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Giovanni Pontano hears the street soundscape of Naples

TIM SHEPHARD and MELANY RICE

In this paper, we attempt something like a Geertzian ‘thick description’ of the soundscape of a Neapolitan street as heard by Pontano, by undertaking ethnographic fieldwork entirely within the pages of a book. The book in question is a 1501 volume of the *Opera* of the diplomat, administrator, poet and intellectual Giovanni Pontano.¹ Our unorthodox project is made possible because the book contains Pontano’s lengthy dialogue *Antonius*, which is set in a street in Naples and includes numerous passages of reportage, and it also contains eight shorter treatises on ethics, which dissect and evaluate various human experiences and behaviours, including some of those found on the street in *Antonius*. Thus, the book provides both a representation of street life, and an ideological framework within which the different aspects of that street life can be interpreted, all tied to the presiding ear of a single author.

Our 1501 edition begins with two treatises dedicated to Alfonso II of Naples, who Pontano served as tutor from 1468 to 1475: *De Fortitudine* (*On Fortitude*), composed probably in the first half of the 1480s, and *De Principe* (*On the Prince*) dated 1468.² Next come two dialogues. First, *Charon*, written around 1470, in which Charon, Mercury and other interlocutors comment wittily on the souls arriving in the underworld. Then *Antonius*, which describes a meeting of Pontano’s informal academy, set shortly after the death of their mentor Antonio Beccadelli, known as Panormita, in 1471, but written later, probably in the mid-1480s.³ Next we find the five ethical treatises known collectively as the *Libri delle virtù sociali*, all completed in the second half of the 1490s: *De Liberalitate* (*On Liberality*), *De Beneficentia* (*On Kindness*), *De Magnificentia*

¹ *Ioannis Ioviani Pontani Opera* (Venice: Bernardinum Vercellensem, 1501).

² *De Principe* is edited in Giovanni Pontano, *De Principe*, ed. Guido M. Cappelli (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2003); and translated into English in Pontano, ‘On the Prince’, trans. Nicholas Webb, in Jill Kraye (ed.), *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, vol. 2: *Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 69–87.

³ The literature on Pontano and his dialogues is enormous, and most of it is only indirectly relevant to our purpose here, but a useful summary of *Charon*, *Antonius*, and their scholarly reception can be found in Pontano, *Dialoghi*, ed. Lorenzo Geri (Milan: BUR Classici, 2014), 14–48. The modern English translation is Pontano, *Dialogues*, vol. 1: *Charon and Antonius*, ed. and trans. Julia Haig Gaisser (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

(*On Magnificence*), *De Splendore* (*On Splendour*), and *De Conviventia* (*On Conviviality*).⁴ The book concludes with a treatise *De Obedientia* (*On Obedience*), written in 1472.

All of these texts had appeared in print before, and the structure of our 1501 edition reflects their printing history. *On Fortitude* and *On the Prince* were printed together by Mathias Moravus in Naples in 1490; and *On Obedience* was issued separately by the same printer later in the same year. *Charon* and *Antonius* appeared together in 1491, again from the same printer. The five treatises on virtue were printed together in 1498 by Johannes Tresser and Martinus de Amsterdam, once again in Naples. The particular combination of works anthologized in our 1501 Venetian edition was issued again, in 1512, by Giovanni and Bernardino Rosso in Venice, and also in Lyon in 1514. Thus it seems that these works enjoyed a modest but not insignificant print circulation, initially locally in Naples in the 1490s, and then more widely in the early 1500s thanks to Venetian printers.

Originally from Cerreto di Spoleto in the contested territory of the Papal States, Pontano studied at the University of Perugia and began a legal career, then joined the Aragona court in 1447, aged about 20, and served for decades in Naples as a diplomat and high-ranking official, finally retiring following the French conquest of 1495. Alongside his work as a statesman, Pontano built a reputation as a neo-Latin poet and essayist, and as Matteo Soranzo has shown, his literary products reflect and advance his wider campaign to carve out a career and a status as an outsider to Naples' rigidly-structured social elite, in a city recently and violently occupied by the Spanish dynasty who were his patrons.⁵ In his scholarly and literary pursuits, Pontano enjoyed the mentorship of Panormita, and after the latter's death became the leader of his literary sodality, known thereafter as the Accademia Pontaniana. *Antonius* is set at precisely this moment, and purports to represent a meeting of the academy in a portico on the Via dei Tribunali near the turning onto Via Nilo in Naples (the *Porticus Antoniana*, named for Panormita). Although the meeting includes serious discourses and discussions on literary topics such as Cicero and Quintilian's theories of rhetoric, and Virgil's *Aeneid*, and serves as an excuse to present some of Pontano's own poetry, it is also very varied and porous. People join in and depart, and the academicians continually observe, comment upon, and

⁴ Edited as Pontano, *I libri delle virtù sociali*, ed. and trans. Francesco Tateo (Rome: Bulzoni, 1999). *De Splendore* has been translated into English as Evelyn Welch, 'Public Magnificence and Private Display: Giovanni Pontano's 'De splendore' (1498) and the Domestic Arts', *Journal of Design History*, 15.4 (2002), 211–27, at 222–7. These five treatises are the principal focus of Matthias Roick, *Pontano's Virtues: Aristotelian Moral and Political Thought in the Renaissance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

⁵ Matteo Soranzo, *Poetry and Identity in Quattrocento Naples* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014). See also Elizabeth G. Elmi, 'Singing Lyric among Local Aristocratic Networks in the Aragonese-Ruled Kingdom of Naples: Aesthetic and Political Meaning in the Written Records of an Oral Practice' (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2019), 58–146.

participate in the life of the street, maintaining an acidly witty tone that is clearly influenced by Lucian's satirical dialogues.⁶

Pontano's witness to the urban soundscape differs in both form and emphasis from the sources and themes that are central to the rapidly expanding literature on Italian Renaissance urban soundscapes. Typically, such studies use institutional records, architectural remains and treatises, and visual evidence, to present an account of the urban soundscape that prioritizes 'official', planned interventions from ruling or civic authorities, rich patrons, guilds, and major religious institutions.⁷ Often these interventions are exceptional, rather than everyday, as with the processions and festivals that frequently take centre stage. Where more informal and ephemeral street sound is the focus, scholars have generally discussed what we might call 'sonic professionals', such as *cantastorie*, popular preachers, peddlers, and other street performers, rather than the passing citizens who form their audience.⁸

Whilst all of this work is important and innovative, in our 1501 edition Pontano offers us the chance to approach the same topic in quite a different way, hearing one particular street in a moment of everyday informality through one particular pair of ears, artfully constructed on the written page. Following the grain of our source in this respect, this essay does not attempt to reconstruct the lost soundscape of Renaissance Naples as such (a treacherous business given the literary nature of the text). Rather, our focus is upon Pontano's agency as an auditor within that soundscape, and indeed as its author, with a particular agenda – both in relation to the ethics of sound and nobility in general (the principal focus of this article), and in relation to his personal social situation and ambitions. This shift in perspective may have a wider utility for the discourse on Renaissance soundscapes, because it emphasizes aural perception as an active participant in, rather than a neutral receiver of, the sound-world of the street. Just as scholars have long seen 'landscape' as not nature itself, but nature represented as humans see it and reshape it in their minds, so 'soundscape' can be viewed not as an objective fact about frequencies reverberating in a given space, but as the expression and creation of listening subjectivities. Reading Pontano hearing the

⁶ *Charon*, the other dialogue in the book, is more thoroughly Lucianic. On the influence of Lucian and his satirical dialogues in fifteenth-century Italy, see, among others, Christopher Robinson, *Lucian and his Influence in Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1979), 81–95.

⁷ Key examples include Robert L Kendrick, *The Sounds of Milan, 1585–1650* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Iain Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City: History, Memory and Myth in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Iain Fenlon, *Piazza San Marco* (London: Profile, 2010); Niall Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance: Sound, Architecture, and Florentine Urban Life* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2016); Daniele Filippi, 'Roma Sonora: An Atlas of Roman Sounds and Musics', in Pamela M. Jones, Barbara Wisch, and Simon Ditchfield (eds.), *A Companion to Early Modern Rome 1492–1692* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 266–84.

⁸ Numerous important studies arise from the publication collaborations of Luca degl'Innocenti and Massimo Rospocher. See especially 'The Cantastorie in Renaissance Italy: Street Singers between Oral and Literate Cultures', published as *Italian Studies*, 71.2 (2016); and 'Street Singers in Renaissance Europe', published as *Renaissance Studies*, 33.1 (2019).

street in this way invites us to dig into the ideologies sustaining his auditions, problematizing his core assumptions about the purpose and nature of public sounds as components in the perceptual apparatus of an individual occupying a particular gender, national or regional identity, age and status, rather than as evidence for a coherent historical state of affairs.

HUBBUB

Pontano's street is full of conversation. Of course, the members of the academy discourse together, sometimes joined by friends and visitors as they pass by on the street; and their speech is, of course, more elegant, rational, and refined than that of any other character appearing in the dialogue. The nature of perfect speech is a subject treated in detail elsewhere in the book, at the end of the treatise *On the Prince*, where it is understood as a mirror of the mind:

Since there are only two things in which we are markedly superior to other animals, our mind and our power of speech, and since speech is the indicator of those things which we conceive of or perceive in the mind, you should see to it, using all the skill at your disposal, that your speech does not reveal anything lewd, foolish, rash, malevolent, proud, frivolous, greedy, lustful or ruthless in your mind and thoughts. Let your speech instead show you to be solemn in serious matters, witty and urbane in jests, cautious in doubtful affairs, true and stern in judgements, brave in adversity and unhappiness, gentle, affable and kind in prosperity and happiness.⁹

The prince is advised to speak 'in accordance with the way things are', to keep his gesticulations and facial expressions measured, and to avoid the uncouth slang of workmen, foreigners and soldiers. His speech should be 'smooth and fluent', and always free from anger, even when it is necessary to reproach, because 'once anger rears its head, there is no way that majesty can be preserved.' 'A clear and pleasant-sounding voice, neither weak nor loud, is especially prized', and can be cultivated with practice; it should be inflected to harmonize with the mood and meaning of the words. The notion that speech is an outer reflection of inner virtue is obviously core to the aesthetic of the dialogue form, and provides an overarching framework within which the pervasive conversational interventions in the street soundscape can be evaluated ethically and socially.

The dialogic frame is used as a pretext for numerous apparently incidental verbal exchanges. Panormita is remembered arriving at the portico early, because he lived nearby, and bantering with passers-by; indeed, Panormita's witty repartee in informal public conversation is recalled fondly several times in

⁹ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. f iii v; Pontano, 'On the Prince', 84. Where a reliable English translation of a treatise is already available, we will not give the Latin.

Antonius, and the stinging retort is an extremely valuable commodity within Pontano's conversational economy.¹⁰ Among the academicians, clever put-downs are deployed especially to deflate pompous fools, and are thus a demonstration of sound judgement as well as wit. Early on in *Antonius*, for example, a visitor to the academy is irritated by a passing youth who thinks himself very clever because he can quote a few phrases from Pindar in Greek. 'Just see how pleased with himself he is!' gasps the visitor, incensed, before responding to a quote praising gold with an antisemitic insult: 'Hey, you, Greekish fellow, why don't you go to hell? Praise gold to the Jews and the moneylenders'.¹¹ The visitor is comforted by an academician who recalls the acerbic barb used by Panormita in such situations: 'Antonio used to say that these people are like rumblings in the belly: they only displease the nose; the rest is wind'.¹²

The fools most often and most gleefully deflated in *Antonius*, however, are grammarians, whose speech is likened not to farting but to the barking of rabid dogs. Arguments with grammarians appear in numerous anecdotes throughout. The character Suppazio, for example, tells of how he visited the doctor to discuss remedies for catarrh, and was attacked by a grammarian for presenting his enquiry using the wrong conjugation.¹³ The lengthy discussion of Virgil which supplies the dialogue's literary meat is itself framed as a defense of the *Aeneid* from the censure of grammarians' misplaced pedantry.

Another important category of street conversation in *Antonius* comprises servants gossiping about their masters. In an especially picturesque episode, a passing 'young man' (*adolescens*) showing signs of mirth is persuaded by the academicians to recount how the bishop he serves had suffered trapped wind, sought counsel from the court physician, was cured by another servant's wit, and, now recovered, had sent for a young prostitute.¹⁴ The young man is in fact on his way to deliver the bishop's message to Frontonilla, the said prostitute – making him one of several messenger boys whose comings and goings contribute to the soundscape of Pontano's street scene, all of them engaged in co-ordinating illicit sexual liaisons. Much later in the dialogue, Pontano's own young son arrives to gossip about a domestic argument in progress between his parents in which his mother, her suspicions raised by the arrival of a boy with a message, has accused his father of 'listening in the middle of the street to harlots' messenger boys'.¹⁵ Although this episode might seem to reflect badly on

¹⁰ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [h vi] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 124/125.

¹¹ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. i [i] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 136/137.

¹² Pontano, *Opera*, sig. i [i] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 136/137. Foolish speech is also treated as 'wind' or 'hot air' in contemporary commentaries on the musical contests of Apollo and Marsyas or Pan: see Tim Shephard, Sanna Raninen, Serenella Sessini and Laura Ștefănescu, *Music in the Art of Renaissance Italy* (London: Harvey Miller, 2020), 191–205.

¹³ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. l [i] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 236/237.

¹⁴ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. i ii r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 140/141.

¹⁵ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [l iv] r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 258/259.

Pontano himself, it is effective in inserting the author (who is absent from the dialogue itself) into the sonic economy of the street and the neighbourhood in his adoptive city, as well as drawing attention to his wife, Adriana Sassone, whose unambiguous Neapolitan nobility had helped establish Pontano among the city's social elite.

The dialogue *Charon* adds the dimension of workmen's conversation to the street soundscape. A shade arriving in the underworld is interviewed by Charon, who asks for an account of his daily life. In the course of his witty exposition, the shade recalls that 'Sometimes I went down to the square, and there on feast days I would listen to estate managers talking about weather signs, the condition of the soil, grafting, seeds, irrigation and other farming tasks, and I was eager to become more knowledgeable from their conversation'.¹⁶ The educative potential of conversation, mentioned here in passing, is thematized more fully by Pontano in the treatise *On the Prince*, where he stresses the value of learning about foreign nations through informal dialogue with ambassadors:

Receive guests at banquets lavishly, talk convivially among diners, show yourself to be greatly amused by their conversation. Try to glean a good deal of information from them about national customs, about geography and about those things which they have seen or heard on their travels which are worth remembering.¹⁷

This principle is deployed in satirical inversion in *Antonius* following the arrival of the academician Giurazio Suppazio, who is introduced as an exceptionally wise man. Suppazio's discourse on the subject of wisdom is framed initially as a set of anecdotes relating to his travels in different regions seeking after wise men, an itinerary that encompasses Siena, Pisa, Lucca, Prato, Florence, Bologna, Genoa, Porto di Talamone, Rome, and Velletri, without success.¹⁸ Then the frame is inverted as he explains why he did *not* visit a range of further destinations, namely France, Spain and Venice, where the absence of wise men is a foregone conclusion.¹⁹

Although Suppazio's anecdotes are framed in relation to travels abroad, his barbs hit close to home, in a kingdom that was contested between French and Spanish dynasties throughout the fifteenth century, and in a large city that was home to migrants from other Italian regions. Any political message, however, is ameliorated by the indiscriminate and widespread nature of the accusations, which are clearly meant to be humorous. For our purposes, the episode serves as a useful reminder that a wide range of languages, accents, and Italian dialects could be heard in the Neapolitan street, each occupying

¹⁶ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [h iv] r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 106/107–108/109.

¹⁷ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. f [i] v; Pontano, 'On the Prince', 80.

¹⁸ Pontano, *Opera*, sigs. [k vi] v – l [i] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 228/229–234/235.

¹⁹ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. l [i] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 234/235–236/237.

distinct political and social registers which might take on different significance in the ears of different listeners.

A substantial contribution is made to general street hubbub at the interface of street and home. As Flora Dennis has observed, ‘sound disregards conventional physical or architectural means of differentiating between interior and exterior space and provides an alternative understanding of the boundaries of the domestic sphere’.²⁰ In *Antonius*, sounds breach the walls and sanctuary of the house in both directions, rendering public communications that would better have remained private. Indeed, the inappropriately public nature of these private communications is primary evidence of the poor judgement of those who produce them.

First we have a kind of proto-Pantalone figure, an elderly man, ‘eighty years old, singing, crazy with love’, who stands in the street beneath the window of beautiful young Mariana, scattering roses, pleading and weeping.²¹ This scene resonates strongly with the satirical treatment of older men singing of love in public in Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*; indeed, in several contemporary sources, listening to music is considered beneficial to the old on account of its moderately invigorating effect, but singing is discouraged – at least in public – because of the ravages of time on voice and memory.²² In conversation with the academicians, the old man announces himself to be a devotee of the god Amor, who he credits with inventing ‘elegance, style, fine dress, charm, adornment, sport, jest, song, refinement, delight, in short, every pleasant thing in life’. Love has made him young again, he declares, drawing him toward ‘all the sweetest pleasures’, including ‘dinner parties, music, weddings, dances, processions, holidays, theatre.’

The academicians note that the old man’s behaviour is Valencian in origin, thus his serenade is a sonic marker of regional identity, legible to local listeners. This is not the only such case in *Antonius*; elsewhere the public use of foul language is identified as a Catalan custom recently introduced to Naples along with Spanish rule.²³ The old man’s behaviour is valued by the academicians to the extent that it gives them a cheap laugh, but it is also suspect, read as symptomatic of an excessive license resulting from foreign influence and the decline of the indigenous Neapolitan nobility. Pontano’s position here is striking, given that he owed his career and status in the city precisely to that Spanish influence; here, and also at several other moments in *Antonius*, he seems keen to maintain critical distance from his Trastámara employers,

²⁰ Flora Dennis, ‘Sound and Domestic Space in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Italy’, *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, 16.1 (2008–9), 7–19, at 8.

²¹ Some version of this practice was common in Italy; see Dennis, ‘Sound and Domestic Space’, 13–16.

²² See Shephard et al., *Music in the Art of Renaissance Italy*, 283; and Sanna Raninen, ‘No Country for Old Men? Aging and Men’s Musicianship in Italian Renaissance Art’, in Chriscinda Henry and Tim Shephard (eds.), *Music and Visual Culture in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 268–80.

²³ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [h vi] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 128/129.

members of a dynasty that also ruled Valencia and Catalonia (among other territories). Pontano's relation to the Neapolitan elite, meanwhile, seems even more delicately nuanced – sometimes, as in this case, positioning himself as an outsider looking in, whilst at other points in the dialogue he introduces anecdotes and gestures emphasizing his local status and belonging.

The old man's performance is censured using the terminology of madness: he is *insaniens*, *delerius*, *delirantem* (raving, deranged), also *inane* (fatuous) and *lubricum* (unsteady). Pontano uses the accusation of madness to characterize foolish speech repeatedly in *Antonius*, applying it to no group more consistently than the grammarians. One of the academicians even recalls that Panormita had coined a specific psychopathology to capture their verbal idiocy:

He used to say that magistrates paid no attention to the grammarians since they were counted among the mad, and that although the types of madness and insanity, however various, were comprehended by physicians, the frenzy of grammarians alone was not only not comprehended, but not even comprehensible; and he made up a name for it: 'labyrinthiplexia'.²⁴

To better encapsulate their madness, grammarians are subjected to several bestial comparisons by Pontano, called whelps, dogs, rabid dogs, asps, bedbugs, gnats, bears, and lions – largely on the basis of their tendency to attack viciously and without good reason.²⁵

Following on directly in *Antonius* from the episode with the serenading old man, we encounter Euphorbia, an angry housewife whose domestic arguments can be heard by the whole neighbourhood. After she passes on the street, the academicians gossip about her, describing how her expressions of discontent stretch beyond speech to encompass a whole range of aggressive bodily noises: 'She shouts, she reviles, she howls, she makes noises with her teeth, she whinnies, she quarrels, she rages'.²⁶ Not only that, but her efforts to take out her anger on the housewares can also be discerned from their acoustic outcomes: 'she throws a skewer, basins, pans; she brandishes pokers, hurls candlesticks'.²⁷ As with the grammarians, Euphorbia's aggressive and meaningless vocalizations are described as bestial:

Do you recall, visitor, the beast that Hannibal, the Carthaginian general, saw in his sleep laying everything waste – forests, fields, farms, towns – wherever it went?

²⁴ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [i iv] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 160/161.

²⁵ Pontano, *Opera*, sigs. i iii r, [i iv] v, [k iv] v, l ii r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 148/149 (whelps, bedbugs), 160/161–162/163 (whelps, dogs, rabid dogs, asps), 212/213 (gnats), 238/239 (bears, lions).

²⁶ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. i ii v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 146/147.

²⁷ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. i ii v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 146/147. On the sounds of Italian tableware in this period, and their positive or negative reflection of the propriety of the women of the house, see Flora Dennis, 'Cooking pots, tableware, and the changing sounds of sociability in Italy, 1300–1700', *Sound Studies*, 6.2 (2020), 174–95.

She is that beast, but definitely not a dream like the other, but a reality and an actual beast.

This is not the only noisy domestic disagreement mentioned by Pontano – an argument in his own house was noted above – and in all cases the aggressor is said to be the woman. Indeed, Pontano's son, Lucio, reports that his father uses a sonic remedy to cure his wife of her anger:

Lucio: [...] he himself began to sing the spewing poem.

Visitor: Excellent boy! But please explain what the spewing poem is.

Lucio: The person who speaks the poem faces an enraged woman and spits three times. At once she spews out her bile and is relieved of her madness. Here is the song itself:

Cerberus has three heads, thrice spit I on thee.

Threefold is the Fury, thrice spit I on thee.

Spew, I say, spew, thrice spew. Get vile rage
off your chest and send it to Phlegethon.

Visitor: This poem has amazing power!

Lucio: The proof is in the pudding.²⁸

Throughout the book, Pontano shows nothing but contempt for charms and all other forms of superstition, suggesting that this episode is not to be taken seriously, but rather allows the character of Pontano a humorous and rather double-edged performance of a local culture to which he (though not his wife) is really an outsider. The problem of the angry wife was clearly close to Pontano's heart, though, for a second remedy, this time presented as if from a medical doctor, is found among the insights to be learned from Suppazio's discourse on his travels:

Suppazio: When I entered Capua I met a man who thought I was a physician and asked what I considered to be most beneficial to the eyes. I replied, 'If you never see a lawyer or a barrister'. 'What for the ears?' 'If you have no woman in the house.'²⁹

From the treatment of the elderly serenader and Euphorbia it is clear that speech in this book inhabits an elaborate ethical framework that is deeply veined by sexist and ageist attitudes. The ill-judged, impotent and emotional outbursts of nagging housewives and senile old men are at the bottom of the pile. At the top is the persuasive eloquence of mature men at the law court – a hierarchy that Pontano is evidently especially motivated to uphold given his legal training. Persuasive eloquence is the subject of a lengthy discourse delivered by Andrea Contrario as soon as he arrives at the portico, which is framed as a digest and continuation of the conversation he and his

²⁸ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [I iv] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 258/259–260/261.

²⁹ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. I iii v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 252/253.

companion Elisio Calenzio were enjoying as they walked along the street immediately before.³⁰ Andrea contrasts the definitions of oratory offered by Cicero and Quintilian, subject matter that requires him to repeat no fewer than sixteen times within four pages three key points: oratory is speaking well, in order to persuade, primarily in a legal context.

As a discussion among the academicians unfolds from Andrea's initial discourse on oratory, a conceptual framework emerges contrasting well and poorly formulated speech in a way that implies a kind of verbal self within which the madness of angry wives, old men and grammarians can be coherently theorized. Andrea examines the nature of definitions, in order to show how Cicero's definitions of the words *status* and *constitutio* are superior to Quintilian's. He explains that Quintilian's definition is not satisfactory because it is too general and therefore points in many directions at once. In two almost identical formulations, he complains that it 'confuses the listener from the start and pulls his thoughts in several different directions', and that it 'confuses rather than clarifies since it carries the hearer's mind off into so many directions'. In contrast, according to Andrea, a good definition is one which is interchangeable with the thing defined: 'what is being defined and the definition harmonize (*conveniunt*) so reciprocally that they can be exchanged with each other in turn'; 'nothing is left doubtful, nothing in confusion, and one can turn it either way very harmoniously (*magno ... consensu*)'.³¹

In this passage there is a significant focus on the direct impact of well or poorly reasoned speech on the mind of the listener: poorly-reasoned speech causes the disintegration of the mind, whereas well-reasoned speech supports its coherent integration. There is a conceptual continuity here with contemporary discussions of madness, which is also seen as a disintegration of the mind and exemplified through incoherent speech, and furthermore is potentially contagious. The stakes are high in this conceptualization of speech: maintaining rigorous standards of rational discourse in the public sphere is not only seemly, but essential to public sanity.

OFFICIAL SOUNDS

Pontano mentions several sonic interventions from royal, civic and church authorities aimed at regulating time, lifecycles, health, and safety in the city. First we meet a herald of the king, who arrives in the street with his trumpet to proclaim a royal edict:

³⁰ Pontano, *Opera*, sigs. i iii r – [i iv] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 148/149–160/161.

³¹ Pontano, *Opera*, sigs. [i v] r-v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 166/167–170/171. The translation here fixes a musical connection ('harmony') that is a possible but not a necessary reading of the Latin; this is tangential to our point here.

But let us listen to this herald who is getting such a hearing in the crowd. It must be a royal edict. I have never seen more puffed-out cheeks. I think the fellow feeds on yeast. Good gods, what a noise!³²

This passage does not clearly state whether the herald is currently playing his trumpet or making his announcement, but puffed-out cheeks (here likened to leavened dough) are often associated with playing wind instruments in this period so most likely he is trumpeting. He does so again at the end of his proclamation, to affirm it.

The trumpet is mentioned more often in this book than any other musical instrument, appearing in royal, civic and military guise for the purpose of announcement and signalling, and also for private entertainment, as well as serving as a metaphor for heroic verse. Although in a straightforward way this underscores the importance given to trumpeting in other studies of late medieval city soundscapes, such as that of Gretchen Peters on French cities, it is noteworthy that Pontano adopts a distinctly sardonic tone in relation to the herald, and his contempt for wind players in general is crystal clear throughout the book.³³ In the dialogue *Charon*, which is set in the afterlife, wind players (*tibicines*) are identified as drunkards and fools whose proper punishment in hell is to have their throats pierced and a nail driven into their brains.³⁴ In the treatise *On Magnificence*, meanwhile, Pontano censures those who seek to show off their magnificence by ‘pursuing actors, clowns and pipers with the greatest gifts’, because (elaborating an ethical framework already presented in the treatise *On Liberty*) such people are not deserving of reward.³⁵

Most detailed in its articulation of the status of wind players is an anecdote recounted in the treatise *On Liberty* concerning another official trumpeter.³⁶ Arriving at an inn in Narni with his associates, a trumpeter came to welcome Pontano to the city, as was the local custom for visiting dignitaries. According to the custom, after playing the trumpeter would expect a tip. Pontano felt unable to show liberality to a trumpeter who plays, because his low status would not merit liberal treatment; but equally Pontano did not wish to seem

³² Pontano, *Opera*, sig. i [i]r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 134/135. On royal trumpeters in Naples, see Allan Atlas, *Music at the Aragonese Court of Naples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 98–100.

³³ Gretchen Peters, *The Musical Sounds of Medieval French Cities: Players, Patrons and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). In contemporary Italy, it is the official wind players of Florence that have been studied most extensively; see, among others, Timothy J. McGee, ‘In the Service of the Commune: The Changing Role of Florentine Civic Musicians, 1450–1532’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 30.3 (1999), 727–43. On wind players in Naples, see Atlas, *Music at the Aragonese Court*, 110–11; and Gianluca D’Agostino, ‘La musica nel Trionfo napoletano di Alfonso d’Aragona (febbraio 1443)’, in *Linguaggi e ideologie del Rinascimento monarchico aragonese (1442–1503): Forme della legittimazione e sistemi di governo*, ed. Fulvio Delle Donne and Antonietta Iacono (Naples: Federico II University Press, 2018), 137–77.

³⁴ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [f vi] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 24/25.

³⁵ ‘qui tamen, dum ostentare volunt magnificentiam, istriones, scurras, tibicines maximis donis prosequantur’. Pontano, *Opera*, sig. s [i] v; Pontano, *I libri*, 216/217.

³⁶ Pontano, *Opera*, sigs. [o vi] v – p [i] r; Pontano, *I libri*, 98/99–100/101.

illiberal, which would diminish his own status, so instead he paid the trumpeter to stay quiet.

Although issues of status and pride certainly attached themselves to trumpets as to other sonic representatives of civic or royal authority, the value of the trumpet as a public instrument lay fundamentally in its volume and the arresting quality of its sound. Although in the case of the herald these are precisely the qualities mocked by Pontano, elsewhere in the book he does recognize the value of music as a means of controlling behaviour in a noisy and potentially disorderly environment. The treatise *On Conviviality* provides extensive advice on the subject of feasts, including a reflection on the role of musicians:

Likewise proper and splendid is the custom that, as the courses are brought in, they are preceded by trumpets and pipes, whose playing entertains the guests and those present, and gives a signal of the approaching courses, so that pleasure may seem to be adjoined to order – which, if it is lacking, everything must be confused and jumbled. Also connected to order, those present and the servants must observe the discipline that is proper to banquets, that not only words, but also actions will be absent which produce some degree of distaste and disturbance. This seems to be the reason the custom of calling musicians to banquets was introduced; their playing not only delights, but, by drawing those present to them to listen, they might obtain silence, and out of silence, calm.³⁷

Here, the capacity of music to bring people into harmonious order is not only metaphorical, but practical, the result of providing a focal point within the soundscape. Paradoxically, the very noisiness of trumpets that Pontano apparently found so irritating and ridiculous is an effective means to achieve silence in a public or crowded space.

Another musical component of the street that has been prioritized in previous soundscape studies, but which is strongly disliked by Pontano, is bells.³⁸ In the dialogue *Charon*, the titular character complains:

But you don't know, Mercury, how you pierced my heart a minute ago when you mentioned the Campanians, for I was very much afraid that you would say

³⁷ 'Recte etiam ac splendide institutum videtur ut, procedentibus ferculis, tubae tibiaeque praegrediantur, quae convivas, astantesque oblectent cantibus et signum dent incedentium ferculorum, ut voluptati etiam ipsi ordo videatur adiunctus; qui si defuerit, interturbari atque confundi necesse est omnia. Ordini quoque illud accedet, ut astantium ac ministrorum ea disciplina sit, quae convivorum est propria: absint non modo dicta, verum etiam gestus, qui tristiam aut turbationem afferre habeant aliquam. Quae re mihi videtur introductum, ut his in conviviis adhiberentur musici, qui non solum oblectarent cantu, verum ut, dum astantes ad se audientes trahunt, silentium parerent, atque e silentio tranquillitatem'. Pontano, *Opera*, sig. t [i] v; Pontano, *I libri*, 260/261.

³⁸ Bells are a particular focus in Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance*. See also Daniel M. Zolli and Christopher Brown, "Bell on Trial: The Struggle for Sound after Savonarola," *Renaissance Quarterly* 72 (2019), 54–96.

something about campaniles, whose sound and very name I detest. I really wonder how men can stand them, since they sometimes assail my ears here.³⁹

Mercury explains that men are all belly and no head, and the little head they have they do not want, so they use bells to help them lose it. In *Antonius*, the angry wife Euphorbia is compared to a bell:

It would be in the best interest of the pope in Rome for Euphorbia to be set upon the highest peak of the Alps, so that at the same moment the peoples of Germany, Gaul, and Britain could be summoned to a council by her shrieking; for Euphorbia was the bell of the world.⁴⁰

Clearly, as with the herald, it is the volume of bells to which Pontano principally objects: like the bestial Euphorbia and the grammarians, they constitute an unprovoked and meaningless sonic assault. However, this is not the only layer to Pontano's distaste, for the *campanile* draws us close to the church, and priests are equalled only by grammarians in Pontano's hierarchy of distain. In Pontano's view, priests are dishonest fools who indulge in and build their power upon superstition, something for which he expresses the utmost contempt. In *Charon*, for instance, Mercury says:

There is nothing more wretched than the man whose mind is possessed by superstition. What life can such a man have, as long as he fears everything, dreads all things, and – what is most disastrous of all – day and night belabours the ears of the gods, who are moved, not by much talk and anxious mutterings or tears called up, often for the most feeble reasons, but by honourable and thoughtful actions and appropriate wishes?⁴¹

Charon notes in reply that among the souls arriving in the underworld he sees 'no one tattooed with more loathsome marks of disgrace' than priests and popes. Mercury agrees, complaining that 'No men are less concerned about true religion, since their aim is to increase their property, pile up money and keep busy fattening their bodies'.⁴² In the treatise *On Liberality*, Pontano lays into princes who assist priests in these objectives by funding their lavish lifestyles.⁴³

In Mercury's critique of superstition, Pontano emphasizes the emotive quality of prayerful speech. The same point is repeated elsewhere in the book:

³⁹ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [g v] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 66/67–68/69. Given that ancient Campania encompassed the city of Naples, it would seem that here once again Pontano is leaning into his outsider status, for in the same terms he was an Umbrian.

⁴⁰ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. i ii v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 146/147.

⁴¹ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [g iv] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 60/61.

⁴² Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [g v] r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 62/63.

⁴³ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [o v] v; Pontano, *I libri*, 92/93.

in *Antonius*, for example, the gossiping servant whose master has suffered with trapped wind describes the ‘groaning and lamentations’ (gemitu lamentationibusque) of the bishop’s prayers for relief. Within Pontano’s framework for the ethics of speech, these descriptions effectively gender emotive prayer feminine, because of a fundamental association between women and emotive speech. In the treatise *On Fortitude*, for example, in a chapter on cowards, he notes that those of weak and feeble spirit ‘collapse into women’s ways – women’s wailings and lamentations are theirs’.⁴⁴ In *Charon* women are identified as the very origin of both superstition and emotive prayer, through their role as teachers of their young children:

The greatest possible superstition is found among foolish women. When they get a painted picture, they consult it on the spot, and, to pass over the rest, if a gosling or chick has the pip, with what prayers and tears they entreat the image! They instruct boys and girls barely seven years old in this nonsense.⁴⁵

The implication that priests are somehow effeminate, suffering from the same weaknesses of mind and spirit as women, is certainly intended by Pontano. In telling of his travels in *Antonius*, the wise Suppazio recalls a conversation with a friendly widow in Gaeta, who offers him water for refreshment in the street outside her house, in which superstition emerges as a terrain held in common by women, and men of the cloth.⁴⁶ Suppazio watches young women arrive to seek the widow’s counsel, and she explains that since her husband’s death she has had to earn her keep as a purveyor of magical cures and fortunes. Business would be good, she says, because the women of the town are gullible – except that the monks of the local monastery are muscling in on her trade. In other words, the anecdote serves to show that women and religious are in competition for the same market among the gullibly superstitious.

This furnishes necessary context for the only mention of church music in the whole book – and it is hardly an encouraging one. In *Charon*, Mercury notes that priests must be the happiest men on earth because ‘you hear them singing even in funerals’.⁴⁷ Pontano’s issue here seems to build upon the assumption, very common in the period, that music is fundamentally an expression of joy. (As the musician Johannes Tinctoris, a colleague of Pontano at court in Naples, points out in a treatise from the 1470s, this is why the angels are represented making music in heaven: their music-making serves

⁴⁴ ‘Statim concidunt foemineum in modum: eorum sunt muliebres illi ciulatus ac lamentationes’. Pontano, *Opera*, sig. b ii v.

⁴⁵ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [g v] r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 64/65.

⁴⁶ Pontano, *Opera*, sigs. l ii v–l iii r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 244/245–246/247.

⁴⁷ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. g ii r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 38/39.

to convey their state of heavenly bliss.⁴⁸) If music is inherently joyful, it is clear that it is inappropriate at a funeral. There is also a hint here of the view, expressed by others around this time, that church song placed too great an emphasis on making nice music, and not enough on respecting the decorum and meaning of the liturgical occasion.⁴⁹ However, given Pontano's broader attitude to priests and to emotion in prayer, it seems likely that it is not only the clash between joyful song and a sorrowful occasion that bothers him, but also priests singing in the first place. As Augustine explains in a very influential passage of the *Confessions*, church song serves the purpose of heightening the emotional impact of the liturgy – indeed, he specifically mentions being moved to tears by prayerful song, something which Pontano would certainly ridicule.⁵⁰ So we might reasonably speculate that even if priests were to sing in an emotional register appropriate to the liturgical occasion, Pontano could still accuse them of emoting like superstitious women.

It is interesting to note the extreme mismatch between the tiny space and contemptuous valuation allotted to church music by Pontano in this book, and the immense esteem and focus lavished upon it by modern musicologists specializing in this period. In this respect Pontano's 1501 *Opera* is characteristic of the entire corpus of literature considered by the 'Sounding the Bookshelf 1501' project, in which (to summarize rather glibly) trumpets abound, and lyres are common, but polyphonic masses and motets are practically invisible. Pontano's witness to the urban soundscape forms a useful counterpoint to soundscape studies in which the contributions of important churches and monasteries are given centre stage.⁵¹ Evidently church sound loomed large in the ears of some urban auditors, but not in the ears of all.

A final religious intervention in the city soundscape is more communal in character, and concerns sanitation. In *Antonius*, one of the academicians mentions an anecdote that had been told by Panormita concerning a charm designed to rid a city of rabid dogs:

Compter: [...] It is a charm he said the Apulians used in the towns to cure the bite of a rabid dog. Unsleepingly, they would go around the town nine times

⁴⁸ J. Donald Cullington ed. and trans., with Reinhard Strohm, *'That liberal and virtuous art': Three Humanist Treatises on Music* (Newtownabbey: University of Ulster, 2001), 60 and 77 (*Compexus effectuum musices* 53). On Tinctoris' likely relations with the literati of contemporary Naples, see Evan A. MacCarthy, "Tinctoris and the Neapolitan Eruditi," *Journal of the Alamire Foundation* 5 (2013), 41–67.

⁴⁹ One thinks, for example, of Giovanni Carlioli, as discussed in Rob Wegman, *The Crisis of Music in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 17–48; and Girolamo Savonarola, as discussed in Patrick Macey, *Bonfire Songs: Savonarola's Musical Legacy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 91–7.

⁵⁰ James McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 154–5.

⁵¹ A key case in point is Kendrick, *The Sounds of Milan*, although the later date range of Kendrick's study brings it within the post-Tridentine period, in which public religious expressions took on a changed significance.

on the Sabbath, calling on some saint or other called Vitus; and when they had done this by night on three Sabbaths, all the rabies and poison were eliminated. Since I remember this song, I will repeat it if you like.

Visitor: I would like that very much.

Compter: Gentle Vitus, dog averter,/ you guard the coast of Puglia/and the shore of Polignano;/ you relieve their rabid bites/ and tame the wrath of dogs./ Keep off cruel rabies, holy one,/ and the dog with ghastly jaws;/ keep off the savage scourge./ Get thee hence, O rabies, go;/ let all madness be far away.

Visitor: A very fine song, and a divinity exceedingly accommodating to the Apulians!

This is one of three charms mentioned in *Antonius*, including the ‘spewing song’ for irate wives (see above), and another charm for rabid dogs (also effective against grammarians) used in Sicily.⁵² For Pontano, these count as examples of superstition, and are therefore altogether ridiculous. Of course, this is also a description of a religious procession, a category of public activity that has loomed large in the soundscapes literature.⁵³ Pontano does cite the Florentine feast of St John the Baptist, and the feast of Easter as celebrated in Rome, Naples and other Italian cities, as examples of magnificence in the treatise dedicated to that virtue.⁵⁴ But elsewhere, as in the case of the Apulians, public religious celebrations are ridiculed as examples of superstition – public festivities for the feasts of St Martin and San Gennaro, for example, are criticized in *Charon*.⁵⁵

Overall it is clear that Pontano maintains a healthy disregard for all attempts at sonic ordering and control of the public spaces of the city, as examples of pompousness, loud noises that will give you a headache, vulgar emoting, and foolish superstition. His witness in this respect offers a healthy counterbalance to soundscape studies in which ‘official’ interventions in the urban soundscape – such as those of royal or civic musicians, bells, and religious processions – are given a great priority in ordering and dignifying public space. Whilst no doubt that was the intention of the royal, civic and religious authorities who sponsored such activities, it seems that their effect was not equally successful in the ears of all citizens, and ‘unofficial’ readings of their valence were also richly possible.

PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

The third major category of street sound in *Antonius* concerns public performance for the sake of entertainment. There are two key episodes here, which

⁵² Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [i iv] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 160/161 (the Sicilian charm).

⁵³ Religious processional and festive activity is particularly prominent in Fenlon’s studies of Venetian soundscapes: *The Ceremonial City* and *Piazza San Marco*.

⁵⁴ Pontano, *Opera*, sigs. [r iv] r-v; Pontano, *I libri*, 198.

⁵⁵ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [g v] r-v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 64/65–66/67.

together take up a significant proportion of the whole dialogue. The first concerns a passing *lyricen* – literally a lyre-player, but we will join the translator of the I Tatti edition, Julia Haig Gaisser, in calling him a ‘lutenist’ – who is persuaded to sing several numbers for the academicians before hurrying off to play at a wedding.⁵⁶ The second concerns a theatre troupe, who set up in the street and deliver a rousing account of daring deeds in an ancient battle.⁵⁷

Interestingly, both of these practices are described as new imports from northern Italy, or more precisely from Cisalpine Gaul. Following on immediately from the departure of the lutenist, and responding to the arrival of the theatre troupe, one of the academicians, Enrico, remarks ‘This thing too is a new import from northern Italy’ (*Et hoc quoque recens Cisalpina e Gallia allatum est*).⁵⁸ Gaisser connects this comment with the import of carnival from Venice to southern Italy in the late fourteenth century, because the arriving troupe are called a ‘crowd of people in masks’ (*grex personatorum*). But the spokesperson for this group is called a ‘Masked Actor’ (*Istrio Personatus*), and their arrival heralds a theatrical performance, which this group specifically is said to prepare and present. Thus, although carnival may well be the wider context for this episode, it seems more likely that Enrico is commenting on the actors and their performance specifically. Perhaps it is not carnival as such that is newly arrived, but experiments with classical and classicizing theatre, often presented within the carnival period, which emerged in the 1470s–1480s in Mantua, Ferrara, Florence and Rome.⁵⁹ Such a reading certainly stretches the chronology of the dialogue’s setting, in the early 1470s, but not its likely date of composition, in the mid-1480s, by which time Pontano’s friend and protégé Jacopo Sannazaro was closely involved in innovations in Neapolitan theatre.⁶⁰ So far as the lutenist is concerned, the most celebrated string-player in Naples in the 1470s who could accurately be said to have recently come from Cisalpine Gaul was the Ferrarese Pietrobono Burzelli – although we are not aware of any evidence that he had served as a soldier, an experience mentioned in passing by the lutenist character.⁶¹ Another possible candidate is Il Chariteo; but he was Spanish, and given Pontano’s sensitivity to

⁵⁶ Pontano, *Opera*, sigs. [I iv] v – [I vi] r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 262/263–272/273.

⁵⁷ Pontano, *Opera*, sigs. [I vi] r – n ii v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 272/273–344/345.

⁵⁸ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [I vi] r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 272/273.

⁵⁹ The classic musicological studies of this phenomenon are Nino Pirrotta, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, trans. Karen Eales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 3–75; and Lewis Lockwood, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara 1400–1505* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 278–87.

⁶⁰ See Cristiana Anna Addesso, *Teatro e festività nella Napoli Aragonese* (Florence: Olschki, 2012), esp. 75–91; and Francesca Bortoletti, ‘Arcadia, festa e performance alla corte dei re d’Aragona (1442–1503)’, *The Italianist* 36.1 (2016), 1–28.

⁶¹ This identification is also favoured in James Hankins, ‘Humanism and music in Italy’, in Anna Maria Busse Berger and Jesse Rodin (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 231–62, at 253n98. On Pietrobono’s trip to Naples see F. Alberto Gallo, *Music in the Castle*, trans. Anna Herklotz and Kathryn Krug (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 86–97.

new Spanish influences in *Antonius* it seems unlikely that he would have omitted to mention the performer's nationality.⁶²

Whatever his precise identity, the lutenist clearly stands for the category of self-accompanying singer-songwriters who became immensely famous, and widely imitated, in Italy across the second half of the fifteenth century and into the sixteenth.⁶³ His musicianship occupies a wholly different social, ethical and emotional register to that of the wind players, and receives a much more sympathetic hearing from Pontano. The academicians are made 'cheerful' by his performance, and thank him for 'soothing our spirits so pleasantly and with such variety'.⁶⁴ Similar functions are attached to identical musical practices also in other treatises in the book. In the treatise *On the Prince*, for example, the future ruler is counselled that:

As we cannot always be actively pursuing our affairs, and sometimes we need a respite from books, we must have intervals when we seek recreation for both mind and body. ... In this rest period some provision is to be made for the renewal of the mind through games and pastimes. ... Musicians who divert the mind and soothe our cares with both song and instrumental music are also to be employed.⁶⁵

Again in the treatise *On Obedience*, when discussing how one must restrain oneself from indulging in pleasures, Pontano adds:

But indeed pleasure itself is not always and everywhere disgraceful, and not all the pleasures of the bodily senses will affect us intemperately – such as when we are charmed by the lyre, and take comfort in song; or our nostrils are moved by flowers; or turning to some excellent paintings, amusing or noble, we feed our eyes in looking at them, and are ourselves refreshed.⁶⁶

The lutenist's performances are described as 'charming' or 'delightful' (*lepide*), and 'sweet' (*suavis*), the sentiments of his verses as 'true' (*vere*). Together with the comment on their 'variety' – which is represented in *Antonius* through the performance of songs in several different meters – this amounts to precisely the same critical framework as can be found applied to secular solo song in other Italian sources of the late fifteenth and

⁶² This identification is very loosely implied in Blake Wilson, *Singing to the Lyre in Renaissance Italy: Memory, Performance, and Oral Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 321–22.

⁶³ On this musical idiom see, among others, Giuseppina La Face Bianconi and Antonio Rossi, *Le rime di Serafino Aquilano in musica* (Florence: Olschki, 1999); Wilson, *Singing to the Lyre*; and, with a focus on late fifteenth-century Naples, Elmi, 'Singing Lyric among Local Aristocratic Networks in the Aragonese-Ruled Kingdom of Naples'.

⁶⁴ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [I vi] r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 272/273.

⁶⁵ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [e v] v–[e vi] r; Pontano, 'On the Prince', 75.

⁶⁶ 'Verum cum voluptatis commune quidem nomen sit: et voluptas ipsa semper nec ubique sit turpis, non omnes corporis sensuumque voluptates intemperantes nos efficiunt: ut dum lyra delinimur: laboremque solamur cantu: aut naribus admovemus flosculos: seu in locti aliquas, Gentilisue picturas egregias conversi, in spectandis illis oculos pascimus: et tanquam ipsi reficimur.' Pontano, *Opera*, sig. u ii r.

early sixteenth centuries. In Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, for example, the shepherds prefer performances that are 'harmonious', 'sweet', and 'gentle', setting verses that are 'elegant' and 'wise'.⁶⁷ Moreover, a clear parallel is established by Pontano between the charm of the lutenist's music and the nobility of his nature. The same adjectives are applied to both man and music, and after he departs one academician comments to another that 'As I see, you are admiring the sweetness of this good man's singing *and* the nobility of his nature under such a mild demeanor' (my emphasis).⁶⁸ In other words, harmonious song both arises from and serves as a signifier of a harmonious nature, another principle that can also be found in many other sources of the period, and is closely aligned with Pontano's ethics of speech as described above.

Meanwhile, the lutenist occupies a complex social position *vis à vis* the academicians. Clearly it is important for them to establish his nobility and the elevated quality of his musical practice, because this allows them to give him money and think of the payment as ennobling liberality – in contrast to the hapless civic trumpeter mentioned above, whose only possible social grace was to shut up and leave. At the same time, it is important that the academicians are confirmed in their higher social standing, and they achieve this by belittling the lutenist with diminutives – 'charming little man' (*lepide homuntio*), 'here's a little reward' (*accipe mercedulam*) – even as they praise him.⁶⁹

To support the assertion of the lutenist's noble nature, the episode leads the lutenist through an elaborate social performance of musical decorum, along lines strikingly similar to those later advocated by Baldassare Castiglione as a musical demonstration of *sprezzatura*:

I should not like our courtier to behave as do so many others who as soon as they put in appearance, even in the presence of gentlemen who are strangers to them, immediately, hardly waiting to be asked, start showing off what they know, and often what they don't know, in such a way that it seems they have come along just for this purpose and that it is their main pursuit in life. So the courtier should turn to music as if it were merely a pastime of his and he is yielding to persuasion, and not in the presence of common people or a large crowd. And although he may know and understand what he is doing, in this also I wish him to dissimulate the care and effort that are necessary for any competent performance; and he should let it seem as if he himself thinks nothing of his accomplishment which, because of its excellence, he makes others think very highly of.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Shephard et al., *Music in the Art of Renaissance Italy*, 282–3.

⁶⁸ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [I vi] r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 272/273.

⁶⁹ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [I iv] v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 262/263.

⁷⁰ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin, 1967), 120.

Pontano's lutenist is initially happy to meet the requests of the small company, principally because he sees that one among them, Suppazio, is 'not ignorant of music' (*musicae huius non imperiti*), and not at all because he needs their cash. After a few songs, though, he begins to show some reluctance, and to downplay his abilities, clearly worried that he might seem to be showing off. He allows himself to continue, under persuasion, through the mediation of a suitable classical precedent: 'And yet in order not to be one of those who (as Horace mocks justly) "never brings themselves to sing when they are asked", hear this as well'.⁷¹ At the end of the performance, he responds to the praise of his auditors with an elaborate web of protestations and excuses for his meagre musical accomplishments, but is satisfied if his faltering attempts have pleased such a worthy and select audience. In a sense, this careful social performance of virtuosity acts as a literary device to convey in a different register what remains inaudible, namely the harmonious quality of the lutenist's songs: just as the academicians receive his charming music as a reflection of his noble character, so Pontano writes his noble character as a representation of his charming music.

The lutenist is in a hurry to depart because he has to play at a wedding. He mentions specifically that it is the wedding of a friend, evidently wishing to avoid any demeaning implication that this is merely a paid gig. Although a wedding is in some sense a private occasion, it is well known that contemporary Italian wedding customs included prominent and symbolically important components such as processions, dances and banquets that sometimes took place in public spaces of the city. *Antonius* loses sight of the lutenist as he sets off for the wedding, but comparable celebrations are described several times in other treatises in the book – especially in the treatise *On Conviviality*, for example in the passage about feasts quoted above.

The lutenist gives what is effectively a private performance in a public space. The theatre piece that follows is altogether more broadly public. Pontano gives quite a bit of detail on the practicalities of this event, many of which have sonic components.⁷² First, the troupe of masked actors arrives in parade, led by a trumpeter. Next they erect a platform and benches for the audience – also noisy activities. Evidently a large and noisy crowd arrives to watch, because the lead actor gives an elaborate performance of calling for silence, with the help of the trumpeter. He gives instructions on audience etiquette, saying that they must remain silent during the performance, and clap afterwards – very loudly, and not only with their hands, but also cheering and stamping their feet. If the audience keep silent through the action on stage, they will be rewarded with wine. The actor is witty, and Pontano also highlights the audience's laughter, with a particular focus on drunken laughter.

⁷¹ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [I v] r; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 266/267.

⁷² Pontano, *Opera*, sig. [I vi] r-v; Pontano, *Dialogues*, 272/273–276/277.

The academicians maintain a distant, sardonic view of the theatre performance – even though they evidently watch the whole thing, because the ‘play’ itself (which takes the form of a short epic) takes up the whole of the rest of the dialogue and is a demonstration of Pontano’s poetical panache. The audience’s clapping and laughing may hint at the reason for their reserve. In the treatise *On the Prince*, Pontano discusses the deportment fitting the noble, advising that:

All bodily movement should be entirely free from awkwardness and arrogance. Hand-clapping and overly energetic gesticulation are quite gauche. Is a contorted facial expression anything other than disgusting? Are roaring laughter and guffaws that are practically hiccoughs anything other than vile?⁷³

Hearing and viewing the conduct of the street theatre audience through this lens, the academicians might easily have concluded that participation in such vulgar behaviour did not befit their status – even though the classicizing tone and style of the ‘play’ itself certainly piqued their interest.

CONCLUSIONS

Our 1501 book gives us the opportunity to hear a Neapolitan street – fictionally constructed, certainly, but nonetheless clearly informed by the author’s lived experience of the city – through one particular set of ears, processing the sounds we encounter through one particular mind and its prevailing ideological frameworks. For Pontano, street sound is richly charged with implications for and representations of status, gender, age, education, and national or regional identity. It is abundantly clear that in *Antonius* Pontano occupies one particular position in relation to these dimensions of audible identity – that of an Italian man, of high status, professionally educated, mature but not yet elderly – and from that position he hears the street in a particular way. Another pair of ears attached to a different auditor – those of a market trader, for instance, or a wife, or an African servant, or a messenger boy, or a nun – might experience the same street soundscape quite differently.⁷⁴ The existence of many possible ‘auditions’ of the Italian Renaissance street, partly overlapping but partly contrasting, highlights the importance of positionality in investigating street soundscapes, something that is perhaps clearer when studying sound-hearers than it is when studying sound-producers.

⁷³ Pontano, *Opera*, sig. f ii v; Pontano, ‘On the Prince’, 82.

⁷⁴ In *Antonius*, Pontano is said to have ‘Ethiopian girls’ (Aethiopissis) among his household staff. Their precise role and status are left unclear, but they appear within a list of women – mostly of low status – in whom Pontano takes an inappropriate sexual interest. (The reference has no sonic element.) Pontano, *Dialogues*, 258/259.

Across the whole of *Antonius*, the only street sounds that meet with the academicians' unqualified approval are those of the lutenist, and those of their own pithy and sophisticated discourse. In a sense these two exist in a necessary balance. Following an initial phase of picturesque street reportage, the majority of the dialogue is taken up with literary criticism, specifically a detailed discussion of Virgil; the appearance of the lutenist follows on directly from this core episode, furnishing the academicians with the charming refreshment they surely need after their studious and learned debate. The centrality of song and especially speech to the sonic economy of Pontano's street emphasizes the primary importance of the voice in the social experience of public space, and is clearly related to the fact that Pontano sees the use of the voice as a representation of inner virtue and nobility, as well as a legible measure of identity markers through which street auditors can organize and give meaning to their public social encounters.

Pretty much every component of the street soundscape *other* than their own conversation and the lutenist's songs is simply an excuse for the academicians to demonstrate their snarky wit – a playfully satirical tone that is indebted to Lucian, certainly, but is also quite characteristic of Pontano's literary voice more generally, as our method of weaving together related material from the dialogues and the ethical treatises has demonstrated. For Pontano, foolish women, senile older men, cocky youths, vulgar crowds, uncouth foreigners, pompous officials, and greedy priests all reveal their inadequacies of character through their sonic interventions, and the academicians delight in pointing them out. Indeed, the centrality of acerbic commentary in *Antonius*, in counterpoint with the protagonists' refined discussions, speaks to the urgency of sonic discrimination as a means of identity formation for the academicians, both individually and as a sodality.

This observation should give us pause, for the attitudes toward sound evinced by Pontano in the texts gathered in this 1501 edition overlap considerably with those found in the corpus of sources that have more routinely been used by musicologists to investigate contemporary attitudes toward music and identity – texts such as Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani*, and above all Castiglione's *Il libro del Cortegiano*.⁷⁵ In these texts, Italian men of high status, professionally educated, youthful or middle-aged, are found repeating to one another the sonic ideologies that sustain their own identity constructions – the dialogue form serving as the Renaissance version of a social media 'echo chamber'. In *Antonius*, the setting locates that exclusive dialogue outside in an artful representation of a real street, giving us an opportunity to see how the sonic ideologies that we have come to view as broadly characterizing the relationship between music and elite identity in Renaissance Italy look when they are placed into a (fictitious) real and varied

⁷⁵ The most complete study of music and identity in Renaissance Italy to date is Stefano Lorenzetti, *Musica e identità nobiliare nell'Italia del Rinascimento: Educazione, mentalità, immaginario* (Florence: Olschki, 2003).

social situation – and they look like offensive misogyny, unsavoury ageism, unpalatable snobbery, and xenophobia.

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Abstract

Giovanni Pontano's dialogue *Antonius* can be read almost as a thick description of the soundscape of a Neapolitan street in the mid- to late-15th century, complete with public announcements, street performers, domestic arguments, workers' banter, charms and spells, processions, errand boys, bells, clocks, cockerels, and much more. *Antonius* was first printed in 1491, and then in a 1501 *Opera* edition alongside another dialogue, *Charon*, Pontano's treatises *De fortitudine*, *De principe* and *De obedientia*, and his treatises on the "social virtues," *De liberalitate*, *De beneficentia*, *De magnificentia*, *De splendore*, and *De conviventia*. Using the street soundscape of *Antonius* as a framework, this essay interleaves both sonic reportage and reflections on the ethics and purpose of sound drawn from the other works included in the 1501 edition, to construct a rich and surprisingly detailed impression of the urban soundscape as it struck Pontano, or at least as he represented it in a literary context.