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MUSIC AND THE GENDERED IMAGE IN HANDEL'S *LA BELLEZZA RAVVEDUTA NEL TRIONFO DEL TEMPO E DEL DISINGANNO* (1707), ITS LATER REWORKINGS AND CONTEMPORARY STAGINGS

Izvleček: Oratorij *La Bellezza ravveduta* (1707) Georga Friedricha Händla se od njegovih poznejših predelav – *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità* (1737) in *The Triumph of Time and Truth* (1757) – razlikuje tako po glasbeni vsebini kot tudi glede na to, kako so alegorični liki kodirani v smislu spola. Primerjalna analiza razkriva širok interpretativni razpon teh del v izbranih gledaliških uprizoritvah 21. stoletja.

Ključne besede: Georg Friedrich Händel, oratorij, emblem, gledališče, *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*

Abstract: George Frideric Handel's oratorio *La Bellezza ravveduta* (1707) and its two later reworkings, *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità* (1737) and *The Triumph of Time and Truth* (1757), differ in musical content and in how the allegorical characters are coded in terms of gender. A comparative analysis showcases their wide interpretative range in selected twenty-first-century stagings.

Keywords: George Frideric Handel, oratorio, emblem, theatre, *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*

In her book on Handel's operas Silke Leopold explains that for Handel, the opera composer, the genre of the (English) oratorio was not a limitation, but rather a challenge to his ability to "create images before the inner eye, to organise space and time, to bring about the theatre of the mind".[1] This definition could apply equally to some of his cantatas, serenatas and Italian oratorios, as these are no less dramatic despite lacking the support of staging, sets or acting. It also sheds light on why many of Handel's English and Italian oratorios and some of his large-scale cantatas and serenatas have been staged relatively frequently during the last century, even though they were not originally intended to be so treated.

Although some argue that it is not unequivocally an oratorio, but according to Carolyn Gianturco "a moral cantata",[2] all the above description applies to Handel's setting of the libretto by his important Roman patron, cardinal Benedetto Pamphilj, in 1707 under the title *La Bellezza ravveduta nel trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*. This work is better known today by the shorter title *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* (HWV 46a). Gianturco's reasoning rests on three main points: the work consists of two parts instead of three (unlike Italian opera of the time, which generally adhered to a three-act structure), it features exclusively emblematic characters, and it lacks a dramatic action in the Aristotelian sense of the word. As we shall see, the frequency of staged performances of this work has nevertheless increased over the past twenty years. This trend can be seen as the continuation of a broader movement to stage Handel's oratorios that began during the Handel renaissance in the 1920s, when the absence of staging conventions offered greater freedom for innovative theatrical interpretations.

Handel returned to the subject matter of an allegorical confrontation between the characters Bellezza (Beauty), Piacere (Pleasure), Tempo (Time) and Disinganno (Counsel or Disillusionment), with some changes to the characters' original 1707 names and the addition of some new ones, in two subsequent works: *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità* (HWV 46b, 1737) and *The Triumph of Time and Truth* (HWV 71, 1757).[3] Hereafter, when referring to the three pieces as different versions of the same musico-dramatic idea, I shall use such terms as "Il trionfo del Tempo" and its three versions, while I will always refer to the first (1707) setting as *La Bellezza ravveduta*.

1 Leopold, *Händel*, 27.
2 Gianturco, "Handel's *Il trionfo del Tempo*", 2887; Gianturco, "*Il trionfo*", 55.
3 Although the librettos of the three versions of the work differ significantly, the following brief summary captures their common dramatic plot. Bellezza/Beauty is reluctant to abandon her companion Pleasure/Piacere, but is gradually persuaded by Disinganno/Counsel and Tempo/Time to follow a path of virtue and repentance. Her transformation is marked by the realization that hedonism, embodied in the image of the pleasure garden, must yield to the pursuit of "true pleasure". Ultimately, Bellezza/Beauty shatters her mirror, confronts the reality of transience and embraces the prospect of spiritual eternity.

Gianturco elaborates on the inappropriateness of labelling the subsequent two works as "oratorios", finding HWV 46b, with its three parts, no longer compatible with the genre, while HWV 71, with its more elaborate libretto by Thomas Morell, added characters and developed action, is considered by her a moral opera, albeit one that was likewise not staged. Although her views have not yet been fully accepted by Handel scholars, they were sufficient to provoke a polemic with Donald Burrows, who eventually settled the argument by acknowledging Gianturco's credentials, while adding that "the question of terminology concerns what was understood by 'drama' and 'oratorio' in Rome in 1707 and London in 1737 and 1757."[4]

The assessment in musicological literature also varies considerably. Writing on *La Belleza ravveduta* in 1957, Winton Dean claimed that Pamphilj's "frigid text obviously did not inspire Handel, though Tempo's aria 'Urne voi' shows him already stirred to the depths by the conception of mortality."[5] It is not surprising that Dean was impressed by the "depth" of "Urne voi", and this aria will be examined as one of the case studies when comparing performances. Although of the opinion that "in all but the absence of stage action the work is a two-act opera", Donald Burrows writes as recently as 2012 that "the allegorical nature of the drama gives no opportunity for the portrayal of complex human relationships" and even mockingly compares the moralizing tone to something that would please "John Calvin".[6] Much of this negative assessment stems from a misunderstanding of the libretto and the emblematic and allegorical representations on which it is based.

Even with the considerable effort invested and results produced by Handel scholars, we still know very little with certainty about *La Belleza ravveduta*, apart from the fact that many bills from music copyists were presented to Pamphilj in 1707 and later. Whereas Gianturco is of the opinion that the manuscript sources preserved today do not reflect the versions of the work copied and revised in 1707–1709, in the absence of proof about whether, when and where the work was performed, Ursula Kirkendale assumes that it was indeed performed on 2 May 1707, but by musicians employed by Francesco Maria Ruspoli and in preparation for an artistic competition for painters, sculptors and architects sponsored by Ruspoli, but organized by the Accademia di San Luca, of which Pamphilj was an honorary member.[7]

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4   Gianturco and Burrows, "*Il trionfo* Revived".
5   Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, 17.
6   Burrows, *Handel*, 36.
7   Kirkendale, "Handel with Ruspoli", 380–381.

EMBLEMS IN CONFLICT

It is known that during his life George Frideric Handel developed an interest and taste for the visual arts. A crucial impulse may have been the exposure to both sacred and secular art in Italy during his sojourn there in 1706–1710. The visual domain plays an important part in all three versions of the piece under discussion, even though *The Triumph of Time and Truth* was composed when he was already blind. However, I will refrain from speculating about the concrete visual stimuli that may have influenced Handel and his collaborators, since such an objective would require a more thorough immersion in the respective historical contexts of the visual arts of the period. I am therefore going to concentrate on recent stage performances and their take on the visual aspects of the libretto in relation to Handel's settings.

These visual aspects have undoubtedly been influenced by centuries-old traditions of symbolic representations: namely, through emblems and allegories. For the purposes of this study, I will make a distinction between an emblem, as a visual image conveying a more direct representation of an idea, as opposed to an allegory, as a narrative structure that often makes use of emblems within an overarching semantic framework.[8] As one of the most influential emblem books of the Early Modern period, Cesare Ripa's lexicon *Iconologia* deeply conditioned the cultural sensibilities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries after the appearance of its first (1593) and subsequent (seventeenth-century) editions. Among its numerous translations into other languages, the 1709 English one by Pierce Tempest would have been the most familiar to Handel's audiences in London. In the words of Peter Stephan: "It is obvious that Handel and Morell knew Ripa's *Iconologia*. The same applies to cardinal Benedetto Pamphilj."[9] In her emblematic analysis of Pamphilj's libretto Lucia Díaz Marroquín pointed out that "genres such as the Italian or the Italian-inspired Counter-Reformation oratorios, cantatas and sacred or moral operas often contain images quite similar in form and function to those published in the Seventeenth and early Eighteenth-century European collections of emblems."[10] Among the emblems she mentions, I will come back to the "image of a ship caught in the storm"[11] when I discuss a contemporary staging of Tempo's 1707 "nautical" aria "È ben folle quell nocchier".

For the purposes of this study, apart from the 1709 English translation, I consulted *Nuova iconologia*, the extended 1618 edition of Ripa's treatise, and established

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8   For a more detailed exploration of these issues, see Borris, "Allegory, Emblem, and Symbol"; or the writings of Brenda Machosky, e.g. her book *Structures of Appearing: Allegory and the Work of Literature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). My thanks are due to Magnus Tessing Schneider for pointing me in this direction.

9   Stephan, "'The heav'nly image see'", 177.

10 Díaz Marroquín, "Voglio tempo", 35.

11 Ibid., 41.

that with regard to all the emblematic characters encountered in the different versions of Handel's *Il trionfo del Tempo*, the two sources contain similar depictions of Bellezza/Beauty, Piacere/Pleasure and Inganno/Deceit. When it comes to Bellezza/Beauty, she takes the form of a naked woman,[12] while Piacere/Pleasure is portrayed as a winged young man playing a harp.[13] Both facts will resonate in different terms in the twenty-first-century staged performances of the oratorio. Consiglio (another name for Disinganno in Pamphilj's 1707 libretto) was present only in the Italian edition and depicted as an old man in a monk's habit, with an owl perched on his left hand and a book held in his right hand.[14] As we shall see, although the characters Consiglio and his 1757 equivalent Counsel are coded as male in all the versions of the oratorio, the emblem does not necessarily correspond to the high vocal range of the role (alto) in the scores or to the majority of its twenty-first-century stage readings. If we bear in mind the association of the characters Disinganno (HWV 46a and 46b) and Counsel (HWV 71) with Verità/Truth (in the 1757 libretto Counsel is even called "the son of Truth"), it is interesting to note that Verità/Truth was portrayed also as a beautiful young woman, naked in the 1618 Italian edition and partially covered in the 1709 English one.[15] Even more striking is the difference between the two editions' monstrous depiction of Deceit as a bearded man "cloath'd with the Skin of a Goat: from the Middle, downwards, are two Serpents Tails."[16] Appearing only in HWV 71 as an unquestionably female, seductive character, the emblem must have sought to unveil the true nature of Deceit.

The visual arts continued the tradition of emblematic depiction well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, often resulting in altogether different imagery, as evidenced by the following examples considered by other scholars. For example, H. James Jensen discusses *The Triumph of Time and Truth* with the help of two iconographic sources: Nicolas Poussin's *Truth Stolen Away by Time Beyond the Reach of Envy and Discord*, 1641,[17] and Peter Paul Rubens's *Triumph of Truth*, 1620–1622.[18] Both set the allegorical scene by showing Time as a bearded and winged old man who is

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12   See Ripa, *Nuova iconologia*, 51; and Ripa, *Iconologia*, 10.

13   See Ripa, *Nuova iconologia*, 411; and Ripa, *Iconologia*, 55.

14   Ripa, *Nuova iconologia*, 100.

15   See Ripa, *Nuova iconologia*, 411; and Ripa, *Iconologia*, 78. Huub van der Linden rightly points out the possible conflation of Verità and Disinganno in van der Linden, "Benedetto Pamphilj", 146.

16   Ripa, *Iconologia*, 41–42. Cf. Ripa, *Nuova iconologia*, 256.

17   Nicolas Poussin, *Le Temps soustrait la Vérité aux atteintes de l'Envie et de la Discorde*, 1641, oil on canvas, tondo, 297 cm diameter, Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, inventory no. INV 7301, https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010062522.

18   Petrus Paulus Rubens, *Le Triomphe de la Vérité*, 1620–1622, oil on canvas, 394 × 160 cm, Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, inventory no. INV 17898, https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010060853.

transporting Truth, a beautiful and naked woman, into the heavenly realm — but this rescue takes on different, even opposing, meanings when we compare Poussin's with Rubens's take on the subject. Whereas Poussin's depiction of the ascent is idealized, an attitude enhanced by the grotesque depiction of Envy and the monstrous Discord, Rubens's painting, forming part of his Marie de' Medici cycle, acquires ironic overtones, since "Truth looks apprehensive, and Time is straining every muscle to get Truth to Marie de' Medici: it is questionable whether he will succeed."[19]

Figure 1 | Jean-François de Troy, *Time Unveiling Truth*, 1733 (The National Gallery, London)

Not only could a philosophical or moral allegory take an ironic turn, but emblems, too, were often embodied in dramatic constellations of conflict. Jean François de Troy's painting *Time Revealing Truth*, 1733,[20] is chronologically closer to the three versions of *Il trionfo del Tempo* considered in this study and helps to elucidate the allegorical dramaturgies available to Handel. As pointed out by Stephan, it reveals

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19 Jensen, *Signs and Meaning*, 321.
20 Jean-François de Troy, *Time unveiling Truth*, 1733, oil on canvas, 203 × 208 cm, The National Gallery, London, accession no. NG6454, https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/time-unveiling-truth-116095.

Truth by literally uncovering her white robe, which elicits not only the admiration of the four Virtues to the left but also — to the right — the unmasking of Deceit, likewise coded as female in terms of gender in Handel's *The Triumph of Time and Truth* of 1757.

Gender is an important aspect of the anthropomorphic emblem, since choices had to be made about whether to depict an abstract notion or idea as a gendered image, female or male, young or old. If we look at the scores of the three versions of Handel's work under discussion and the types of vocal soloist they employ for the emblematic characters already coded to a certain extent in terms of gender in the libretto, we may conclude that Bellezza/Beauty — even if, in Rome 1707, this part was sung by a castrato — was strongly coded as female, although she represents not only women but also the whole of humanity, whereas Tempo/Time is unquestionably male in all the versions and thereby congruent with the iconography of the winged, grey-bearded man. However, with the other characters, the assignment of gender is less straightforward, because high voices can be coded variously as male and female.[21]

Table 1 | Character, voice and gender in the three versions of G. F. Handel's *Il trionfo del Tempo*

HWV 46A (1707)		HWV 46B (1737)		HWV 71 (1757)	
CHARACTER (VOICE)	GENDER	CHARACTER (VOICE)	GENDER	CHARACTER (VOICE)	GENDER
Bellezza (s)	female	Bellezza (s)	female	Beauty (s)	female
Piacere (s)	male?	Piacere (s)	male?	Pleasure (t)	female?
Disinganno (a)	male?	Disinganno (a)	male?	Counsel (a)	male?
Tempo (t)	male	Tempo (t)	male	Time (b)	male
				Deceit (s)	female?

So there is no clear link between a character and his/her gender as coded in the libretto and the vocal range and voice type required by the musical setting. Another semantic level that makes this interrelationship more complicated is performance, both

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21 Grammatically speaking, gender may have been presumed in unequivocal terms in the Italian librettos, and very likely also in the English one via a translation from Latin. However, the reality of the musical gender coding is far more fluid and would require a separate article to explore fully.

musical and theatrical. However, "the examination of gender identity on stage should not, and cannot be isolated from its specific context in theatrical performance."[22] It comes as no surprise that some of the performances make strenuous efforts to present their own subjective readings of the emblematic images, allegorical librettos and Handel's multi-faceted settings as convincingly unequivocal. To give just one example, Katie Hawks takes a decisive stand on Piacere's gender by describing the nature of his (!) relationship with Bellezza in the different versions:

> In 1707, it is quite clear that they are lovers, and that Piacere, although a slippery trickster, is not the confident hedonist he pretends to be: his wild, uncontrolled 'Come nembo' revels his dependence on Bellezza, and his shock that she has left him. The removal of their Part I duet in 1737 also removes the confirmation that they are lovers; 'Come nembo' this time is more measured.[23]

Since it is possible that the soprano castrato Gioacchino Conti performed the role of Piacere in 1737, the persuasiveness of Hawks's reading does not depend on the gender of the performer at the premiere of the piece (not to mention how easy it would be to replace the pronoun he/him with she/her or any other in the quoted passage).

I TRIONFI DEL TEMPO, 1707/1737/1757

Let me now outline a comparison of the three versions of *Il trionfo del Tempo* based on the editions available to me (see the list of musical sources in the Bibliography). I shall focus on the music of the original 1707 numbers and the manner in which they were retained or modified without going into detail about the composer's working methods. All the correspondences (and lack thereof) are listed in Table 2, but before delving into the details some clarification is needed. Even though HWV 46b and HWV 71 can be considered as independent works, for the purposes of this investigation they are assessed in comparison with HWV 46a. Consequently, the third and fourth columns of Table 2 list only the numbers from HWV 46b and HWV 71 that have possible equivalents in HWV 46a. When Handel retained a number from HWV 46a in the work's later reworkings in complete or substantial form, the numbers (with their respective incipits in HWV 46b and HWV 71) are preceded by a = sign.

This does not mean that the setting was taken over verbatim, for in 1737 Handel often made minor changes to the 1707 music to suit the new context. Conversely, at times

22 Ćurković, "Men and/or Women", 217.
23 Hawks, "Handel's Timely Triumphs", 201.

he made more significant changes or borrowed only raw material, fashioning recognizably new musical units. Lastly, when Handel set the same Italian text or the English equivalent of the original Italian text wholly independently from its HWV 46a or HWV 46b precursors, the incipits of the HWV 46b and HWV 71 numbers appear with underscoring. In cases where Handel borrowed material from his own or other composers' works, this fact is indicated after the incipit, whereas if no borrowing has so far been established, the incipit is preceded by the adjective "new". Where an original HWV 46a number was dropped and nothing was inserted in its place, the cell is left void.

Handel's strategies for the reuse of previous works were multi-faceted. The issue is complicated by the fact that in 1757 the extent of the co-authorship of John Christopher Smith Jr. — in whose handwriting, on account of Handel's blindness, the sources are noted — cannot be precisely determined. The starting point was the more recent version, which means that in HWV 46b (1737) Handel drew mostly on the versions of specific numbers from HWV 46a (1707), whereas in HWV 71 (1757) the model was often HWV 46b (1737).

The following overview is based on my own analysis and a 1998 article by Roland Dieter Schmidt.[24] As regards HWV 46b, as many as sixteen numbers from HWV 46a were reused in it. Alongside the four additional choral numbers derived from other works, of the fifteen numbers from the original 1707 libretto for which Handel avoided reusing the 1707 music, seven were based on borrowings from either Telemann's *Harmonischer Gottesdienst* or Handel's *Wedding Anthems* and *Terpsichore*, while eight were set entirely afresh. As a result, the 1737 work is marked by a high degree of textual correspondence with the 1707 original, albeit with a relatively low percentage of newly composed music.

In comparison with HWV 46b, HWV 71 is distinguished by a higher incidence of text and music inserted from other, mostly English-language, works of the composer. As a result, it is often regarded in the literature as a pasticcio. Nevertheless, *The Triumph of Time and Truth* can be assessed in terms of its "fidelity" to both HWV 46a and 46b. Whereas Handel and Smith retained most of the choruses and as many as nineteen arias from HWV 46b, only five of these were specific to HWV 46b and unrelated to HWV 46a, whereas as many as thirteen were common to HWV 46b and HWV 46a and thus to a certain extent indirectly derived from *La Bellezza ravveduta* half a century earlier. Moreover, there are two examples of numbers where the 1737 model was disregarded, Handel and Smith reverting to the original 1707 solutions. This was the case with Pleasure's final aria "Like Clouds, Stormy Winds", which is indebted to the 1707 "Come nembo" rather than to the significantly different 1737 setting. Similarly, "Ricco pino" was dropped altogether from HWV 46b but reinstated fifty years later as the model for Deceit's aria "Melancholy Is a Folly".

24 Schmidt, "Die drei Fassungen", 111–118.

However, the most striking aspect of the interrelationships between the three works is the fact that in 1757 Handel and Smith avoided the use of, or any reference to, any of the eight numbers newly composed for HWV 46b in 1737. This highlights the transformational character of the different versions of *Il trionfo del Tempo*: original additions to the work in 1737 were not retained in 1757, a fact attributable to the new circumstances of the performance as well as to changing taste and fashion, whereas borrowings from Handel's other works that were deemed appropriate in 1737 could be retained in 1757. However, even though there were significant changes in style and dramaturgy, approximately half of the music in HWV 46b originates from HWV 46a, as does around a third of the music in HWV 71. All this contributes to a sense of continuity despite the differences. Many of the striking 1707 Roman gendered musical images — such as Beauty admiring herself in a mirror ("Fido specchio"/"Faithful Mirror"), Beauty as a wilting flower ("Se la bellezza"/"The Beauty Smiling"), sleeping Time ("Venga il Tempo"/"Come, O Time" and "Crede l'uom"/"Mortals Think"), and Beauty closing her eyes before Truth ("Chiudi, chiudi"/"Lovely Beauty") — not only made their way into later versions of *Il trionfo del Tempo* but have also taken on new meanings in twenty-first-century staged performances.

Table 2 | Musical correspondences in HWV 46b and HWV 71 in relation to their counterparts in HWV 46a (B = Bellezza, P = Piacere, D = Disinganno, T = Tempo)

No.	HWV 46a (1707)	HWV 46b (1737)*	HWV 71 (1757)
1	Sonata	= Sinfonia (altered)	<u>Ouverture</u>: borrowing from *Il pastor fido*
PRIMA PARTE			
1	"Fido specchio" (B)	= "Fido specchio" (B)	= "Faithful Mirror, Fair Reflecting" (Beauty)
2	"Fosco genio" (P)	<u>"Fosco genio" (P)</u>: borrowing from Handel's *Wedding Anthem* no. 2	= 1737 "Fosco genio" English equivalent ("Pensive sorrow", Pleasure)
3	"Se la bellezza" (D)	= "Se la bellezza" (B), altered	= "The Beauty Smiling" (Counsel), altered
4	"Una schiera di piaceri" (B)	<u>"Una schiera" (B)</u>: borrowing from Telemann	= 1737 "Una schiera" English equivalent ("Ever-Flowing", Beauty)

5	"Urne voi, che racchiudete" (T)	"Urne voi" (T): borrowing from Telemann	= 1737 "Urne voi" English equivalent ("Loathsome Urns", Time)
6	"Il voler nel fior degli anni" (B, P)		
7	"Un pensiero nemico di pace" (B)	new "Un pensiero" (B)	
8	"Nasce l'uomo" (T)	= "Nasce l'uomo" (T)	= "Like the Shadow, Life Ever Is Flying" (Time)
9	"L'uomo sempre" (D)	= "L'uomo sempre" (chorus)	= "Like the Shadow" (chorus)
10	"Sonata e Recitativo" (organ, B)	new Sinfonia, Sonatina e Recitativo	
11	"Un leggiadro giovinetto" (P)	new "Un leggiadro" (P)	
12	"Venga il Tempo" (B)	= "Venga il Tempo" (B), altered	= "Come, O Time, and Thy Broad Wings Displaying" (Beauty)
13	"Crede l'uom ch'egli riposi" (D)	= "Crede l'uom ch'egli riposi" (D)	= "Mortals Think That Time Is Sleeping" (Counsel)
14	"Folle, dunque tu sola presumi" (T)	"Folle, dunque": borrowing from Telemann	
15	"Se non sei più ministro di pene" (B, P, D, T)	new "Se non sei più ministro" (B, P, D, T)	

SECONDA PARTE

16	"Chiudi, chiudi i vaghi rai" (P)	= "Chiudi, chiudi i vaghi rai" (P)	= "Lovely Beauty, Close Those Eyes" (Pleasure)
17	"Io sperai trovar nel vero" (B)	new "Io sperai trovar" (B)	
18	"Tu giurasti di mai non lasciarmi" (P)		
19	"Io vorrei due cori in seno" (B)	= "Io vorrei due cori in seno" (B), shortened	= "Fain Would I, Two Hearts Enjoying" (Beauty)

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Table 2 | *continued*

No.	HWV 46a (1707)	HWV 46b (1737)*	HWV 71 (1757)
SECONDA PARTE			
20	"Più non cura valle oscura" (D)	= "Più non cura valle oscura" (D)	= "On the Valleys, Dark and Cheerless" (Counsel)
21	"È ben folle quel nocchier" (T)	<u>new "È ben folle"</u>	
22	"Voglio tempo per risolvere" (B, P, D, T)	<u>new "Voglio tempo" (B, P, D, T)</u>	
23	"Lascia la spina" (P)	<u>"Lascia la spina" (P)</u>: from Terpsichore (HWV 8b)	= 1737 "Lascia la spina" equivalent ("Sharp Thorns Despising", Pleasure)
24	"Voglio cangiar desio" (B)	= "Voglio cangiar desio" (B), altered	= "Pleasure! My Former Ways Resigning" (Beauty)
25	"Chi già fu del biondo crine" (D)	= "Chi già fu del biondo crine" (D)	= "Thus to Ground, Thou False, Delusive" (Counsel)
26	"Ricco pino" (B)	absent in HWV 46b	= "Melancholy Is a Folly" (Deceit), derived from 1707 "Ricco pino" but placed earlier, after "Lovely Beauty"
27	"Si, bella penitenza" (B, accomp.)	= "Si, bella penitenza" (B, accomp.)	
28	"Il bel pianto dell'aurora" (D, T)	<u>"Il bel pianto" (aria, T)</u>: borrowing from Telemann	= 1737 "Il bel pianto" equivalent ("From the Heart That Feels My Warning", Time)
29	"Come nembo che fugge col vento" (P)	<u>"Come nembo" (P)</u>: borrowing from Telemann	derived from 1707 "Come nembo" ("Like Clouds, Stormy Winds", Pleasure)
30	"Pure del cielo" (B, accomp.)	<u>new accompagnato "Or se la Verità" (B)</u>	<u>new accompagnato "Oh Thither Let Me Cast" (Beauty)</u>
31	"Tu del ciel ministro eletto" (B)	= "Tu del ciel ministro eletto" (B), altered	= "Guardian Angels, oh Protect Me" (Beauty)
		<u>"Alleluia" (chorus)</u>: borrowing from Organ conc. HWV 292	= <u>"Alleluja!" (chorus)</u>

* The changes for the 1739 performance of the oratorio will be left out of consideration.

The productions I will examine vary to such an extent that, at first glance — judging by the costumes, sets and stage action — they hardly seem to derive from the same dramatic plot. However, they are unified by fundamentally similar approaches to Handel's musical emblems. To demonstrate this, the remainder of this study will focus on three groups of case studies that correspond to the relationships between the 1707 original and its later reworkings:

1. musical settings present only in HWV 46a, which were not revisited in the eighteenth century after the 1707 premiere but have been revived in twentieth- and twety-first century Handel performances;
2. musical settings from HWV 46a that were carried over into both HWV 46b and HWV 71, remaining largely unaltered;
3. musical settings from HWV 46a that underwent substantial modifications in the later versions.

I TRIONFI DEL TEMPO IN THE NEW MILLENIUM

The selection of twenty-first-century productions for analysis in this study was influenced by my personal observations as an engaged and interested audience member, particularly with regard to the growing interest of opera houses and festivals in staging *La Bellezza ravveduta* since 1960. That year marked the work's first revival after its 1707 premiere, one performed in German at the Göttingen Handel Festival. Its resurgence can, in part, be attributed to practical, production-related reasons: the piece requires only four vocal soloists, a small orchestra and no chorus. However, it is also undeniable that *La Bellezza ravveduta* resonates with contemporary sensibilities, which further explains its appeal in recent decades.

My selection was guided by the availability of video recordings via streaming and my first-hand experience of attending two productions: in Stuttgart in 2012 and Karlsruhe in 2013.[25] Their assessment is rooted in my personal perspective as an informed audience member, rather than based on an analysis of testimonies from the creative team, press reviews or accounts from other audience members.

To my knowledge, there have been no recorded stagings of *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità*, while *The Triumph of Time and Truth* has been staged only three times — most recently, at the Handel Festival Karlsruhe in 2013 in a production directed by Sam Brown. Following a precedent set by the Britten-Pears Festival in 2002, this staging of HWV 71 was paired with Gerald Barry's 1990s opera *The Triumph of Beauty and*

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25   In the main text, the productions will be referred to in a shortened form containing the location and the year of the performance. See Appendix, List of productions.

Deceit. Musically, the 2013 Karlsruhe production was notable for its omission of all the choruses. As explained by the then intendant Bernd Feuchtner: "The choruses are unnecessary for a staged performance. They follow what has just happened with a moral but add nothing to the plot while prolonging the performance."[26] Ironically, this omission suppressed the musical element of HWV 71 most grounded in the tradition of the English oratorio, thereby bringing the work closer in form to *La Bellezza ravveduta*. The director Sam Brown, evidently inspired by the HBO series *Mad Men*, which was at the height of its popularity at the time, set the action in a sprawling 1950s or 1960s New York office. In this setting, Beauty was portrayed as a secretary ensnared in the power struggles and gender dynamics of the era. The production featured numerous ironic accents that subverted the original libretto. This reinterpretation may have been influenced by the pairing with Gerald Barry's grotesque *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*, which made up the second half of the evening. In comparison with other productions under consideration, the 2013 Karlsruhe staging was simplified, lacking significant nuance in both musical and theatrical terms. Consequently, it holds less interest for the purposes of this overview.

All the remaining productions considered in this study are of *La Bellezza ravveduta*. Among these, the most popular appears to be one directed by Jürgen Flimm and later revived by Gudrun Hartmann. Following its premiere in Zürich in 2003, this production was staged also in Madrid, Berlin and Milan. On account of the availability of a higher-quality recording of a Berlin performance on YouTube, I shall refer to it as the 2016 Berlin production. The set design presents a quasi-realistic setting of a mid-twentieth-century high-profile restaurant, aligning well with the portrayal of Bellezza as a Marilyn Monroe archetype. Notably, this is not the only production to reference the twentieth-century pop-cultural icon of female beauty. To some extent, the 2011 production directed by Calixto Bieito similarly engages with this stereotype, though in a more nuanced and multi-faceted manner. While this production includes some surreal elements, facilitated by the presence of numerous extras, as well as occasional references to the eighteenth century through costumes and dancing (which I shall address later), the interpretation of the libretto remains rather one-sided. The narrative is told predominantly from Bellezza's perspective, making her the sole fully developed character. Her journey from hedonism to repentance is portrayed in a straightforward manner, culminating in a literal transformation when she dons a nun's habit at the conclusion.

Krzysztof Warlikowski's production of *La Bellezza ravveduta* premiered at the Aix-en-Provence Festival in 2016 and was subsequently revived in other venues. It adopts an approach to the interpretation of the libretto that is entirely opposed to

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26 Feuchtner, "Die dramatisierte Allegorie", 208.

that of the Berlin production. Rather than portraying Bellezza's journey as a path to repentance and enlightenment, Warlikowski presents it as a cautionary tale about the manipulation of a vulnerable individual. In this interpretation the three allegorical figures — Piacere, Disinganno, and Tempo — no longer compete to win over Bellezza to the ideas and values they represent. Instead, they collectively contribute to her downfall, culminating in a final aria that is interpreted as Bellezza's suicide rather than an apotheosis of Truth and Virtue.

Figure 2 | Inga Kalna (Piacere), Charles Workman (Tempo), Hélène Le Corre (Bellezza) and Sara Mingardo (Disinganno) in the production of Handel's *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* (Staatsoper unter den Linden, Staatskapelle Berlin, conductor Sébastien Rouland; directors: Jürgen Flimm, Gudrun Hartmann), 2016 (© Hermann and Clärchen Baus)

A quasi-realistic frame is introduced during the opening Sonata through a projected short film showing a young woman (Bellezza) losing her lover to an overdose at a party, where the drugs have been supplied by Piacere. Disinganno and Tempo are portrayed as detached parental figures, characterized by their lack of compassion and reliance on authority and emotional manipulation. In the second part of the production the *teatro del vero* takes the form of a gathering of a dysfunctional family set against a highly conceptual visual backdrop. As depicted in Figure 3, the stage is divided into two wings of a theatre auditorium. The left wing is occupied by Bellezza and Piacere, while the right wing is assigned to Disinganno and Tempo, with Bellezza circulating freely between the two. At the centre of the set is a cabin, serving as a liminal space or "limbo" for the deceased young man and the ashes of young

beauties portrayed by extras. The set and costumes were designed by Małgorzata Szczęśniak, who played an integral part in the production, working in close collaboration with Warlikowski to make directorial decisions.[27]

Figure 3 | Sabine Devieilhe (Bellezza), Franco Fagioli (Piacere), Sara Mingardo (Disinganno), Michael Spyres (Tempo) in the production of Handel's *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* (Aix-en-Provence Festival, Le Concert d'Astrée, conductor Emanuelle Haïm; director Krzysztof Warlikowski), 2016 (© Pascal Victor – Artcomart)

Calixto Bieito's production of *La Bellezza ravveduta* premiered in Stuttgart in 2011 and was later restaged at two other opera houses. I had the opportunity to see it in 2012, an encounter that sparked my broader interest in contemporary staged performances of Handel's works and opera production in general. Central to the production was a merry-go-round, which served as a perfect contemporary emblem of Time — or even Life — designed by Susanne Gschwender. The characters were portrayed as pop culture icons, each embodying distinct emblematic qualities: Bellezza as Marilyn Monroe and other, similar figures; Disinganno as Courtney Love; and Piacere as various other, clearly female, figures, who included the burlesque star Dita von Teese. (The costumes were designed by Anna Eiermann.) Bieito's signature controversial style was on full display, with a heavy use of violence and sexual innuendo, especially in the portrayal of Piacere. Despite these elements, the production conveyed a deeply reflective and moving narrative. I would like to share a quote from my review of this production, which was published in 2015:

27 My thanks are due to Jera H. Petriček for pointing this fact out to me.

The interpretation of the oratorio suggests that human life is defined by the contrast between youth, associated with Piacere, and old age, associated with Disinganno. After Bellezza reconciled with Tempo (and her own transience), during her final aria, she disrobed and smeared both her body and Tempo's body with ashes. Meanwhile, a group of elderly extras, with expressionless, tired faces, dressed only in underwear, slowly approached the carousel. Once the last note of the aria had been sung, they jumped onto the carousel and, to the cheerful sounds of the overture, joyfully celebrated the spinning ride. This marked the conclusion of the performance. The "moral" of the oratorio which requires no explanation — namely, that acceptance of mortality can also be a source of life's joy — could not have been expressed in a more vivid theatrical manner.[28]

One of the highlights of the production was the portrayal of Disinganno by Marina Prudenskaja: "While for Handel's Roman audience, the loss of illusions symbolized by this figure was clearly a positive value, as it led to the realization that spiritual values are what truly matters, today Disillusionment is represented by the image of a depressed, life-worn 'human wreck'".[29]

Figure 4 | Marina Prudenskaja (Disinganno) in the production of Handel's *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* (Staatsoper Stuttgart, Staatsorchester Stuttgart, conductor Sébastien Rouland, director Calixto Bieito), 2011 (© Sebastian Hoppe)

28   Ćurković, "Barokk opera".
29   Ibid.

HANDEL'S GENDERED MUSICAL IMAGES IN
A CONTEMPORARY LIGHT

The remaining productions will be discussed only briefly, referencing specific examples. While one case study will suffice for the second and third categories — "Crede l'uom" as an example of a number that remained unaltered across all three versions of the work, and the modified concluding aria "Tu del ciel ministro eletto" — the first category, encompassing music unique to the 1707 version, will be illustrated by three examples. Each case study reflects the musical settings of highly visual and emblematic concepts: an errant ship at sea symbolizing Bellezza torn between Piacere and Tempo; the ashes of beauties in urns; Music (and, in the 1707 version, the composer himself) as an allegory of Pleasure; Time portrayed as seemingly asleep but still spreading his wings; and the final apotheosis of Beauty as Penance.

More recently, *La Bellezza ravveduta* has taken on new relevance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A production from Hanover entitled *Il trionfo. Four Last Nights*, ventured a strikingly modern interpretation. It retained only the initials of the allegorical characters' names, cut most of the recitatives and re-imagined the performance as a series of monologues by suicidal individuals grappling with personal struggles rather than engaging in debates with one another. The production addressed contemporary moral issues such as mental health, terminal illness, gender transition and motherhood. One of the most striking examples in the 2020 Hannover production was the 1707 aria "È ben folle quel nocchier" (Tempo's simile aria), which depicts the image of a ship in a storm — "a symbol of the disoriented lover's heart" but also "a transcript of the lost soul and the lack of strength or direction to fight."[30] In this production the tenor Sunnyboy Dladla portrayed a character struggling with an identity as a trans woman. The jagged, energetic ritornello that opens the aria, in conjunction with its bouncy melodic line, vividly conveyed the character's inner turmoil. This effect was amplified by restless stage movement, creating a poignant and compelling representation of this character's mental state.

Il Trionfo. Her Temple, directed by Polish filmmaker Krystian Lada, re-imagines *La Bellezza ravveduta* from the perspective of advocacy for women's reproductive rights. The production focuses on a young woman grappling with the dilemma of terminating her pregnancy. Because of the pandemic, the planned staging at the National Theatre in Mannheim was cancelled, and the work was instead realized as a film consisting of eight chapters, for which nine numbers were selected from HWV 46a. A notable inclusion in the film is the 1707 aria "Urne voi" — Tempo's haunting piece that evokes elements of "an *ombra* scene, in which the character of Tempo gives

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30 Díaz Marroquín, "Voglio tempo", 41.

a demonic account of the transformation of everything living into dust."[31] By vividly describing the ashes of dead beauties, Tempo seeks to intimidate Bellezza. The 1707 setting, striking in its imagery, was excluded from the 1737 and 1757 versions but takes on new significance in *Il Trionfo. Her Temple*. In the film, the scene features the young woman confronting her confessor, who responds coldly and unsympathetically to her pleas for guidance. While this interpretation aligns with the film's central theme, it is not particularly inventive in its dramatic framing. However, it serves to underscore the enduring power of Pamphilj's evocative text and Handel's music. Christine Martin offers a fitting analysis of the specific aesthetics of Handel's setting:

> Time (Tempo) calls upon the graves to open and reveal what remains of human beauty after death. The first version of this aria draws upon the rich texture of the Italian string ensemble, with an expressive tremolo that mirrors the trembling before the sight of skeletons. Repeated pounding tones symbolize the relentlessness of time. Its dramatic exclamations, "apritevi! mostratevi" (open! reveal yourselves), are meant to instil respect and fear in Beauty (and the listener). The downward octave leap and the dotted rhythm were common musical gestures in Baroque theatre, associated with powerful figures. A similar effect is achieved through abrupt shifts between the string tremolos and the broken phrases of the vocal line. The vocal line spans a wide range and frequently changes direction abruptly: large, unsingable leaps create a musical "ugliness" that characterizes Il Tempo as a grim and ominous figure.[32]

In the 2011 Stuttgart and 2016 Berlin productions of *La Bellezza ravveduta* the role of Tempo was sung by the same tenor, Charles Workman. His portrayal was visually enhanced with pale make-up and grey-coloured hair, emphasizing the emblematic representation of Time as an aged and wise figure. This visual characterization coincided with traditional allegorical depictions of Time's advanced age and omniscience. The 2016 Aix-en-Provence production, directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski, took a different approach to Tempo's character. Like the 2022 Mannheim production, this interpretation stressed Tempo's malevolent qualities. Michael Spyres, under the musical direction of Emmanuelle Haïm, delivered a masterful performance that highlighted the character's ominous and sleazy dimension. Haïm's deliberate choice of a slow tempo for the aria accentuated its sinister tone, as Tempo vividly described the decay of beauties, set against the central "limbo" space on stage.

As Burrows observed, the Sonata for organ in Part 1 of *La Bellezza ravveduta* could be considered the most modern movement in the work. Alongside the opening

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31   Knapp, "Die drei Fassungen", 88.
32   Martin, "Triumph der Kunst", 196–197.

Sonata, it explores the procedures of ritornello form, serving as "a preliminary stage in the development of Handel's organ concertos"[33] and anticipating their later performances between oratorio acts in London. Despite its innovative character, "there is no evidence that Handel ever considered using the 1707 Sonata in 1737".[34] Instead, he replaced it in *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità* with a far less virtuosic Sonatina for violin and continuo and in a later revival even replaced the organ by a carillon, which was already familiar to London audiences from *Saul*. "A similar scene from Bernardo Pasquini's Roman oratorio *Sant'Alessio* (Rome 1675) could have been a model for the Sonata and the following exclamation in recitative by Bellezza ('Taci, qual suono ascolto')."[35] Bellezza seemingly cuts short the instrumental movement to introduce Piacere's aria "Un leggiardo giovinetto", a piece with a similarly concerted organ accompaniment. In this aria Pamphilj explicitly alludes to the twenty-two-year-old George Frideric Handel's performance on the organ at the Roman premiere. Terence Best's English translation also successfully captures this vivid autobiographical element:

> Un leggiadro giovinetto
> bel diletto
> Desta in suono lusinghier.
> E vuol far con nuovo invito
> che l'udito
> abbia ancor il suo piacer.

> A handsome youth
> arouses delight
> in a flattering sound
> and wishes with another invitation
> that the ear
> once again has its pleasure.[36]

This unexpected allusion to the composer-performer as a "handsome youth" in the libretto and score finds equally impressive stage interpretations in the 2016 Aix-en-Provence and Berlin productions. In the Flimm/Hartmann production the aria "Un leggiardo giovinetto" is choreographed, while the Sonata features a visually striking interplay between music and staged imagery. A violinist and an organist in

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33 Marx, *Händels Oratorien*, 245.
34 Handel, *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità*, VIII.
35 Ehrmann-Herfort, "Il Trionfo del Tempo", 180.
36 Handel, *La Bellezza ravveduta*, XXXIII–XXXIV.

baroque attire are brought on to the stage, performing amidst a display of female beauty in the form of a fashion show where three models parade on the bar dominating the stage. Bellezza interrupts the orchestra to hear the performers more clearly, and this interruption cues in an elegant dance trio featuring Bellezza, a baroque-clad dancer, and a similarly baroque-clad Piacere. Meanwhile, Charles Workman (Tempo), equipped with angelic wings in these scenes, is visibly asleep on a chair — a detail that gains significance when the scene transitions to "Crede l'uomo". As both human and musical beauty are celebrated, Time metaphorically stands still. In contrast, Warlikowski's production shifts the focus from Handel and his era to the "handsome youth" referenced in the aria's text. Here, Bellezza's deceased lover, previously seen lying under a sheet, enters the central space of the stage, bloodstained, and begins dancing as he did during the opening Sonata, even though the Sonata is not dance-like in either metre or character. This staging aligns the youthful male emblem of Beauty with music, drawing on emblematic imagery from Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*.

The examples considered so far have been viewed as having limited appeal, since they did not make it into the later reworkings of the oratorio in 1737 and 1757. In contrast, "Crede l'uom" serves as a musical fixed point, appearing in all three versions of the oratorio. Distinguished by its moderate or slow tempo, the alto's dark timbre, the delicate lightness of recorders and its mellifluous, seemingly never-ending vocal line, it is nevertheless based on a substantial borrowing from the aria "Ruhig sein" from Reinhard Keiser's opera *Octavia*.[37] However, it impresses, according to a detailed analysis by Donald Burrows with which I wholeheartedly agree, through its "masterly construction of melodic and harmonic organisation using the simplest means (and a vocal compass within an octave), which does not let the interest sag at any point".[38] This is achieved via the combined effect of all the structural elements of the aria: the initial *Devise* statement by the contralto, the sleep motif of the ritornello, its reappearance throughout the A section of the aria to articulate the form, a modulation and a vocal cadence on the dominant midway (b. 23) and a climactic return to the tonic via a cadence in bar 41, to which a coda introducing further sequential figures is added, "once again keeping the music in the air".[39] The sequential stretching of the vocal line is particularly striking, as it explores the middle range of the contralto (or the low range of the mezzosoprano), conveying aurally at the same time a visual allegory of Time sleeping. While Time appears to stand still, the aria's hypnotic flow suggests an unhurried yet inexorable passage of time.

As previously pointed out, the Flimm/Hartmann production quite literally puts Charles Workman, in the role of Tempo, "to sleep" during the aria. Piacere (Sara

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37   Cf. Greuel, "Il trionfo", 188–189.
38   Burrows, *Handel*, 53.
39   Ibid.

Mingardo) gradually raises him and manipulates him in the manner of a marionette during the A section of the aria. Following the contrasting B section, her focus shifts to Bellezza, who until that moment has been dining with Piacere. While Piacere dozes off, Disinganno appears to explain — and demonstrate — the imperceptible passage of time to Bellezza, even engaging in a waltz with her near the end of the aria. The Aix-en-Provence production, however, takes a different approach: rejecting the male attire used in the Flimm production, Disinganno is portrayed here by the same singer (Sara Mingardo) as a middle-aged bourgeois woman. She delivers the aria with a mannered smile in an extremely slow tempo, a choice that conductor Emmanuelle Haïm adopts, consistently with her audio recording featuring Sonia Prina as Piacere. Meanwhile, the young women referenced by Tempo in the aria "Urne voi" gradually fill the auditorium. As a result, despite meeting all the musical requirements, this staging of the aria lacks a melancholic or generally reflective quality, instead bringing out Tempo's cynicism. While Warlikowski's production portrays Disinganno as a female subordinate of Tempo, all the other productions, including Bieito's, present the character as far more complex, independent and occasionally also androgynous or ambivalent in terms of gender.

My final case study, "Tu del ciel ministro eletto", was also the final number of the work in HWV 46a. It hardly ever fails to move an audience, except perhaps in Sam Brown's production of *The Triumph of Time and Truth*, which to a certain extent banalizes Bellezza as she returns to her job as a secretary, following the failure of her ambitions. However, the reasons why the aria was less moving in this production are, to an important extent, also musical. Scholars such as Hans Joachim Marx have pointed out how the 1707 version of the aria "reaches the limits in terms of harmony and sound"[40] with its modulations to D-sharp major/G-sharp minor, the exploration of the high register in the violin part and its final bars in *pianissimo*. Huub van der Linden, on the other hand, has emphasized that Bellezza's wholesome conversion results in the gradual disappearance of her music into the inaudible music of the spheres, in contrast with the Sonata's hedonistic sensory pleasures.[41] The expressive melodic lines of the solo soprano (Bellezza) and the violin — presumably originally played by Corelli — are punctuated by an alternation of semiquaver notes and rests in the strings that invites staccato articulation and suggests constancy and steadfastness. Mary Ann Parker has insightfully connected the fade-out, hushed *pianissimo* ending with the *Trionfi* sonnets of Francesco Petrarca, the last of which are dedicated to Time and Eternity. "Pamphili — and no doubt Handel — understood that Time is not really triumphant, since it is ultimately conquered by eternity, or God. But

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40 Marx, *Händels Oratorien*, 235.
41 Van der Linden, "Benedetto Pamphilj", 157–160.

more profoundly, there is a unique quality to the ending of Petrarch's *Triumphs* that I believe Handel is evoking here in his music."[42] Let us inspect the text of the aria:

> Tu del ciel ministro eletto
> non vedrai più nel mio petto
> voglia infida o vano ardor.
> E se vissi ingrata o Dio,
> tu custode del cor mio
> a lui porta il nuovo cor.

> Chosen servant of Heaven,
> you will no longer see in my bosom
> an unfaithful desire of hollow ardour.
> And if I lived ungrateful to God,
> you, guardian of my heart,
> carry my new heart to him.[43]

Parker rightly highlighted the introspective nature of Pamphilj's text, stressing Bellezza's dialogue with her own heart and — in Handel's setting, especially — "an element of incompleteness, especially for those of us who are used to Handel's self-assured and even victorious finales".[44]

When Handel reworked the aria in 1737 and took it over again in 1757, transposing it from the original E major to F major and then returning it to E major, he also replaced the violin with a solo oboe and added a conventional cadential ending, framed by a fuller string sound, to round off the aria with more conventional dynamics. These later versions of the aria were placed in a different context — not only because they were followed by a jubilatory choral "Alleluia"/"Alleluja", and thus did not close the oratorio — but also because the overall structure and tone of the revised scores differed from the 1707 original. In combination with Sam Brown's directorial style, these musical and theatrical factors may have contributed to the different impact the aria had on me as a spectator. However, the question of context also bears significant relevance to the endings of the other staged productions examined here.

Some productions employed similar strategies in terms of lighting, with a gradual dimming of the stage lights to parallel Bellezza's closing monologue in performances of HWV 46a. The Flimm/Hartmann production most likely came closest to van der Linden's interpretation in the sense of spiritual absorption. In contrast,

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42 Parker, "Handel's 'Il Trionfo'", 408.
43 Handel, *La Bellezza ravveduta*, XXXIX.
44 Parker, "Handel's 'Il Trionfo'", 408.

Il trionfo. Four Last Nights focused on Bellezza's ambivalent feelings as she decided to abandon her child. As previously noted, the 2011 Stuttgart production emphasized the unity of Bellezza and Tempo as they covered themselves in ashes, but it also introduced a musical intervention: the repetition of the opening Sonata as the older extras began their triumphant ride on the merry-go-round, symbolising the circularity of life and time. The ending of Warlikowski's production was simultaneously the most impactful and the most controversial. Clad in a white dress inscribed with "IHD", Bellezza — portrayed with masterful musical and dramatic nuance by the soprano Sabine Devieilhe — slashes her wrists as an impassive chorus of dead beauties looks on, joined by the weeping young man, the only member of the audience who seems to care. While this ending may have faced opposition for diverging from Pamhilj's "intended" resolution, it convincingly matches the fading away of the music with the fading away of Bellezza's life.

CONCLUSIONS

La Bellezza ravveduta, an atypical and eccentric early Italian work by G. F. Handel is liminal in terms of genre, but preoccupied the composer for half a century and has recently inspired a wide variety of theatrical interpretations. As we have seen, the hypotheses about its genesis in the musicological literature are indicative of a fascination with the work and its subsequent versions, as well as with a need to find a distinctive approach to them, which is also felt in contemporary performance practice. All three versions of *Il trionfo del Tempo* have been surrounded by an aura of ambiguity from the moment they started receiving the attention of musicians and scholars. This has resulted in a diversity of meanings in terms of both scholarship and performance. The central hypothesis of this article is that the emblematic imagery in Pamphilj's 1707 libretto and its later versions, set to Handel's music, demonstrates a surprising responsiveness to the changing fashions of both Handel's era and contemporary times, as reflected in composition and performance practice.

Returning to the polemic between Gianturco and Burrows on what constitutes oratorio or drama in general, we may conclude that different times have distinct notions of what constitutes viable drama in the genres of Western music. Consequently, the assessment of these works and their performances depends significantly on what one considers a prerequisite for effective musical drama. This divergence is evident not only in how musicologists have approached the different versions of *Il trionfo del Tempo* but also in how they have been performed, and — in particular — staged in the twenty-first century. The interplay of both continuity and discontinuity across the different versions of the work mirrors the same dynamic of unity and diversity in the stagings I have examined. To further support this argument, I will elaborate briefly on the construction of gender in the oratorio and its contemporary re-imaginings.

In both the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries Bellezza must be instantly recognizable as an emblem of (female) beauty. As we have observed, Ripa's emblems and their representations in the visual arts frequently employ nakedness to emphasize this connection, drawing parallels between Beauty and Truth. In all versions of the oratorio Handel reinforces this through a soprano role that combines lyrical expression with virtuosity. Modern productions often underscore this by casting young, beautiful singers, occasionally styled as icons like Marilyn Monroe (Stuttgart 2012, Karlsruhe 2013, Berlin 2016). Some stagings, however, take a different approach, portraying Bellezza as an emblem of female suffering and focusing on contemporary struggles of femininity (Aix 2016, Hannover 2020, Mannheim 2022).

Since there have been no staged productions of HWV 76b — a score in which Tempo is portrayed by an alto, in HWV 46a/71, Tempo (tenor) and Time (bass) are consistently depicted as unquestionably masculine, aligning with traditional emblematic representations — except in the 2020 Hannover production. The Aix 2016 and Mannheim 2022 productions leaned into the negative aspects of contemporary masculinity, thereby distancing themselves from the emblematic tradition. In contrast, the Berlin 2016 and Stuttgart 2011 productions succeeded in offering a contemporary reinterpretation of the Early Modern emblem through the person of the tenor Charles Workman.

Even though the villain in all versions of *Il trionfo del Tempo*, Piacere/Pleasure fascinated Handel, his librettists and contemporary performers, and the modern productions have all clearly sought to create a strong personality measuring up to the allegorical duel with the representatives of virtue, Tempo/Time and Disinganno/ Counsel. As previously noted, the librettos often exhibit linguistic tension regarding the character's possible gender identity: while in HWV 71 Pleasure is sung by a tenor, yet referred to as female,[45] in HWV 46a and HWV 46b the text seems to imply a male identity. This is at variance with the modern female soprano interpreters of the role, who nonetheless imbue it with a sense of gender ambiguity. In both the 2012 Stuttgart and the 2016 Berlin productions the ambiguity is highlighted through numerous costume changes, as Pleasure reveals its many faces — predominantly feminine but occasionally masculine. In contrast, Franco Fagioli's portrayal of Piacere as a countertenor in the 2016 Aix-en-Provence production is rather one-dimensional, aligning more strictly with the opposition between Bellezza and the three other characters.

Finally, in terms of gender, Disinganno/Counsel may be considered one of the most complex musical emblems in the various versions of *Il trionfo del Tempo* and its staged performances. Apart from the productions I have discussed, I have greatly benefited from conversations with the Croatian mezzo-soprano Sonja Runje, who

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45 "Here Pleasure keeps her splendid Court, Where all her Devotees resort; And, at her Nod, advance". Morell, *Triumph of Time and Truth*, 8.

portrayed Disinganno in two different productions of ʜᴡᴠ 46a, which were staged in the opera houses of Montpellier and Mainz. Both productions emphasized the gender ambiguity of the role through imaginative costume design and its interactions with the other characters. Disinganno is perhaps the most challenging character to define, and — if we set aside Consiglio in the 1618 *Nuova iconologia* — it is also the one least connected to unequivocal visual emblems.

It is particularly noteworthy that the three productions of ʜᴡᴠ 46a I analysed in detail (Stuttgart 2012, Aix 2016 and Berlin 2016) presented entirely different interpretations of Disinganno, even though the last two featured the same singer. Marina Prudenskaja's portrayal of Disinganno as a "human wreck", modelled on Courtney Love and including Bieito's signature depictions of drug use and self-harm, stood in stark contrast to Mingardo's hypocritical sidekick to Spyres's unpleasant Tempo in the Aix-en-Provence production. Meanwhile, in the Berlin production Mingardo offered an abstract, androgynous interpretation of the character. These varied approaches were all powerful in their own right, leaving a lasting impression, thanks to Handel's imaginative musical setting and the compelling performances by the singers.

The minds of the first audiences of the 1707 performance must have raced to keep up with the rapid succession and simultaneity of emblematic images in Pamphilj's original libretto. Today, however, much of this semantic richness is lost on the average reader, listener or spectator. Nevertheless, there have been attempts to replace these layers of meaning by contemporary gendered images that hold a degree of omnipresence comparable to the impact that Ripa's emblems probably achieved in Early Modern times. Ultimately, it is Handel's sublime, vivid yet flexible music that — recalling Leopold's observation — evokes images before the mind's eye, organizes space and time and conjures up a theatre of the mind.

APPENDIX

List of productions

Il trionfo del Tempo e del disinganno
11 February 2012. Staatsoper Stuttgart, Staatsorchester Stuttgart. Conductor: Sébastien Rouland; director: Calixto Bieito; soloists: Judith Gauthier (Bellezza), Ezgi Kutlu (Piacere), Marina Prudenskaja (Disinganno), Stanley Jackson (Tempo). Stuttgart 2012, accessed 7 September 2024, https://player.vimeo.com/video/50980052.

2016. Staatsoper unter den Linden, Staatskapelle Berlin. Conductor: Sébastien Rouland; directors: Jürgen Flimm, Gudrun Hartmann; soloists: Hélène Le Corre (Bellezza), Inga Kalna (Piacere), Sara Mingardo (Disinganno), Charles Workman

(Tempo). Berlin 2016, accessed 9 September 2024, https://www.staatsoper-berlin.de/en/veranstaltungen/il-trionfo-del-tempo-e-del-disinganno.69/?spielzeit=2016-2017; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSCF9d11TFY&ab_channel=StefanLazar; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBBX0nxXhvE&ab_channel=StefanLazar.

2016. Aix-en-Provence Festival, Le Concert d'Astrée. Conductor: Emanuelle Haïm; director: Krzysztof Warlikowski; soloists: Sabine Devieilhe (Bellezza), Franco Fagioli (Piacere), Sara Mingardo (Disinganno), Michael Spyres (Tempo). Aix 2016, accessed 10 September 2024, https://www.medici.tv/en/operas/il-trionfo-del-tempo-e-del-disinganno-handel-opera; https://festival-aix.com/en/programmation/opera/il-trionfo-del-tempo-e-del-disinganno.

19 September 2020. *Trionfo. Vier letzte Nächte*. Staatsoper Hannover, Niedersächsisches Staatsorchester Hannover. Conductor: David Bates; director: Elisabeth Stöppler; soloists: Sarah Brady, Nina van Essen, Nicholas Tamagna, Sunnyboy Dladla. Hannover 2020, accessed 12 September 2024, https://operavision.eu/de/performance/trionfo. 18 January – 8 March 2022. *Il Trionfo. Her Temple* (visual album). Nationaltheater Mannheim, Nationaltheater-Orchester Mannheim. Conductor: Bernhard Forck; director: Krystian Lada; soloists: Amelia Scicolone, Shachar Lavi, Benno Schachtner, Christopher Diffey. Mannheim 2022, accessed 14 September 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFsWnB0hJdM&ab_channel=NationaltheaterMannheim; https://vimeo.com/669899784 (Chapter II., "Urne voi").

The Triumph of Time and Truth
19 February 2013. Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe, Badische Staatskapelle. Conductor: Richard Baker; director: Sam Brown; soloists: Joshua Bloom (Time), William Purefoy (Counsel), Anna Patalong (Beauty), Stefanie Schaefer (Deceit), Sebastian Kohlhepp (Pleasure). Karlsruhe 2013, accessed 17 September 2024, http://www.omm.de/veranstaltungen/musiktheater20122013/KA-der-sieg-von-zeit-und-wahrheit.html.

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Povzetek

GLASBA IN OSPOLJENOST PODOB V HÄNDLOVEM ORATORIJU *LA BELLEZZA RAVVEDUTA NEL TRIONFO DEL TEMPO E DEL DISINGANNO* (1707), NJEGOVE PREDELAVE IN SODOBNE UPRIZORITVE

Zgodnji italijanski oratorij *La Bellezza ravveduta nel trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, HWV 46a (1707) Georga Friedricha Händla sodi v dolgo tradicijo dramatične alegorične glasbe. Njegovi poznejši predelavi – *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità*, HWV 46b (1737) in *The Triumph of Time and Truth*, HWV 71 (1757) – nakazujeta na spremembe v žanrski hierarhiji in njihovi definiciji, nenazadnje tudi na transformacijo pomena skladateljevega avtorskega prispevka. Tako je Händel obdržal le del izvirne glasbe, drugo polovico pa je bodisi radikalno preoblikoval bodisi napisal povsem novo glasbo. Obenem je bistveno modificiral tudi pristop do spolne markacije štirih alegoričnih likov (Bellezza, Piacere, Disinganno in Tempo), saj same glasovne lege in vloge niso nedvoumno označene za ženske ali moške. Tako na glasbeni kot tudi na dramski ravni se zato zrcali nekakšna dvoumnost, ki pa sovpada z raznolikostjo reprezentacij spola pri teh figurah v vizualnih umetnostih prve polovice 18. stoletja.

Glede na pomembnost (vizualnega) imaginarija v libretu so interpretacije sodobnih gledaliških postavitev postavljene ob bok izbranim primerom iz zgodovine vizualnih umetnosti. Da bi analiza osvetlila morebitne vzporednice in kontraste, se opira na pojme emblema, alegorije in družbenega spola. Glede na to, da oratoriji niso bili ustvarjeni za odrske deske, so se morali upirati na moč različnih zvrsti poslušalčevega imaginarija, ki ga je v tem primeru spodbujala ravno Händlova glasba. O odprtosti vseh treh različic oratorija za povsem raznovrstne interpretacije tako nekoč kot tudi danes pričajo najrazličnejše gledališke uprizoritve 21. stoletja, ki docela drugače razumejo ospoljenost likov in njihovo vizualno reprezentacijo. Pričujoči članek zato vsebuje primere sodobnih odrskih postavitev *La Bellezza ravveduta* (denimo v režiji Calixta Bieita ali Krzysztofa Warlikowsega) s poudarkom na analizi uprizoritve (de)konstrukcije družbenega spola.