Le Plaintif

Doleful Music of the French Grand Siècle

CORDEVENTO

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Izhar Elias ~ Israel Golani
Alessandro Pianu ~ Robert Smith

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cordevento

Erik Bosgraaf alto recorder in F after Bressan, by Sebastian Meyer [2, 7, 16]; alto recorder in E after Bressan, by Ernst Meyer [17]; seventh flute in E-flat after Bressan, by Ernst Meyer [1, 6, 8–9, 12–15]; voice flute in D after Bressan, by Sebastian Meyer [5, 18–24]; bass recorder (Küng), revoiced and modified by Ernst Meyer [10]

Izhar Elias baroque guitar after Tessler (ca. 1620) by Ivo Magherini [1–2, 5–9, 11–24]

Israel Golani theorbo after 17th-century Italian models, by Klaus Jacobsen [1–2, 5–10, 12–24]

Alessandro Pianu harpsichord after N. Blanchet (1693), by Jan Kalsbeek [1, 3–9, 12–24]

Robert Smith *dessus de viole* after Tielke, by Robert Blaszauer [1–2, 6–9, 12–16, 18–19, 24]; *basse de viole* after Collichon, by Pierre Bohr [5, 10, 17, 20–23]

Recording: 6–9 May 2019, Kruiskerk, Bergum, the Netherlands
Recording producer, balance engineer and editing: Dirk Fischer
Pitch: a′= 392 Hz ~ **Temperament:** ⅙-comma meantone [1–2, 5–24], ¼-comma meantone [3–4]

[**a**] *Pièces en Trio pour les Flutes, Violon, & Dessus de Viole* (1692) ~ [**b**] *Pièces de clavecin* (1689) ~ [**c**] *Pièces pour la flûte traversiere et autres instruments […] livre premier, œuvre second* (1708) ~ [**d**] *Livre de Simphonies contenant six suittes en trio* (1709) ~ [**e**] *Concerts pour la flûte traversiere avec la basse chiffrée* (1724) ~ [**f**] *Nouvelles Découvertes sur la guitarre* (1705) ~ [**g**] *Deuxième Livre de pièces pour la flûte traversiere et autres instruments […] Œuevre Vᵉ* (1715) ~ [**h**] *Premier Œuvre […] pour les hautbois, Flûtes, Violons, &c.* (1717)

Pleurer sans mots

*Forms of the Lament in the Seventeenth
and Eighteenth Century*

The intellectual universe and the sensibility of the seventeenth century give special prominence to the expression of emotional pain in all its various and diverse manifestations, as well as to the theoretical reflection on how to communicate and rouse this passion. Whether in the lines of sonnets or madrigals, in the scenes of the spoken tragedy inherited from antiquity or in those of the new *tragédie en musique*, in the learned pages of rhetorical treatises or in the fiery words of preachers, or even in the fictional world of the heroes of the novel, the aesthetic space of the *Grand Siècle* is home to many opportunities to express suffering through a broad typology of forms and genres of discourse, which the listener and viewer intuitively associate with the *plainte*.

This term is used in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French as a label that seems to designate a *de facto* genre in its own right – alongside the Italian cognate *pianto* and its more common synonym *lamento* (epitomized by Monteverdi's *Lamento di Arianna*, *Pianto della Madonna* and *Lamento della Ninfa*). For example, the word *plainte* appears in some novels, (1) in the

title of passages of poetry scattered within the prose, as in the "Plainte de Daphnide sur la mort d'Euric" (Lament of Daphnide on the death of Euric) in the third part of *L'Aſtrée* (1619) by Honoré d'Urfé; (2), less markedly, in the body of the text itself, as an announcement of a remarkable sequence to come; or (3), more often, as a callback – that is, to signal the end of such a sequence. An example of the latter is this passage from the first part of *Polexandre* (1637) by the successful novelist Marin le Roy de Gomberville: "This Queen, having shed a stream of tears in finishing her *plainte*, kept her eyes and mouth closed for some time". Further examples can be found in the realm of theatre

6 music. For instance, Isaac de Benserade's *Ballet Royal de Flore*, a *ballet de cour* performed in 1669 with music by Jean-Baptiste Lully, contains a long scene entitled "Plainte de Vénus sur la mort d'Adonis" (Lament of Venus on the death of Adonis). In 1671 the very same Lully collaborates with the dramatists Molière, Pierre Corneille and Philippe Quinault for the creation of *Psyché*, a *comédie-ballet* for which he composes a prologue and five *intermèdes,* to be performed alternately with the acts of the spoken play. Lully's first *intermède*, which begins after we learned that Psyché has been sentenced to be devoured by a monstrous serpent, bears the subtitle "Plaintes italiennes", and it is, in fact, a long, multi-sectioned scene of collective lamentation, in which "a band

of distressed people" appears on stage, lamenting the misfortune of the protagonist. Among them, a desolate woman and two afflicted men express their pity by singing "with touching *plaintes*" on an Italian text attributed to Lully himself, while others embody their grief through a dance "full of every mark of the most violent despair". More than a century later, in a foreword to a 1785 edition of the libretto of *Isis*, a *tragédie en musique* by Quinault set into music by Lully and originally performed in 1677, one could read: "Particularly admired [by the audience] was the *plainte* of the nymph Syrinx transformed into reeds".

These examples show that authors and their public shared the notion of a textual sequence of varying length, sometimes consisting of several heterogeneous sub-sections, identifiable with some ease by a mood of sadness, which they called *plainte*. Despite this, when we try to regard the *plainte* as a well-defined literary genre and to identify its formal features, we encounter two major obstacles. First of all, contemporaneous treatises of poetics do not subject the *plainte* to a systematic theorisation that might help us determine its formal characteristics. Secondly, lexicographers do not explicitly present it as a genre in and of itself. The *Dictionnaire François* by Pierre Richelet (1680), for example, contains the

following entry: "*Plainte*. Lamentation. Action of complaining, wailing, moaning, sighing, words that express some sorrow. *Discourse* where one complains". The presence of the word *discourse* in this context could be an allusion to a specific literary genre – an impression reinforced by the reference to Jean de La Fontaine's poem *Élégie aux Nymphes de Vaux* (Elegy to the Nymphs of Vaux) under the title *La plainte des Nymphes de Vaux*. Another example of this ambiguity can be found in Antoine Furetière's *Dictionnaire Universel* (1690), which attests the then-antiquated use of the word *complainte* in the sense we are concerned with: "Complaint and grievance of a person who suffers. In the *pastoralles* there are usually *complaintes* of shepherds. This sad *complainte* was heard. This word is becoming obsolete". As for the word *plainte* itself ("Testimony of pain or affliction, which one expresses outwardly"), its use in reference to a literary genre remains doubtful, even if one of Furetière's examples ("Lovers make their *plaintes* to the echoes and the rocks") evokes a frequent narrative situation, both in pastoral novels as well as in elegiac poetry.

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If this lexicographical approach turns out to be somewhat disappointing, the fact remains that the *plainte* does seem to establish itself as a poetic category in its own right. In Thomas

Sébillet's *Art poétique français* (1548), for example, it is the subject of a short chapter, titled "De la déploration et complainte". Sébillet does not specify any strict formal features for this form, apart from a preference for *décasyllabes* in rhyming couplets: his advice is that "between so many species and various forms, it only remains to choose the one that you see as more suitable to the deplorable matter, which is most often a grim and unwelcome death, sometimes amorous misfortune, that is unhappiness or damage received by Love". However, Sébillet observes that "*complaintes* and *déplorations* would seem to be included under the elegy … because elegy literally means *complainte*". This association between *plainte* and elegy is also confirmed by Gomberville's novel *La Carithée* (1621), in which we find a long passage in verse, visually framed by the title "Élégie" and, in turn, preceded by the sentence "It is a continuous *plainte,* accompanied by all the thoughts that love can give". What is more, this sequence is also introduced and closed by two metalinguistic references: "a woman … began in this manner to lament [*se plaindre*]"; "Abeille had heard, down to these last lines, the *plainte* of this disconsolate shepherdess".

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That said, it is important to note that, by this time, the elegy itself is not so much defined by precise formal features as it is by its doleful tone, innervating this poetic genre at least since Ovid's *Heroides*. The link between *plainte* and elegy, however interesting,

is therefore not particularly useful for our purposes: despite our best efforts, the *plainte* remains a kind of elusive, composite and 'open' genre. Yet it is thanks to this formal flexibility that it can adapt itself and fit into a wide range of situations, in which – drawing on various forms of discourse (letters inserted in a narration, dramatic soliloquies, passages of poetry, harangues, to name but a few) and taking advantage of the most expressive stylistic devices available – it is among the most effective means of eliciting *pathos*, and in particular compassion, in its audience.

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10   Considering the potential of lamentation in terms of influencing listeners, viewers, and readers alike, it comes as no surprise that this kind of discourse receives a great deal of attention, in classical antiquity as well as in the early modern period, from rhetoric: the discipline that studies texts precisely from a pragmatic point of view – that is, the intended effect on a recipient. Concerned with developing, employing and teaching the techniques for writing and delivering a speech that could win over their listeners, the masters of eloquence crafted a whole arsenal of tools meant to stir up passions – as it were, to enchant an audience with the power of language and lead them wherever one wants. In fact, the ability to move the audience (*movere*) has been the

most important among the three missions of the orator (*docere*, *delectare*, *movere*) since the first century BC, when Cicero states in his *Orator* that "to demonstrate is necessary; to please is charming; to move is victory" ("probare, necessitatis est; delectare, suavitatis; flectere, victoriæ"). Cicero's passage is taken up by, among others, Father Pelletier in his *Palatium Reginæ Eloquentiæ* (The palace of Queen Eloquence, 1641) ("the triumph of Eloquence consists in mastering the art of manipulating passions [*ars tractandorum animi affectuum*]"), who draws upon Book IV of Saint Augustin's *De Doctrina Christiana* ("the ecclesiastical orator must … touch to overcome [*flectere ut vincat*]"). Rhetoric teaches precisely the art of exploiting this psychagogic (literally 'soul-guiding') capacity of passions, while also providing models to analyse the effect of discourse on its audience, as well as tools to bring about those same effects. Therefore, in an era imbued with as highly influential a rhetorical culture as the early modern period, one should not be surprised to find evidence of rhetoric's extensive influence over any given form of artistic expression.

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Looking at the rhetoric of lamentation, two main features can be observed. Firstly – as with other forms of discourse in which codification and analysis for educational purposes exist only subsequently to literary practice – theoretical discourse on

lamentation turns out to be scattered across numerous, partially-overlapping categories, which share the common purpose of awakening compassion, and, more generally, emotionally engaging the audience. Secondly, the masters of rhetoric seem more concerned with providing models, both ancient and contemporary, than with proposing a system of theoretical precepts proper.

In eloquence manuals, as we said, the genres of discourse identifiable with the lament are subject to significant development from the point of view of rhetoric. At least since the *Eleoi* (Appeals to Pity), by Thrasymachus of Chalcedon, a sophist of the 5th century BC particularly renowned for his skill with pitiful themes, the ancient theory of eloquence gave prominence to techniques for manipulating emotions, considered as a key to the soul of the listener. Particularly in Latin rhetoric we witness the remarkable development of a taste for *pathos*, expressed through particular attention to the crafting of the *peroration* – the final section of a speech, devoted to an appeal to the emotions of the audience. Among the ancient works it is worth mentioning the treatise *De Inventione* (On Invention), in which Cicero provides sixteen *loci* from which to draw the *conquestio* ('passage arousing pity') – that is, sixteen strategies to rouse compassion. Among these, we mention four examples: the fifth *locus*, identified with the stylistic process of *enargeia* ('vividness'), namely the striking depiction of

the misfortunes that are the speech's subject; the seventh, which aims to suggest that the same misfortune which torments the speaker also concerns the audience; the ninth, which consists in addressing silent objects or inanimate entities; and finally the fourteenth, in which the orator directly appeals to the audience's pity. In Book IV of the *Saturnalia,* Macrobius offers us a large repertoire of means to express *pathos*, using significant examples from Virgil's *Aeneid* and highlighting various stylistic devices, like the *ecphonesis* ('exclamation': "Oh loathsome race!"), the *breves interrogatiunculæ* ('short questions': "How could they not have fallen in the fields of Sigeum?") and the hyperbole ("They found their way through armies and through fire!").

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As we can see, it is not always easy to pin down the exact features of the lament. This is not only the case because it most often manifests itself as a composite structure of several sections (of which the act of lamentation itself is only a part), but also because the range of devices mobilised to elicit pity is, for its part, composite as well (and suffering represents only one element among many). Indeed, the terminology applied to different forms of discourse intended to stir compassion, as well as for the situations that these pathetic speeches are intended for, is

very wide. Neo-Latin theorists propose an interesting treatment thereof: they emphasise their expected effects and above all highlight the extensive use of figures aimed at 'piercing the soul' of the listener. The erudite protestant scholar Gerardus Vossius, for example, devotes a chapter of his *Institutiones oratoriae* to a category which he calls *oratio lamentatoria* ('lamentation speech'), the effects of which he thus identifies: "First, the lamentation speech displays the calamities and amplifies them, so that the listener is moved to pity; then, it incites hatred towards those from whom we have received harm; finally, it strikes fear in the listener, because it shows that things that affect one person can also happen to others". In his *De Eloquentia sacra et humana [libri XVI]* (Parallels of sacred and human eloquence), the Jesuit Nicolas Caussin addresses lamentation as part of his analysis of pathetic figures. Although the lament is not among the figures cited in his first list (*exclamatio*, *imprecatio*, *sermocinatio*, *prosopopœia*, *apostrophe*, *aporia*), the excerpt from Aelian which Caussin goes on to offer as an example is explicitly qualified as a 'lament' (*deploratio*). Later on, Caussin presents another set of "grave, admirable and inflamed" figures of thought, among which he includes the lament, classified under two categories: *querimoniæ* and *lamentationes*. The Jesuit Joseph de Jouvancy explicitly mentions the lament in his *Candidatus rhetoricæ* (The

student of rhetoric, 1710), by presenting it in opposition to the *oratio gratulatoria* ('congratulatory speech'), and proposes a series of synonyms for it: "*Nænia*, or *Threnus*, and *Lessus*, that is, lament, which deplores a misfortune, shows its gravity, particularly if it reaches an innocent who does not deserve it". The lament also appears in the chapter that Jouvancy devotes to the *ethopœia*, among the most suitable figures for moving an audience, which consists in depicting the character of a person by impersonating them in a speech which lets their feelings surface. Interestingly, not only does Jouvancy reference, as an emblematic example of *ethopœia*, a passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* where Niobe is represented "lamenting [*deplorans*] the death of her children", but he adds a second example in the form of a passage of text, the title of which also contains the verb 'to lament': "Mater occisum in bello filium deplorat" (A mother laments her son killed in war). This sequence makes extensive use of those of Cicero's *loci* aimed at eliciting compassion, as well as figures such as exclamation, *apostrophe*, interrogations and conduplication, demonstrating both the composite nature of the lament and the degree of stylistic refinement of the pathetic discourse: "O wretched fate, cause of my grief, O deceptive hopes, O care lavished in vain! … What do I have left, my son, if not to die with you? … Sweet tears, pleasant sobs, those by which I will regret your absence! … O war, cursed

by mothers, cruel monster, scourge of families and cities! Who
could have invented something so hideous, so barbaric?".

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Thus codified by the masters of eloquence, the register of
lamentation deeply innervates every literary genre in the early
modern period – particularly the genres intended for the stage,
chief among them the tragedy. To limit ourselves to French
examples, the Renaissance humanist tragedy often consists of a
series of scenes of lamentation involving the actors as well as the
choir, some of Racine's dramatic works are characterised by their
16 elegiac colour, and the *tragédie en musique* offers us extraordinary
scenes of tears. Similarly, several sequences of lamentation appear
in the French novel – both in the pastoral genre of the turn of
the seventeenth century and in the long heroic novels – in the
form of poems inserted into the text as well as authentic pieces
of eloquence. As we see, thanks to its formal indeterminacy the
plainte can, among other things, murmur in the lines of a sonnet,
thunder in the tragic *alexandrin*, but also rumble in long tirades
in prose. Let us consider the pastoral novel *L'Astrée*, in which the
lovesickness of the shepherds finds its expression in several pieces
of poetry woven into the narrative fabric. One such sequence is
"Outré par la douleur de mortelles attaintes" (Overwhelmed by

the pain of mortal blows), which a heading explicitly qualifies as a *plainte* – and which also circulated as an *air de cour*, set to music by Louis de Rigaud. Without dwelling on examples already widely commented on – one thinks of the protagonists' laments in Racine's *Bérénice* and *Andromaque* – let us look at one of the countless *plaintes* that populate the novel of the Baroque age: the 'tablets' of Alcidiane, from Gomberville's *Polexandre*. This is a rather singular example, as the voice of the heroine, tormented by her unwanted infatuation with Polexandre, resounds through the written page, entrusted to a kind of intimate diary which the reader reads and discovers alongside the protagonist. Thus, the emotional contagion, which represents the very purpose of lament itself, infects at the same time the fictional reader and the true audience of the novel. Some excerpts from this episode, rich as it is in exclamations, hyperbole and mythological comparisons, show its adherence to the instructions of rhetoric handbooks: "Who can be the cause of the strange change that I notice in myself? Am I perhaps sick, or insane, without knowing it?"; "O! Vengeful demon, you who indifferently execute the wishes of your Master, show me at the very least what torment it is that you make me suffer. … Ixion does not ignore his wheel, nor Sisyphus his rock."; "Unfortunate that I am…"; "Dragon carrying the face of a child, beautiful monster: content yourself with my

tears, and with the blood that your claws have already drawn from my breast". This passage is emblematic of the very close relationship that connects emotional turmoil and speech act: as the philosopher and mathematician Bernard Lamy emphasizes in his *La Rhétorique ou L'art de parler* (1715 [1675]), emotions are embodied in speech, and in particular in the use of figures: "Passions have a peculiar language. The expressions which embody their character are called figures". Clearly, the public of the seventeenth century wants to be moved. Not only, in fact, does *pathos* invade the domain of eloquence, sacred as well as secular, but the entire aesthetic imaginary is imbued with the power of tears. In this regard, the philosopher and scientist Bernard de Fontenelle observes that the audience wants "to be moved, stirred up, … to shed tears. The pleasure one takes in crying is so curious that I cannot help but think about it".

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Just as the theorists of eloquence devote themselves to revealing and codifying a figurative language, which both emanates from the agitation of the speaker's soul and ignites the passions of listeners and viewers alike, so too has the musical language maintained a privileged relationship with the domain of passions – and this starting from the theoretical reflection

of ancient Greek scholars. At the time we are considering, the establishment of monody in Italy is accompanied by wider reflection on the psychagogic power of the voice and song, symbolised by the figure of Orpheus – whose myth also provides the subject matter for the first Italian operas. From then on, the *lamento* asserts itself as a *topos* of dramatic music. Seventeenth-century Venetian operas (in particular those by Francesco Cavalli, such as *Eliogabalo* or *La Calisto*) are home to imposing, intense examples, but Roman composers are not far behind, both in sacred and secular music (for instance "Plorate colles", from Giacomo Carissimi's oratorio *Jephte,* and Domenico Mazzocchi's *Hunc ego te Euryale aspicio?*, on a text from Virgil's *Aeneid*). Lamentation in French *tragédie en musique* focuses more on the expressive power of the text than on vocal prowess itself, and takes the form of a recitative, which painstakingly illustrates the passions animating its characters. A particularly notable example is the long scene of lamentation concluding *Armide* by Quinault/Lully (1686), spurred by the heroine's discovery of her abandonment by her lover Renaud, and rich in pathetic figures succeeding one another – including reduplication ("The perfidious Renaud flees from me: / as perfidious as he is, my cowardly heart follows him"), hyperbole ("The horror of Eternal Night / yields to the horror of my torture"), hypotyposis ('vivid image': "He escapes

me, moves away, he will leave these shores"), *apostrophe* and deprecation ("Flee, Pleasures, flee, lose all your charms! / Demons, destroy this palace!"). Another example in a similar genre is the magnificent scene of the death of Jonathas in Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *David et Jonathas*.

These few examples allow us a glimpse of a characteristic of the *plainte* which is not trivial: like their literary counterparts, these pieces, whose only unifying element lies in the staging of dysphoric emotions, borrow diverse formal structures and mobilise various stylistic elements. One of the most significant examples thereof is the aria on a so-called *basso ostinato* – a vocal melody

20 that unfolds over a repeating harmonic scheme. Such is the case, in particular, of the many laments written over a *passacaglia* bass – a descending, sometimes chromatic, four-note bass-line pattern. Its association with the scene of lamentation is so common that the educated listener of the time immediately identifies this pattern with the rhetorical-musical category of the lament: even just its brief appearance is enough to signal to the audience that they are going to hear a lament. For instance, in Pan's *plainte* from the aforementioned *Isis*, the formula appears only briefly at its opening. Pan's repeated interjection "Alas!", true distinguishing mark of the *plainte*, follows immediately, reinforcing the context of lamentation. The *passacaglia* bass then disappears, only to return in

the middle of the scene, this time without the voice. Of course, not every lament features a *passacaglia*: other pieces do indeed take on other, freer forms. Thus, like its literary counterpart, the *plainte* as a musical genre is characterized by its formal indeterminacy.

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The pervasive presence of scenes of lamentation in genres intended for the stage is not so surprising, given their affinity for heightened expression of passions. Likewise, even as small-scale a genre as the chamber cantata often uses poetic texts which share multiple features of the *plainte*. Instrumental music, for its part, also makes hay of the aesthetic potential of tears. Virtually all the main solo instruments, but especially the lute and the viola da gamba, are the beneficiaries of two genres that reflect this craze for lamentation in music: the *tombeau* and the *plainte*. While the former betrays by its name a privileged link with the practice of funerary lamentation, and suggests a direct connection with the death of the person to whom it is dedicated (for example the *Tombeau pour Monsieur de Sainte-Colombe* by Marin Marais), the *plainte* seems sometimes to represent a synonym for *tombeau*, and sometimes a kind of genus, of which the *tombeau* would be just one species. Like the vocal lament, these two instrumental genres stand out for their formal freedom. The guitarist François

Campion, for instance, titles a piece from his *Nouvelles découvertes* (1705) "Allemande. Tombeau", showing that the said piece is perceived both as an allemande (by structure and phrasing) and as a *tombeau* (by its elegiac colour and plaintive tone). Similarly, we find *La Plainte, ou Tombeau de Mesdemoiselles de Visée, Allemande*, written by the lutenist Robert de Visée on the death of his daughters. Not only do these examples confirm the need of the instrumental *plainte* to borrow previously-codified forms (most often the allemande, but also the pavane or the sarabande): they also suggest a determination by restriction – that is, proceeding from genus (*plainte*), to species (*tombeau*), to form (allemande).

₂₂ Perhaps the most conspicuous examples of the overlap between the labels *lamento*, *plainte* and *tombeau* in this era are some harpsichord pieces by Johann Jakob Froberger – German by birth, but remarkably at home in both the Italian and French styles. Whereas the piece composed on the death of his lutenist friend Blancrocher is titled *Tombeau fait à Paris sur la mort de Monsieur Blancrocher*, two other pieces honouring the deaths of Austrian emperors Ferdinand III and IV carry the French and Italian titles *Lamentation faite sur la mort très douloureuse de Sa Majesté Impériale Ferdinand III* (Lament on the very painful death of His Imperial Majesty Ferdinand III) and *Lamento sopra la dolorosa perdita della Real Maestà di Ferdinando IV* (Lament on the painful

loss of the Royal Majesty of Ferdinand IV). To further complicate matters, Froberger's titles for other lamenting pieces not connected with mournful events make use of both the French terms *plainte* and *lamentation*: *Plainte faite à Londres pour passer la mélancolie* (Lament made in London to get over melancholy), hinting at the possible cathartic function of such a piece, and *Lamentation sur ce que j'ay été volé* (Lament over the fact that I have been robbed), written after having been mugged by roaming soldiers. And yet, despite Froberger's apparent terminological confusion, these pieces share stylistic and formal traits – not only among themselves but with multiple other pieces by the same author.

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In comparison with other instrumental genres, whose legitimacy is ensured by their idiomatic and even virtuosic character (for instance the *stylus phantasticus*), the instrumental lament suffers from a very close relationship with its vocal counterpart – without, at the same time, however, being able to benefit from the framework of a poetic text. For the authors of instrumental *plaintes*, distancing themselves from such models is thus at once a statement of liberation from a standard perceived as restrictive and, in fact, a necessity. Devoid of speech, instrumental eloquence is forced to establish a plaintive expressiveness beyond

elocution itself: in other words, it must invent immediately-recognisable melodic, rhythmic and harmonic formulas that, through their association with the expression of specific affects, are capable of both representing and eliciting them in their listener. Fortunately, philosophers, musicians and orators have reflected upon the links and the deep kinship between rhetoric and music, in particular between the end of the sixteenth and the end of the eighteenth century. To recall just one example among so many others, consider this passage by René Descartes: "The object of music is Sound. Its purpose is to delight, and to rouse various passions in us. … The means conducing to this end, or the chief properties of sound, are two – namely its differences in relation to duration (or time), and to pitch (low or high)".

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As we can see from this example, the psychagogic vocation of music is identified with that of eloquence. Since antiquity, moreover, reciprocal borrowing between these two arts has been frequent. According to the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher, who states it explicitly in Book VIII of his *Musurgia universalis*, the power of music over passions is even stronger than that of rhetoric. Based on this assumption, music theorists study and illustrate such power – some of them, like Joachim Burmeister (1564–1629) and Christoph Bernhard (1628–1692), from a more speculative point of view, while others, such as the aforementioned

Charpentier and, later, Jean-Philippe Rameau, from a more practical one. To do this, they draw up varied and meticulous inventories of the correspondence between stylistic and expressive devices of eloquence and musical language. Consequently, certain melodic and ornamental formulas (in particular specific intervals and leaps) are assimilated to figures of speech, and are associated with the expression of specific emotions. Similarly, certain rhythms crystallise into patterns carrying a coded expressive meaning, while the major and minor keys embody an emotional character supposed to provide a sort of 'pathetic contagion'. By way of illustration, according to Charpentier's *Règles de composition* (1690), the key of E minor expresses an "effeminate, loving and plaintive" character, while that of C minor embodies a "sombre and sad" emotion.

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Admittedly, today it is not always easy to perceive these correspondences. Such melodic formulas and rhythmic patterns are no longer as eloquent as they once were – they have become duller to the ear, as we have lost familiarity with this kind of sensitivity, this taste for subtly codified expression. Although figurative language in the instrumental *plainte* shares the use of numerous figures with the grand pathetic style of eloquence textbooks, it does not easily indulge in the exuberant expression of passions.

On the contrary, the instrumental *plainte* seems above all to reject the more blatant and 'transparent' stylistic traits typical of vocal laments – such as large melodic gestures associated with pathetic figures like the *apostrophe* or the *exprobratio* ('angry reproach', appearing for instance in various lamentation scenes of Ariadne, Dido and Armide). In this sense the character of this wordless lament – taking refuge as it does in the deepest recesses of melancholy – is significantly closer to that of the elegy. Its mournful murmur befits the expressive restraint of solitude and the feeling of distress that seizes the creative process. The instrumental *plainte* appears both as the echo of an inner lament and the expression of a melancholy pleasure.

Let us enter, then, into the twilight of the music room, and peer into the soul of an era as luminous and shimmering as it is shrouded in subtle shadows. Let us listen to its wordless weeping.

Roberto Romagnino
Translation: Alessandro Pianu, Alexander Stewart

CORDEVENTO

Founded in 2006 by Erik Bosgraaf, Alessandro Pianu and Izhar
Elias, Cordevento seeks to transcend the literal sense of their musical
texts towards the lifeblood and spirit of the music. This fresh
approach has led critics and audiences worldwide to praise their
lively performance and profound understanding of the music. They
have performed in many of Europe's most prestigious venues, such
as the *Konzerthaus* (Vienna), *Concertgebouw* (Amsterdam), *Palais des
Beaux-Arts* (Brussels), *Kölner Philharmonie* (Cologne) *Konzerthaus*
(Berlin), *Concertgebouw* (Bruges), and the *Utrecht Early Music Festival*,
as well as in Saint Petersburg, Hong Kong, Seoul and Taipei.
In 2012 they released their debut recording as a trio, *La Monarcha*
(Brilliant Classics 94352), featuring music of the Spanish territories
during the seventeenth century. The individual members have
won numerous prizes and teach at major institutions. Alongside
their activity as a trio, they perform as a larger ensemble and
have released multiple recordings of recorder concertos by
Vivaldi, Telemann and Bach with Brilliant Classics.

Connect to bit.ly/leplaintif (or scan the QRcode) for translations and bonus material