightening their joy at the ending as it actually transpires in the play.

This subtle but effective use of a musical allusion here, I believe, reinforces the likelihood that the reference to Julio Romano later in the same scene was by a playwright fully aware of the latest currents in music, both popular and refined, and clearly poised to use that knowledge as one more way to “thicken

the plot.” The more we uncover the possible layers of meaning to Shakespeare’s audience, the more we learn about the author, and the less such references look like accidents.⁶

Notes

1. Horace Howard Furness, ed., *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, 284-286.
2. D.E. Baughn, “Shakespeare’s Confusion of the Two Romanos,” *JEGP* 36 (1937): 35-39.
3. Leonard Barkan, “Living Sculptures: Ovid, Michelangelo, and *The Winter’s Tale*,” *ELH* 48 (1981): 657.
4. There is also the sense that Caccini “put breath into his work,” by including examples of the new solo vocal form, the *aria*, in his collection. *Aria*, or “air,” might be construed as a substitute for “breath.”
5. Andrew Clark, ed., *The Shirburn Ballads, 1585-1616* (Oxford, 1907).
6. A study of ballad references in Shakespeare’s plays is in progress by the author.