

George Frideric Händel’s Musical Treatment of Textual Rhetoric in His Oratorio, *Susanna*

MICHAEL PURVES-SMITH

Faculty of Music, Wilfrid Laurier University

Any musician who is interested in performing “early music” (any western art music written before about the beginning of the 20th century) confronts the problem of establishing norms for its realization. For example, just how George Frideric Händel (1685-1759) heard his music raises interesting questions. Providing answers has made the study of performance practice one of the exhilarating preoccupations of musicians for, at least, the past half-century. In this paper, I am especially concerned with the needs of singers. One of the principal resources for a singer committed to recovering the vocal performance practices of the past is the text. Therefore, as a contribution to the art of singing, using as a model Händel’s oratorio, *Susanna*, I will examine how the composer dealt with textural rhetoric and thereby illuminate one of his skills that may have gone mostly unrecognized.

Almost all of the evidence for this paper will be drawn from the score of *Susanna*, from which a persuasive circumstantial case may be made to show that Händel thought it worth his while to reflect in his music the formal rhetoric of the texts that he set. The arts of rhetoric and music operate in the same medium, sound, and in the same dimension, time. One may conceive

of a musical rhetoric analogous to the traditional rhetoric of speech such that many of its figures may be mimicked in music, even abstract tropes of meaning. At least from the beginning of the 16th century leading up to mid 18th century, a musical rhetoric flourished, based upon that of speech. During this epoch this metarhetoric was espoused with particular enthusiasm by the German musical establishment and a rigorous training in the arts of rhetoric undoubtedly will have formed part of Händel's education in the Lutheran *Lateinschule* of his youth in Halle, Germany.¹ While his music is cosmopolitan, showing the marked influences of his experiences in Italy, as well as his long sojourn in England, one cannot discount the importance of his early training in forming his attitudes towards his craft. This paper will show that Händel was deeply committed to the task of text expression; his music demonstrates that he was highly susceptible not only to the overall *affekt* of the texts he set, but to their finest nuances as well. In the service of expressing his texts as forcibly as possible in music, he will have made liberal use of his understanding of rhetoric to invent musical ideas, to assist with the process of ornamentation, and to vivify the affective language of his music.

It is not difficult to find examples. Turning to the score of *Susanna*, the abstract triplet figures in the First Elder's aria, "Blooming as the face of spring" (Händel 115-118), depict equally such disparate words as spring and wing, delight and joy, fair and care, and smile and prayer. At the same time they serve, in this case, to unify the entire aria under one *affekt*. Likewise, as we shall discover, Händel sometimes employs musical symbolism, but in practice his intention is almost always evocative rather than symbolic. For example, the strategic use of pedal to accompany the concept of wisdom in Daniel's first aria (discussed below) is actually

¹Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica* (Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1997), 65–66. Subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text.

more a musical metaphor than a symbol for wisdom. The mind makes the connection between the calm strength of the pedal and the attributes of wisdom. However, it is difficult to attach his music either to any of the lexica of musical figures with which he was likely familiar or with one of his own invention.² While it must be admitted that Händel's audience was much more conversant with the principals of rhetoric than is the average listener today, it is nonetheless always virtually impossible to get the various *actants* (originator, performer, and listener) in a musical-rhetorical equation to agree on its terms, let alone to distinguish them at the normal high speed of musical performance. Aware of this impediment, busy professional composers may have devoted little energy to making their music conform precisely to the theories of musical rhetoric. Nevertheless, when the theorists turn to the effects of *hypotyposis*, (a term which along with related terms such as *prosopopoeia* and *pathopoeia* appears fairly frequently in the writings of the German theorists who dealt most extensively with musical rhetoric) in the sense of vivid characterization as in *enargia* and *mimesis*,³ they touch upon the most useful technique that composers have for reflecting word meaning in their music, and, at the same time they bring us directly into the realm of the Classical tradition of rhetoric. I would suggest that Händel's infatuation and skill with this group of tropes is one of the distinguishing characteristics of his music.

²For an interesting, although controversial, introduction to this subject, see Peter F Williams, *Organ Music of J. S. Bach, Vol. 3* (Cambridge Eng: Cambridge UP, 1980). A more positive overview is provided by George J. Buelow's article, "Rhetoric of Music," in *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians.*, ed. Stanley Sadie, vol 15 (London: MacMillan, 1980) 793. For more extended studies of the subject see Patricia Ranum, *The Harmonic Orator* (Hillside, NY: Pendragon Press, 2001) on rhetoric and the music of Lully; Robert Toft, *Tune thy Musicke to thy Hart* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993) on rhetoric in the Elizabethan and Jacobean English song tradition; and Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica* on the German musical-rhetorical tradition.

³Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984) 64. The word *mimesis* is used here in its literary sense of vivid, sometimes mocking, characterization. As a musical-rhetorical term it was used to refer to inexact musical imitation of thematic material.

In fact, Händel's attitude to musical rhetoric was very likely similar to that of his friend and rival from his early career in Hamburg, Johann Mattheson (1681-1764). Mattheson was a gifted composer and performer who, likely as a result of the early onset of blindness, devoted a large part of his career to writing about music. The most celebrated and influential of his writings is the encyclopedic *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*.⁴ In it and elsewhere, he deals extensively with musical rhetoric. Dietrich Bartel in his work *Musica Poetica*, a survey of the German musical-rhetorical tradition from Joachim Burmeister (1564-1629) to Johann Nikolaus Forkel (1749-1818) sums up Mattheson's views as follows:

. . . just as music and rhetoric share common goals, so do they share common methodologies, structuring principles, and expressive devices. While these were initially defined and systematized by the rhetorical discipline, they are equally evident in and applicable to the musical art. These musical phenomena which are described in rhetorical terminology have a long standing history, . . . [which] can . . . be gleaned both from well-composed music and from naturally gifted musical expression through empirical observation. (Bartel 143)

To judge from their music, as well as from the friendship and the similarities in the background of the two composers, Händel likely held views on musical rhetoric very similar to those of Mattheson.

In fact, Mattheson seems to have thought of many of the rhetorical figures as being so innate to music as to be beyond the need of description. Bartel quotes and translates the same passage from Mattheson several times:

⁴ Johann Mattheson (1681-1764) was a prolific writer on musical subjects. His writings and especially *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg, 1739) may be the most important sources of information on musical rhetoric as it was perceived by his own generation of German musicians.

the *epanalepsis*, *epistrophe*, *anadiplosis*, *paronomasia*, *polyptoton*, *antanaclasis*, *ploce*, etc., assume such natural positions in music that it almost seems as if the Greek orators borrowed these figures from the art of musical composition. For they are purely *repetitiones vocum*, repetitions of words, which are applied to music in various different ways. (Bartel 141, 183, 258)

In this quote Mattheson echoes the views of Johann Georg Ahle (1651-1706), best known to music history as J.S. Bach's predecessor in the post of organist at St. Blasien in Muhlhausen. As well as a skilled musician, he was a gifted poet and a writer on musical subjects. Bartel tells us that in his *Sommer-Gespräche*,

. . . Ahle, the poet laureate, derives his concept of the figures directly from the rhetorical source. He suggests that the composer first study the rhetorical figures found in the text and then reflect these in the music, in the same manner that the cadences and accents of the text might be represented by the music. [Ahle writes:] "Just as orators or poets use a great variety of rhetorical figures, so also do a number of *melopoets* use them in their musical discourse." (Bartel 123)

All of this leads one to wonder if Händel might have espoused a similar approach to musical rhetoric and to ask if he might not sometimes have drawn inspiration from the rhetorical devices that he found in the texts that he was setting. It is this question that this paper will attempt to answer.

Händel often chose to set texts that are saturated with rhetorical figures, and that follow traditional rhetorical organization in some detail. All the important English literary figures that most touched his work – Dryden, Milton, Congreve, and Gay – took classical rhetoric as a given,

and evidently expected that their audience would appreciate it. Händel's education probably included extensive training in classical rhetoric. His father tried to steer him in the direction of law and even after his father's death Händel enrolled for studies in law at the University of Halle. A thorough knowledge of rhetoric would have been a prerequisite for admission to any such law studies. And as we have seen, he came originally from a milieu that included other composers, such as Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767), and composer/theorists, such as Johann Mattheson, whose music and writing exhibit an interest in traditional rhetoric. It was an ordinary part of the environment in which Händel wrote his music. It was why the singers of his day naturally turned, when they sought a foundation for their language of gesture, to the classical teachings on *pronunciatio* and *actio*, especially those of Quintilian.

A characteristic of Händel's approach to text is the extraordinary detail with which he sets it to music. He often translates texts into music word by word, whereas Bach, for example, seems concerned to capture them thought by thought. Rameau appears to place more emphasis on French diction, poetics and prosody. Thus, in Händel, the word running, for example, is usually set with a descriptive figure, the same one perhaps used for different words such as fly or chace [sic], but in all cases equally descriptive. In the following example the mimesis is both aurally and visually apparent:⁵

⁵All of the examples are taken from George Frideric Handel's score of *Susanna*. Page numbers refer to the edition made in 1858 by Dr. Frederick Chrysander, rpt. Miniature Score Series 1322 (New York: Kalmus, n.d.). I have chosen this edition because it is still much the most readily available for consultation. The occasional scholarly or musical lapse in his edition, especially in the realization of the continuo, does not undermine my arguments. In fact, awkwardness in the realization is sometimes resolvable by paying more attention to Händel's treatment of the rhetoric. For example, Dr. Chrysander completely misses the significance of the *hemiolas* in Joacim and Susanna's first duet (12–16) and so he does not perceive that the cadences in question should be realized *hemiolas*.

shall fly - and chace ev_ ry cloud that would
dar - ken the sky, and chace, and chace

Figure 1: George Frideric Händel, *Susanna* 19–20.

For those unfamiliar with Händel's skill at word painting, it may be useful to turn to some musical and poetic analysis drawn from the first duet between Susanna and her husband, Joacim. They sing of connubial bliss.

When thou art nigh, my pulse beats high and rap - tures swell my breast.
Echappe

Figure 2: *Susanna* 17.

First, one may notice the setting of the word raptures. It could be the suitably emphasized focal point of a Mahlerian, long-lined approach to singing Händel, but there is much more. Singers familiar with the writings of baroque singing teachers would add to the word swell a suggestive dynamic surge. Händel ensures that this will happen by placing it on a stressed second beat in ternary rhythm (in this case the third group of the musical *hemiola*) and by giving it as long a note as possible. The *échappé* that precedes it further contributes to the effect, as does the metric reversal of the singsong iambs on the words beat and swell (the musical accents are editorial).

On another level comes the placement of the words high, pulse, and beats. High is pitched high in the line at a caesura on an authentic cadence (a half-close would be more usual at this point in a musical phrase). The meaning of beats is made clear by the rhythmic displacement of the accented poetic foot as well as by the imitation in this bar between the descending thirds in the bass and the melody. Pulse is placed at the highest point of the line. Taking, on the words my pulse, the second parallel phrase up a perfect fourth graphically depicts the quickening of the pulse; as does the displacement of the rhythm on the word, beat. Thou is emphasized by the rising vocal ornament, and nigh by the safety of the falling third, the interval which pervades this entire passage in both the melody and the continuo line. The rising fourth with which the phrase opens is symbolically the interval of direct address as well as of noble sentiment. Händel uses it very effectively to contrast Susanna's strength of character with the sneaking chromaticism of the First Elder and the impetuosity of the Second Elder's scalar descents, all of which he combines brilliantly in their trio (125–129).

Of all of the depictions we have been discussing, only that of the word pulse is, at first, not very convincing—one would have expected a word-painter of the calibre of Händel to find some sort of onomatopoeia to translate it. In fact, this is exactly what he does, as the *hemiola* that begins with the word beat is surely the perfect way to suggest the action of the pulse. Even the *hemiola* serves Händel for a multiple depictive purpose. Through subtle reharmonization, in the course of the duet the *hemiola* is presented in many different guises, of which only the one associated with the word pulse is unequivocal. By this Händel perhaps manages to foreshadow the ephemeral nature of the young couple's bliss.

Finally, there is dramatic irony in both the text and the music. For example, in a musical combination of irony, foreshadowing, and symbol, Joacim, the representative of true love, early

on in the oratorio, begins a centrally important aria with almost the same figure that the First Elder, the representative of false love, begins both his first *recitativo accompagnato* and his first aria. The significant difference is that Joacim sings in the major while the First Elder's figures are in the more dissonant and "evil" minor.



Figure 3: a. Joacim (17)

b. First Elder (66)

c. First Elder (69)

The foregoing is meant to illustrate Händel's detailed, word-by-word translation of text into music. Were these examples uncommon, they would be hard to take seriously, but everywhere in Händel one finds copious examples of the same sort of thing, even in the *recitativo secco*. Only in relatively rare instances of formal fugal writing, where Händel is setting such things as *sententia* or aphorisms, does his seemingly inexhaustible capacity for musical imitation abate. Even in such cases, it could be argued that fugal pomp is especially suited to the representation of these figures.

Music serves best the figures of *hypotyposis*, antithesis, and schemes such as *anaphora* or *accumulatio* which rely on time. These devices create possibilities for balanced structures, repetitions, and many compositional techniques that correspond to procedures in verbal rhetorical figures. Given sufficient imagination, music can imitate a surprising range of verbal meaning, with contrast as the main resource for musical representation: major/minor, up/down, conjunct/disjunct, slow/fast, loud/soft, ternary/binary, tension/release, dissonance/consonance, and so on. However, all these effects, either musical or verbal, are perceived, consciously or unconsciously, in real time. What about tropes such as metaphor, which may require random

time assimilation? In other words, depending upon how deeply embedded a metaphor is in the language of a given communication, we may make the attributive associations between *phor* and *tenor* well after the communication is first made. In words, the equation is always weakened through familiarity. There is no need to see a cow being milked in order to understand the meaning of the word milked when it is used metaphorically in a sentence. Except for a few specific instances, such as the trumpet and its calls and all that we associate with them, where metaphors cross between music and words, such is usually not the case. We need to make the connections between, for example, a musical pedal and the word wisdom. A moment's reflection is required to make them, reflection that is interrupted and postponed by the unrelenting time scale of musical performance. Can such abstractions be meaningfully reflected in music, and does Händel try to do so? The answer to both these questions is a qualified yes.

For example, one would think that a trope like synecdoche does not lend itself to musical treatment, yet in the opening chorus of *Susanna* (8–9) there is an instance. In the line, “How long, Oh Lord, shall Israel groan?” the word Israel is a synecdoche representing the citizens of the state of Israel (the whole for the parts). This text is set as a four part *fughetto*, the Israelites singing independent parts, while the following line, “Jehovah, hear thy people's moan,” is set in homophonic unison rhythm, suggesting the collective voice of the whole nation. Both its parts and its whole thus represent the synecdoche, Israel, musically. While this could be a coincidence, there are instances of complicated textual tropes that are set very persuasively by Händel. In act three the First Elder sings a lament for Susanna. She responds with, “Tis thus the crocodile his grief displays.” The reference to the crocodile serves the multiple purposes of underlining his terrible perfidy and reminding us of Susanna's dilemma which is akin to a

crocodilinae.⁶ Susanna is damned if she does and damned if she doesn't give in to the demands of the elders. In fact, her dilemma is exactly that debated in the *Gorgias*: would the virtuous man choose virtue over life? This, of course, is a small reminder that Händel expected his audience to be familiar with classical rhetoric. It calls from Händel in the ensuing *recitativo accompagnato*, always signaling important moments in his dramas, some beautiful and ambiguously resolved harmonies (165–166). Such is the perfect way for Händel to reflect in music Susanna's "dilemma."

Another example that is crucial to the plot of the oratorio is Daniel's first aria. In contrast to the two elders, rhetors by tradition, whose stature in their society demands veneration and protects them from the discovery of their terrible lies, Daniel is the true rhetor and the rhetor of truth. He has only this one aria to establish his credibility and he requires something especially persuasive to do so. His argument deals with two sets of contraries, age and youth, wisdom and lack of wisdom. We expect the subject term, age, to be coupled with the predicate term, wisdom, and the subject term, youth, to be coupled with the predicate term, lack of wisdom. Here the librettist expresses the contrasts as contradictions: age is not always wisdom, since youth is often wisdom. This *da capo* aria concisely states the familiar theme that reality cannot be judged by appearances. Both the text and the music play upon contradicting contraries, not to mention synecdoche, metonymy, *prosopopoeia*, *accumulatio*, and metaphor, so that we may honestly say that Daniel presents his case rhetorically. Coming at the denouement of the entire oratorio, this aria at first seems surprisingly bland. Apart from the wonderful way in which the composer

⁶Richard Lanham defines dilemma as "any technique of argument which offers an opponent a choice, or series of them, all of which are unacceptable" (54). *Crocodilinae* is a kind of dilemma described by Quintilian as follows: "A crocodile, having seized a woman's son, said that he would restore him, if she would tell him the truth. She replied, "You will not restore him." Was it the crocodile's duty to give him up? (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, trans. H. E. Butler, vol. 1 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1920-22], 162, n.2.

leads the ear to accept the opening b flat major chord, this is not an aria of the expected Händelian magic. There is no orchestrational, or harmonic display. Yet, on closer examination we discover that Händel admirably supports the textual argument musically in every way possible, in the process reminding us of the characters of the two elders, thus turning the discourse into a *bona fide argumentum ad hominem*. It is an aria about the central issue of rhetoric, *ethos*, and librettist and composer bend all their resources to making Daniel's argument as convincing as possible.

Händel's response works on many different levels. In keeping with an argument made by negative contraries, the musical discourse is presented by inverse *hypotyposis*. Old age, which one would expect to be represented with something staid, is given athletic, running and leaping music.



Figure 4: *Susanna* 167

This is strengthened by the very close canonic imitation at the octave between the voice and the bass, the effect of which is of great impetuosity, very much in keeping with the character of the Second Elder, but not at all with the true wisdom that the *doxa* would associate with old age. Furthermore, while it may again be coincidence, the canonic imitation could have been carried on much more consistently to good effect. Instead, Händel chooses to dupe the ear with the illusion of canon, thus suggesting the falsity of the Second Elder. As well, we note that close imitation is an obvious and persuasive way to depict argument in musical terms.

Figure 5: *Susannah* 167

What is more, the instrumental part of the canon is a high *basetto* from which one would traditionally drop all of the 16-foot and harmony instruments. Thus the impression is left that there is no real foundation for the music, an impression reinforced by the static harmonic rhythm of the first three bars, in contrast with all the rhythmic and melodic activity. All of this, of course, belies the image of old age. In addition, it is represented here as having a high, youthful voice.

Youth, on the other hand, is given an exceptionally serious, solemn, hymn:

Figure 6: *Susannah* 170

When the texture changes from three part counterpoint to implied four part homophony, an open invitation to the keyboard player to use a full voiced realization of the harmony; the parts move together with one accord. The *tessitura* of the solo voice is noticeably lower, and more dignified. The harmony is supported by an unarticulated pedal on the tonic of the subdominant key (E-flat), the key of the \flat section of this *da capo* aria. Although a modulation to the subdominant is by no means an unusual procedure for Händel at this point in an aria, in this case he contrives to make

it quite fresh and unexpected, thereby heightening the contrast between the two sections. An interpreter of this music might be tempted to reserve the entrance of the 16-foot continuo until this point. At all events it should certainly be present, lending to the section on youth a feeling of weighty certitude. Youth is set out in unadorned rhythms with no frivolity.

The text of this aria divides into two virtually equal three-line stanzas. The first, associated with age, is in a pointed trochaic rhythm, while the second, the verse for youth, is more spondaic. The dotted trochee seems impetuous and passionate, while the spondee is associated with the grave and slow.⁷



Figure 7: *Susannah* 168

Händel accentuates the trochee by setting the words “age’s sullen” with a broken melisma that forces the singer to make the most of the dotted rhythm. In part this is probably word painting for sullen, just as the octave leap is for wrinkled and the spondaic setting is for “solemn pace.” The *accumulatio* of the text “sullen face, wrinkled front and solemn pace” is highlighted by the increase in the harmonic rhythm leading to the cadence on the words “solemn pace.” The brief cadential extension on the word pace is also a nice touch of word painting. All this is more inverse word painting. Even the phrasing, which is exceptionally specific in this aria, is recruited to the cause. In the a section the first figure of the *ritornello* is set as a dotted trochee. In the b

⁷Isaac Vossius in *De poematum cantu et viribus rhythm* (Oxonii e Theatro Sheldoniano, Prostant Londini: apud Rob. Scot bibliop., 1673) writes “The *grave* and *slow* are expressed by the *Spondee* and *Molossus*: Whatever is soft and tender, the *Trochee* and sometimes the *Amphybrachys* will describe . . .” (qtd. and trans. by George Houle, *Meter in Music, 1600-1800* [Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987] 73).

section where the same music is called to depict age, it is set as a spondee. Is this a musical/literary metonymy on the words “silver hairs,” and is all this coincidence? Who knows? Certainly the metaphor on “bloom of vernal years” is made to stand out by harmonic means.

Much of this has to do with the interrelation between musical and poetic metre, and the study known as *rhythmopoeia*.⁸ Händel uses it very subtly. Anyone who harbours any lingering doubt about his understanding of the rules of English prosody need only examine the detail with which he treats the matter in *Susanna*, in order to dispel them. The present aria is a good example of such subtlety, as is the *largo e piano* from Susanna’s aria, ‘If guiltless blood be your intent.’ Another would be the aria, “Would custom bid the melting fair,” for which Händel sets a regular iambic poetic foot as mostly dactylic and trochaic in a ternary metre.

The image shows a musical score for an aria titled "Susanna". It consists of two systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first system of music has the lyrics: "Would cus - tom bid the melt - ing fair the pur - pose of - her". The second system of music has the lyrics: "soul de - clare, I then had call'd you mine." The music is written in a style typical of 18th-century vocal music, with a focus on the interplay between the natural poetic metre and the imposed musical metre.

Figure 8: *Susannah* 37

Here he sets up rhythmic interplay on five levels: between the natural poetic metre, the imposed poetic metre, the expected metre of the dance (minuet with its tendency to *hemiola*, or if we choose a slightly slower speed, a *sarabande* with its emphasis on the second beat), the harmonic rhythm of the music and the regular ternary rhythm. Similarly, we have cited a number of examples of the use of the poetic metres to depict a special affect; another would be the

⁸ For a fine summary of this topic, see Houle chapter 3.

consistent use of anapaest for the Second Elder, who is characterized as blunt and rather fierce in accord with the traditional description of the anapaest as suitable for the depiction of fury and madness.⁹

To return to Daniel’s aria: the pedal, a pervasive expressive dissonance in the music of J.S. Bach, is used more sparingly by Händel, which makes its appearance here all the more telling. It, clearly, is meant to represent wisdom, as is the undulating articulated pedal used for “sacred wisdom” here and “the truly wise” in the a section.

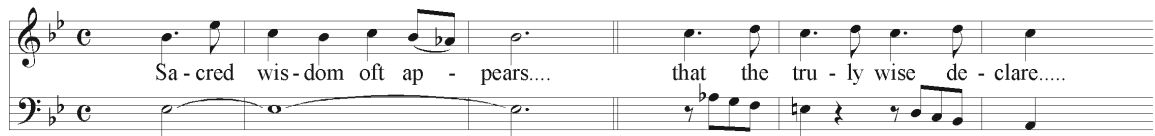


Figure 9: a. *Susannah* 170

b. *Susannah* 168

Although the words, “Sacred wisdom oft appears in the bloom of vernal years,” are the crux of the argument, they are sung only twice. The second time the pedal is moved over to coincide with the words “in the bloom of vernal youth.”

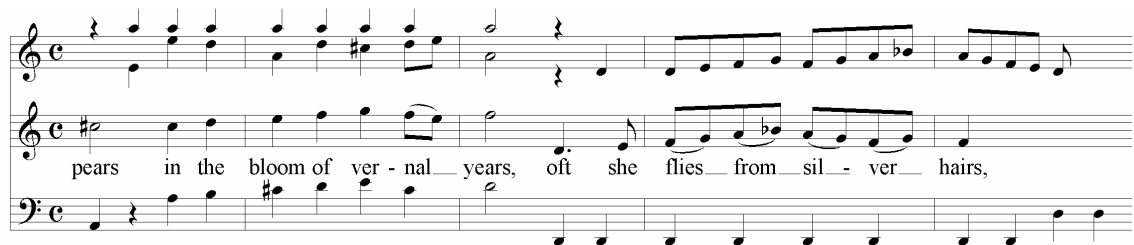


Figure 10: *Susannah* 170-171

This nice touch conclusively associates wisdom with youth for the purposes of the argument, so Händel articulates the pedal and places it on an A in the top voice. The harmony under this pedal

⁹ Vossius writes in *De poematum cantu et viribus rhythmi*: “If we require numbers that may express *Fury* and *Madness*, not only the *Anapest* is at Hand, but, what is still more powerful, the *Paeon quartus*” (qtd. Houle 73).

is purposeful and directional. The articulated pedal immediately falls out of the sky to the bottom of the orchestra on a D in order to accompany the metonymy for age. At the same time the voice drops a remarkable minor tenth, and the harmony loses its sense of direction as it is all a d minor triad with no accented dissonance.

While it is risky to associate key with meaning in Händel, there may be some significance to his choice of these two notes, D and A, since the oratorio as a whole is worked out to some extent in terms of the polarity between them. The A, in this case major, is the key of triumph, and A tends to be most closely associated with Susanna. The D, in this case minor, is associated with gloom and guile. Similarly, the key of C major is too consistently associated with evil, and with the Second Elder in particular, to be coincidence. C as well as A are, in this aria, the targets for some especially dramatic examples of those scalar descents into the basement, so beloved of baroque composers in general. These descents are also particularly associated with the Second Elder.

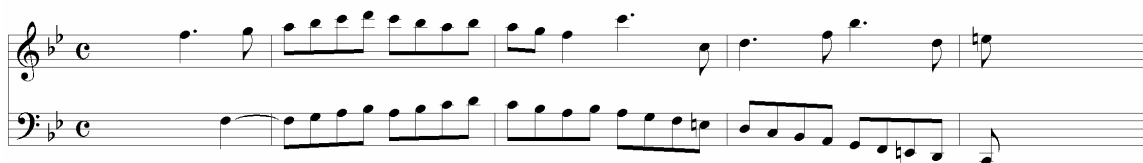


Figure 11: *Susannah* 168

Figure 12: *Susannah* 122

Example 12 is a part of the final *ritornello* from the Second Elder's second aria. The similarities between it and example 11 are quite apparent in terms of the key, scalar descents and angular short-longs (from the beat in example 12).

Here we come to the essence of this aria, which is an argument between good and evil, represented by Daniel on the one hand and the two elders on the other. The question of where true wisdom resides is a test submitted to Daniel as a proof of his skill as a rhetorician. It is important for Händel to represent the two elders as a part of this aria and therefore, party to the argument. He does so in many ways, among them the verbal metonymy, “from silver hairs” (which stands not only for age but for the First Elder, who sings elsewhere “tho’ seventy winters hoar my head”), and the musical metonymy of the opening *ritornello*. The rise to and away from the interval of the sixth reminds us of the First Elder, as do the athletic intervals at the end of the *ritornello*. The descent of the bass line into hell recalls the Second.

However, the most important way in which the First Elder is involved is through the musical argument, which is perhaps the most striking aspect of this aria. He, in contrast to the extremely blunt Second Elder, instinctively uses traditional rhetorical procedures in his effort to persuade Susanna to his purposes. Between them, the two elders, but mostly the First, during the course of the oratorio use appeals to pity (*commiseratio*), to flattery (*comprobatio*), to force (*argumentum ad baculum*), to authority (*argumentum ad verecundiam*), to the crowd (*argumentum ad populum*), to a reasonable excuse (*dicaeologia*), and to false analogy. These are all used as false arguments, culminating in an egregiously perfidious lament by the First Elder (162–164). Händel and his librettist consistently characterize falsity through misplacement of the speech accents (76–81), through slippery chromaticism (127), through vacillating figures (164, first system), frequently through halting broken music (*abruptio, aposiopesis*) (66–68),

through unexpected rhythmic turns (66–68), through specific use of poetic metres (153), through ambiguous, enharmonic harmony and false relations (*dubitatio*)(165–166), and through what might be called the topic of musical argument. These are compositional techniques that Händel consciously uses from time to time throughout *Susanna* in order to draw our attention to the rhetorical discourse. The First Elder’s aria of false analogy, “When the trumpet sounds to arms” is a good example of a number of these, notably the musical argument between the three numbered motives, the aposiopesis that betrays the First Elder’s actual frailty and indecision, the uncertainly placed and vacillating harmonies:¹⁰

Figure 13: *Susannah* 77

first aria, in which the argument is constructed between three motives of the utmost concision, all drawn from the opening ritornello.

¹⁰ Donald Smithers, in the second volume of his *A History of Oratorio* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1977) notes that this aria is a “tongue-in-cheek version of the heroic fanfare aria” (330). This almost certainly misses the point. The text embodies a sinister false analogy: one call is to the noble fulfillment of duty, the other to sin. The guileful First Elder hopes to seduce the innocent Susanna to his ends. As the text is a false analogy, no musical affect could serve both parts of the analogy. Händel rightly chooses the sinister part. The noble trumpet of the aria’s first line, “When the trumpet sounds to arms” could have no actual role to play in this aria even though the instrument was called for elsewhere in *Susanna*.

The image shows a musical score for Susannah 168. It consists of three staves: a treble clef staff at the top, a vocal staff in the middle, and a bass clef staff at the bottom. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: "that the tru-ly wise de - clares, no, not sul-len face, no nor wrink-led front, no tis not a -". Three motifs are marked with numbers: '1' above the first measure of the treble staff, '2' above the first measure of the vocal staff, and '3' above the first measure of the bass staff.

Figure 14: *Susannah* 168

These three motives are distributed in an astonishing variety of ways amongst the three voices during the sections of the music associated with old age. This gives a very convincing imitation of an argument between three people on the subject of good and evil. Immediately following this aria the Judge exclaims, “Oh! wondrous youth.” Once one understands what Händel in particular, but what his librettist as well, achieved in this aria, the remark is fully justified, and Daniel’s ethos is persuasively secured.

Neither is this aria an isolated example. Virtually the whole oratorio yields similar results, even the *recitativo secco*, and Händel deals with the emotional appeal of many of Susanna’s arias with every bit as much detail. One thinks, as well, of the individualization of the characters of Susanna and the two elders in their trio, “Away, away! Ye tempt me both in vain,” or of the graphic *turbæ* chorus, “Susanna is guilty, Susanna must bleed.” In fact, the more one examines this libretto and score, the more convinced one becomes that together they form a rhetorical tapestry, and that rhetoric should be brought into partnership with music and text if we are to truly understand the work.

How could Händel have written a work of more than three hours duration in the space of 18 days and still find time to work out such a wealth of detail? The answer may be that he had an extensive bank of techniques (topics) that enabled him to use rhetoric as a normal part of his

compositional procedures. Rhetoric was part of his compositional method as it was part of that of many of his contemporaries, some of whom, such as Antonio Caldara (1670-1736), were even more prolific than he. Much of the musical detail that I have examined seems contrived when described, and it is true that other composers, even major ones (G.P. Telemann or Antonio Caldara), sometimes do appear awkward when they attempt similar effects. Händel manages to unify everything with a sovereign sense of musical direction, so much so that to a modern ear his rhetorical effects go unnoticed. Therefore we ask the second question: what did Händel and his librettist expect of their audience and performers with respect to perceiving the rhetoric? In answer, it is reasonable to assert that the audience that attended the first performance of *Susanna* was much better grounded in formal rhetoric than a modern one, and it usually had access to the text before, after, and during the performance. The same is likely true of the performers of Händel's day.

If today there is general audience and performer indifference to rhetoric in the performance of dramatic music of the baroque, is there any value in attempting enlightenment? This brings us full circle to where we started: finding the norms of performance. The greater portion of those who perform Händel today still opt for indifference, arguing that they can intuitively sense how a line by Händel should be realized. However, there is a camp which is interested in anything that can bring the performer and the audience closer to the ideals of any given work's creators. A full understanding of texts and their relationship to the music would seem to suit the requirements of this last group. Rhetoric is a complex art, beyond the resources of most musical performers without the help of specialists. It is much to be desired that trained rhetoricians will begin to analyze musical texts as they have purely literary texts. The evidence presented in this paper is often circumstantial, but it is clear that a strong case may be made to

show that Händel was aware of the rhetoric at work in his texts and that he was at pains to reflect it in his music. The libretto of *Susanna* is a full-blown court room drama and, as such, it may have drawn, from both the librettist and the composer, an unusual flowering of rhetoric. Still, performers need to know what the originators of all of the texts and music that they perform most likely thought was in them. Accordingly, they often need to understand the whole constellation of devices that make up the combination of literary and musical rhetoric.

Finally, how would an understanding of textual rhetoric influence the way we perform music? First, the more we understand the text, the more likely we may pick up clues about the composer's thinking – clues that may lead us into the heart of the music. Sometimes the rhetoric of a text may provide the only clue as to the way in which a work should be performed. Daniel's first aria is such an example. It appears enigmatic and difficult to render persuasively. Once one understands that it is deliberately cast as an argument, it is easier to interpret. A rhetorical approach to this music provides the clues that bring to light the astonishing detail that Händel put into his music. When his music is performed with all the detail that he put into its composition, it becomes plastic and supple. It reminds us of the infinite detail that J. J. Quantz suggests is needed to interpret an *adagio*, as when he describes the particular inflection that should be given to every note, including the individual notes of ornaments.¹¹ Finally, a full comprehension of the text can help with the development of an appropriate gestural line, thus completing the rhetoric of performance with the canons of *pronunciatio*. Therefore, a better understanding of all the aspects of rhetoric that may be applied to Händel's music will serve to make our performances of his music more thoughtfully detailed and therefore, more persuasive.

¹¹ See the chapter "On the Manner of Playing the Adagio," in Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute* (1752; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1976) 162–179.

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