

Title: »Dolcemente facendola finire« : Orazio Vecchi and Einstein's Endings

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Source: Das italienische Madrigal: Alfred Einsteins »Versuch einer Geschichte der italienischen Profanmusik im 16. Jahrhundert« und die Folgen, ed. by Sebastian Bolz, Moritz Kelber, Katelijne Schiltz; Dresden, musiconn.publish 2025, (= troja. Jahrbuch für

Renaissancemusik 20), p. 311–321.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.25371/troja.v20223946

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Das italienische Madrigal. Alfred Einsteins »Versuch einer Geschichte der italienischen Profanmusik im 16. Jahrhundert« und die Folgen

Herausgegeben von Sebastian Bolz, Moritz Kelber und Katelijne Schiltz Die Tagung im Jahr 2022, auf die dieser Band zurückgeht, und diese Publikation erfuhren großzügige Unterstützung. Wir danken herzlich unseren Förderern:













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Layout: Sebastian Bolz und Moritz Kelber

Cover: Moritz Kelber

ISSN: 2513-1028

DOI: https://doi.org/10.25371/troja.v2022

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Der vorliegende Band ergänzt und kommentiert die deutschsprachige Erstausgabe des titelgebenden Werks:

Alfred Einstein, Das italienische Madrigal. Versuch einer Geschichte der italienischen Profanmusik im 16. Jahrhundert, hrsg. von Sebastian Bolz, München 2025 (Münchner Veröffentlichungen zur Musikgeschichte, 83)

Die Edition von Einsteins Text ist digital verfügbar:

DOI: 10.5282/ubm/epub.128701 (PDF)

DOI: 10.5282/ubm/data.691 (TEI, MEI)

Paul Schleuse

»Dolcemente facendola finire«: Orazio Vecchi and Einstein's Endings

»The historian of the madrigal and of its secondary forms, the villanella and the canzonetta, may be certain that he is dealing not with a fragmentary phenomenon but with a development running in a perfect and well-rounded curve, including a definite beginning, a beautiful dramatic rise toward a peak, a gradual falling off, and a definite end.«

Alfred Einstein, The Italian Madrigal (1949)1

»Men, like poets, rush into the middest, in medias res, when they are born; they also die in mediis rebus, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems. The End they imagine will reflect their irreducibly intermediary preoccupations. They fear it, and as far as we can see have always done so; the End is a figure for their own deaths.

Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (1966)²

As for poets, so too for historians: one of Einstein's fictive concords is his explicit hierarchy in which strophic songs (the villanella, canzonetta, and other genres) occupy a place secondary to the through-composed madrigal. Yet, as I will argue, this aesthetic stratification highlights Einstein's ambivalence about the sociological position of the madrigal, particularly around his narrative of the genre's late-Cinquecento decline and the concurrent resurgence in popularity of strophic forms in canzonettas and other recreational music by Orazio Vecchi, Adriano Banchieri, and others. The original German subtitle of Einstein's *Das italienische Madrigal*, "Versuch einer Geschichte der italienischen Profanmusik im sechzehnten Jahrhundert« ("Towards a history of Italian secular music in the sixteenth cen-

¹ *TIM*, p. 3.

² Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending (1966), new ed., Oxford 2000, p. 7.

tury«) suggests a more inclusive project than the eventual English title describes by isolating the madrigal as the work's focus, but his narrative's proposed »perfect curve« demands that the madrigal be viewed in opposition to the »lighter« genres. Only in isolation can the madrigal be evaluated by the aesthetics of »Greatness in Music« (to cite the title of Einstein's 1941 book): a paradigm as fixed – and yet as arbitrary and as racialized – as Spengler's world-historical »Hochkulturen«.³ The more concise English title *The Italian Madrigal*, shorn of the qualifying subtitle, crucially foregrounds the through-composed genre against those defined by the »song principle«, which embraces the strophic (and generally monodic) genres that run as a subterranean stream through the book, from the frottola and villanes-ca through a profusion of villotte, napolitane, mascherate, and canzonettas.

The tension Einstein constructs between the high-art (and highly artificial) madrigal and the popular (but more deeply rooted in vernacular culture) »secondary forms« generates an ambivalence in his study that finds its most striking expression in the various ways he accounts for the madrigal's »end«. These multiple endings are adumbrated throughout the book: indeed, Einstein's conception of greatness, like Spengler's, demands that the seeds of decay be sown at the moment of artistic maturity. Kermode reads such narratives as personal and, ultimately, autobiographical, and while it is not my intention to uncover a suppressed psychological theme in *The Italian Madrigal*, the sense of decline that appears throughout the book resonates with aspects of its author's experience of loss and displacement in the decades leading up to the book's publication.

For the madrigal, Einstein locates the Spenglerian downward turn in the music of Cipriano de Rore: »In his work the high point in the development of the madrigal was not only reached but even overstepped. [...] [T]he madrigal's age of innocence was left behind with Rore, that is, if one is ready to consider the already wholly artificial and sentimental madrigal of the early masters as an age of innocence.«⁴ For Einstein the final decline of the madrigal coincides, of course, with its most recondite developments in the music of Gesualdo, which Einstein describes as reaching a point of hermetic decadence:

»He stands at the end and at the peak of a long development, which began with Willaert and Rore and in which every madrigalist has played his part,

³ Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, ed. Arthur Helps and Helmut Werner, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson, Oxford 1991.

⁴ TIM, p. 424. On Einstein's placement of de Rore in music history, as well as the influence of Spengler on Einstein's historiographical concepts, see also Sebastian Bolz, »Cipriano de Rore, Alfred Einstein and the Philosophy of Music History«, Cipriano de Rore: New Perspectives on his Life and Music, ed. Jessie Ann Owens and Katelijne Schiltz, Turnhout 2016, pp. 451–477: pp. 453–455, 472–474.

great or small. The development ends in a blind alley: beyond the peak yawns the abyss. And as their escape is cut off, the desperate ones hemmed in lose themselves in lofty aspirations.«⁵

Where Gesualdo's music reaches an effete dead end, Einstein credits Monteverdi with achieving a more virile battlefield death (and a salvific promise of rebirth) in the continuo-based works of his *Quinto Libro*: »The novelty of these pieces has been dearly bought, and the victory has entailed serious losses. But this is an end and a turning-point. Conceived as a form of music-making in company, and in this sense socially conditioned, the old madrigal is dead.«⁶ Einstein's bellicose imagery of victory won despite casualties invites readers to remember the emphatically theatrical music of Monteverdi's subsequent Eighth Book, the *Madrigali guerrieri ed amorosi* (1638), and to consider the genre's purported evolution beyond the realm of social music making.

This eulogy for recreational singing points us back to another proposed ending point for the genre, in the music of Orazio Vecchi. If Gesualdo's and Monteverdi's madrigals died through alienation from their roots in social play, Einstein characterizes Vecchi's ludic playfulness as a willing and self-indulgent death: »The madrigal becomes self-conscious and amuses itself at its own expense. It is an end, a cheerful, ironic end, a sort of euthanasia«. Einstein's focus on Vecchi as an end point in his narrative is tied up, I believe, with his ambivalence about singing as social recreation, what he calls in Chapter 10 »Music in Company«. Again, the more verbose German title for the chapter is revealing: »Musik als Gesellschafts-Spiel und das Spiel mit dem Volkstümlichen« (»Music as social play and the game of the folk-like«) draws an implicit distinction between the cosmopolitan or universal madrigal and the more culturally localized »popular« genres emphasized in the chapter.

Orazio Vecchi's Canzonettas as Gesellschafts-Spiel

While Einstein's account of the madrigal seems to be one of artificiality and inexorable decay, from the »loss of innocence« in Rore's music to a dead end in Gesualdo's and a reincarnation in Monteverdi's, the musical demimonde of the so-called »lighter genres« resists death, and seems always able to draw on the heritage of the frottola for renewed vitality, linked, for Einstein, to its association with solo performance:

⁵ TIM, p. 715.

⁶ Ibid., p. 854.

⁷ Ibid., p. 785. Einstein writes here in reference to Vecchi's *Lunghi danni e tormenti*, from the *Convito musicale* (Venice: Gardano 1597), ed. William R. Martin, Rome 1966.

»[T]he madrigal, which rises after a thirty-five years' bloom of the frottola, is the very opposite of song. The song principle is immortal; it cannot perish, and it lives on in the forms of the villanella and canzonetta. But in the genre of serious and exalted music it is crowded out as soon as it has attained a certain importance and is doomed to lead, as it were, an underground existence, at least in its monodic form. Not until a century later does it come to the surface again.«8

This is the first of multiple references to monody as living an »underground« life during the era of the madrigal's hegemony. In the most literal reading this subterranean quality refers simply to the invisibility of an unwritten practice in printed sources, but the immortal yet submerged »song principle« suggests an effect of the unconscious: an innocent artlessness uncontaminated by worldly cultivation, belonging to a culturally authentic »Volkstümlichkeit«.

For the madrigal the paradox of polyphonic artifice realized in spontaneous play is crystalized in Einstein's regular reminders of these genres' social function as a mere pastime, and yet in Chapter X, which is dedicated to composers who were notably prodigious in these »light« genres, Einstein re-emphasizes the social function of *all* sixteenth-century music:

»In the sixteenth century the several forms of secular music – the madrigal and the various classes related to it – are neither private nor public, but occupy an anomalous position halfway between the two. Solitary and completely intimate art, such as that of the Preludes and Fugues of the Well-Tempered Clavichord or certain sonatas of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, is unthinkable. It would stand in complete contradiction to the function of sixteenth-century music, whose aim is not emotion, not edification, uplift, or self-improvement, but to serve as entertainment at best, and often enough as a prelude to Venus, an accompaniment to eating and drinking, or a mere pastime.«¹⁰

⁸ TIM, p. 115.

⁹ See also ibid., p. 214: »Music is free only within the limits of its traditional polyphony. It shakes the bars of its prison but is unable to break them. But this striving for freedom goes on underground until, toward the end of the century, it causes the proud edifice of polyphony to totter.«; ibid., p. 836: »The frottola and the old frottola-like canzone had been forms of monody. Thus the trend towards the a cappella ideal seems like a deviation and the trend away from it like a return. But this is not the whole story, for even in the sixteenth century the flow of monody never ceased; it went underground, as it were, and continued to run parallel to the a cappella forms. It was essentially a form of improvisation.«

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 743.

True to an aesthetics rooted in nineteenth-century notions of absolute music, Einstein draws a contrast between social music-making and entertainment on one hand, and the solitary *Innigkeit* of the sonata and the public spirit of the monumental symphony on the other. But he leans into the characterization of music as "mere pastime" only in discussions of the "lighter" strophic genres; when he describes the social function of the madrigal specifically, the comparison to Haydn and Mozart is more favorable, along with the emphasis on masculinist values of action, intellect, discipline, and egalitarianism: "Thus there were no listeners, but only "active" singers; there was no singing by heart, but constant adherence to the part-book; all participants were equally privileged. The comparison with eighteenth-century chamber music is too pertinent to overlook." In the case of virtuosos like Marenzio, Gesualdo, and Monteverdi, the elitism of Einstein's position becomes overt: "None of them, not even Marenzio with his *villanelle* or Monteverdi with his *scherzi*, stand in any relation to the open air, to the middle class, not to say to the "folk"."

And yet there is good reason to frame some music from the last quarter of the century in terms of bourgeois recreational singing. For those composers working mainly outside courtly circles, like Vecchi and Banchieri, the recreational function of their music is central to its construction, its presentation in print, and its place in historical narratives. Einstein seems to understand this when he writes of Vecchi's first publication of four-voice canzonettas: »In these *canzonette* he intentionally avoids the five-voiced texture [...] and returns to composition for four voices, as more popular and less madrigalesque – less suited for performance before an elegant company.«¹³ In other words, they were intended for the middle class.

Scholars like Laura Macy and Susan McClary have proposed, in different ways, how we might hear madrigals from the inside, as musico-poetic experiences for intimate groups and embedded within conversation; with respect to Vecchi's music books this has also been my method. It is not Einstein's: his consistent derision for mimetic text expression (**eye-music**) forestalls consideration of more subtle ways in which recreational singers might experience musical meaning. To cite just one example, of the elaborate wordplay in Vecchi's canzonetta *O donna ch'a mio danno*, Einstein refers only to **the parodistic intention, the exaggera-

¹¹ Ibid., p. 244.

¹² Ibid., p. 608.

¹³ Ibid., p. 776.

¹⁴ Laura Macy, "Speaking of Sex: Metaphor and Performance in the Italian Madrigal", The Journal of Musicology 14 (1996), pp. 1–34; Susan McClary, Modal Subjectivities: Self-Fashioning in the Italian Madrigal, Berkeley 2004; Paul Schleuse, Singing Games in Early Modern Italy: The Music Books of Orazio Vecchi, Bloomington 2015.



Ex. 1: Orazio Vecchi, O donna ch'a mio danno, mm. 1-22

tion, the roguish mockery of Petrarch and Della Casa.«¹⁵ This is a fair gloss on the poem, but it misses the way that Vecchi's use of imitative counterpoint gives each singer a greater degree of agency in negotiating the text, and transforms this canzonetta into a game of *bisticcii* (see Ex. 1).¹⁶ We should remember here Einstein's comment regarding the early madrigal that, as in playing string quartets, the game-like challenge of »keeping together« in a difficult piece is a source of pleasure; he makes no such favorable comparison here.¹⁷

Einstein generally reads books of canzonettas, like books of madrigals, as compilations of autonomous works, not as organized wholes, composed and assembled by the composer for a book-buying public. Scholars since Einstein have investigated various strategies that informed decisions about the organization of madrigal prints, ranging from purely musical to thematic to narrative or quasi-narrative structures. This focus on the materiality of complete printed books is also fruitful in understanding Vecchi's seemingly »naive« canzonetta books, whose opening pieces situate the genre in social play. Thus *Canzonette d'Amore*, the opening piece in Vecchi's first book, addresses the songs themselves, and sends them to kiss Cloris's hands, evoking the singers' hands which hold the songs in printed form.¹⁸

Canzonette d'amore
Che m'uscite del core,
Contate i miei dolori,
Le man baciando alla mia bella Clori.¹⁹

Vecchi's final four-voice canzonetta book of 1590 likewise opens with a self-referential prologue, *Udit' udite Amanti*, which describes a fictive pastoral performance by a trio of women and a man:²⁰

Udit', udite, Amanti, E voi, Pastori eranti, Tre leggiadre Ninfe Con un Pastor lungo le chiare linfe Cantar con voci elette Il Quarto libro de le Canzonette.²¹

- 15 TLM, p. 778.
- 16 The Four-Voice Canzonettas, ed. Ruth I. DeFord, Madison 1993 (Recent Researches in Music of the Renaissance, 92–93), vol. 2, p. 66 f.
- 17 TIM, p. 263.
- 18 Vecchi, Canzonette [...] Libro primo a quattro voci, Venice: Gardano 1580. See Schleuse, Singing Games, pp. 17 f.
- 19 Vecchi, The Four-Voice Canzonettas, ed. DeFord, vol. 1, p. 33.
- 20 Vecchi, Canzonette [...] Libro quarto a quattro voci, Venice: Gardano 1590.
- 21 Vecchi, The Four-Voice Canzonettas, ed. DeFord, vol. 1, p. 60.

This playful characterization of the performers likely refers obliquely to the Ferrarese *concerto delle donne* and similar quasi-professional groups, but these songs are no more intended for performance by court singers than they are for actual nymphs and shepherds; Vecchi's canzonettas remain recreational music for amateurs, even when the singers are invited to imagine courtly performances. Considering the popularity of Vecchi's canzonetta books in Italian reprints and compilations published abroad, he is by some measures the best-selling composer of the last quarter of the century, finding an audience that in sheer numbers must have far surpassed the cohort of courtiers and academicians that Einstein emphasizes as musical consumers.²²

Einstein and the functions of L'Amfiparnaso

This tension between commoditized music books sold to middle-class consumers and Einstein's understanding of the madrigal as an exclusive courtly pastime emerges again when Einstein turns to *L'Amfiparnaso*, Vecchi's best-known work and in 1949 arguably his only well-known complete book.²³ This book of five-voice dialogues and madrigals traces the outlines of a three-act *commedia dell'arte* play, but despite the broad popular currency of the *commedia* elements, Einstein takes pains to associate the subtle five-voice musical dialogues in *L'Amfiparnaso* precisely with courtly culture:

»One asks oneself why Vecchi did not write his work for six voices, for this would have simplified the musical dialogue. The only possible answer is that he must have thought this too simple, too commonplace, and that he chose five voices in order to avoid this musical and dramatic banality. Thus he leaves open the possibility of returning to the madrigalesque at any moment. [...] Everything is calculated for performance by a merry company of *nable* dilettanti.«²⁴

Einstein promises not to add to the »oceans of ink that have already been spilled« over this work, but his comments do provide a forceful argument against the then-common view that *L'Amfiparnaso* was either some kind of opera, or some kind of important theatrical forerunner.

That misconception remained too tempting to historians, however, and two pages in *The Italian Madrigal* were not sufficient to disabuse them. I have traced

²² Ibid., pp. 12-15.

²³ Vecchi, L'Amfiparnaso, Venice: Gardano 1597; ed. Renzo Bez, L'Amfiparnaso: Il testo letterario e il testo musicale, Bologna 2007.

²⁴ TIM, p. 795 f., emphasis added.

the convoluted historiography of this work and the spurious genre of the »madrigal-comedy« elsewhere, but Einstein's most important points of reference seem to be August Wilhelm Ambros's *Geschichte der Musik* in the evolving revisions edited by Gustav Nottebohm in 1878, Otto Kade in 1893, and Hugo Leichtentritt in 1909, which gradually reframe *L'Amfiparnaso* as a transitional work, and the last of which first introduced the term *Madrigalkomödie*, taken over into English for the first time by Einstein forty years later.²⁵

In a 1906 article Edward Dent put forward a compelling argument for reading *L'Amfiparnaso* as a wholly non-theatrical work for recreational singers, but despite the similarity of his conclusion I do not think Einstein can have drawn from it. Dent speculates on the function of the unusual woodcut images that appear before each piece in the partbooks (see Fig. 1), which Einstein does not mention. Indeed, it seems likely that Einstein had not seen the original print: the work had long been available in scores edited by Robert Eitner (in 1902) and Luigi Torchi (in 1908), neither of which includes the woodcuts. If Einstein had seen these images, with their depictions of comic urban stage settings, he presumably would not have described the *innamorati* of this *commedia dell'arte* scenario as sentimental shepherds and shepherdesses, who are no longer called Aminta and Mopsus, Daphnis and Chloe, but Lucio and Isabella, Lelio and Nisa. «28

In conflating the standard *innamorati* of the *commedia dell'arte* with generic pastoral »shepherds and shepherdesses« Einstein again overlooks the degree to which *L'Amfiparnaso* was designed to appeal to print consumers and recreational singers. Archival work by Anne MacNeil published in 2003 tracks the careers of specific Cinquecento actors who first performed under names that became *commedia* stock characters, including Isabella Andreini, her husband Francesco and their son Giovanni Battista.²⁹ Several of these characters also appear in *L'Amfiparnaso*, and I have built on MacNeil's work to show that precisely this combination of actors appeared with the company of the Uniti during the 1595/1596 season in Bologna, where they could have provided a model for the characters

²⁵ Schleuse, Singing Games, pp. 161–175. For the term Madrigalkomödie, see also Hugo Leichtentritt's revised edition of August Wilhelm Ambros, Geschichte der Musik, vol. 4, Leipzig 1909, p. 264.

²⁶ Edward J. Dent, "The Amfiparnasos of Orazio Vecchis, Monthly Musical Record, 01.03.1906, pp. 50–52, and 01.04.1906, p. 74 f.

²⁷ Vecchi, L'Amfiparnaso: eine Komödie von 1597, ed. Robert Eitner, Leipzig 1902 (Publikationen älterer praktischer und theoretischer Musikwerke, 26). Vecchi, L'Amfiparnaso: Comedia armonica in un Prologo e tre Atti, ed. Luigi Torchi, Milan 1908 (L'arte musicale in Italia, 4), pp. 148–280.

²⁸ TIM, p. 794.

²⁹ Anne MacNeil, Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century, Oxford 2003, p. 238 f.



Fig. 1a: Illustration for no. 3, *Che volete voi dir*, from *L'Amfiparnaso*, tenor partbook, p. 10, The British Library Board, shelfmark K.2.b.1



Fig. 1b: Illustration for no. 13, Lassa, che veggio? from L'Amfiparnaso, tenor partbook, p. 35, The British Library Board, shelfmark K.2.b.1

and plot Vecchi evokes in *L'Amfiparnaso*.³⁰ Identifying Vecchi's book as an evocation of specific *commedia dell'arte* performances further dispels the notion that it is itself a kind of theatrical piece, but furthermore it gives us a clearer picture of how recreational singing could draw for its effect on a whole range of musical and non-musical cultural references.

Finally, understanding *LAmfiparnaso* as a book of five-voice recreational polyphony helps to contextualize the four imitations of it published by Adriano Banchieri between 1598 and 1607 as his second through fifth books of three-voice canzonettas.³¹ Each of these books is a variation not only on the plot of Vecchi's work, but on his visual mise-en-page as well, with woodcut images at the head of some of the pieces. Einstein only discusses *La pazzia senile* (1598, rev. 1599) in any detail, and as with *LAmfiparnaso* he apparently had not seen the partbooks or their illustrations, since he cites Vogel's reprint of the preface and Torchi's score. While Banchieri does seem to have imagined a kind of staging for at least the last of these books, the direct derivation of their skeletal plots from *LAmfiparnaso* suggests that Banchieri sought merely to evoke typical *commedia* scenes, rather than to create autonomous theatrical works.³²

³⁰ Schleuse, »A Tale Completed in the Mind«: Genre and Imitation in *L'Amfiparnaso* (1597)«, *Journal of Musicology* 29/2 (2012), pp. 101–153: pp. 104–107.

³¹ Adriano Banchieri, La pazzia senile [...] a tre [...] libro secondo, Venice: Amadino 1598, rev. Venice: Amadino 1599; Il terzo libro delle canzonette a tre [...] intitolato Il studio dilettevole, Milan: Besozzo 1600; Il metamorfosi musicale: quarto libro delle canzonette a tre voci, Venice: Amadino 1601; Virtuoso ridotto [...] detta La prudenza giovenile, Quinto libro de gli Terzetti, Milan: Tini & Lomazzo 1607.

³² On Banchieri's staging suggestions for La prudenza giovanile, see Martha Farahat, »On the Staging of Madrigal Comedies«, Early Music History 10 (1991), pp. 123–143.

Despite Einstein's evident unease with music used as »mere« pastime, he seems to take real, if slightly guilty pleasure in Vecchi's and Banchieri's music. Of the latter he concludes:

»With Banchieri, the madrigal-comedy, the >concatenazione drammatica, <i s at an end. But burlesque composition for voices lives on. The quodlibet cannot die as long as there are jovial musicians to sing together. All that disappears is entertainment for the sake of the entertainers; even in the seventeenth century this sort of music requires an audience.«³³

Einstein's concluding view of Vecchi is likewise cheerful, even as he emphasizes the end of his narrative's »beautiful curve« more poignantly:

»The madrigal and the lighter forms of sixteenth-century music have met as though by appointment and have made merry at one another's expense against what appears to be a dramatic background. It is an end. But Vecchi is so gay, so light, so impudent, so fascinating a companion, that we prefer to see his work as a golden sunset and not as foreshadowing the coming night.«³⁴

Perhaps Einstein indulgesd himself in Vecchi's music as a guilty pleasure simply because doing so would not disrupt his larger narrative of the madrigal's decline. He could momentarily resolve the tensions he has constructed between counterpoint and song, secure in the knowledge that their union will end in mutual annihilation.

³³ TIM, p. 819.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 776.

Abkürzungen

DIM Alfred Einstein, Das italienische Madrigal. Versuch einer

Geschichte der italienischen Profanmusik des 16. Jahrhunderts, hrsg. von Sebastian Bolz, München 2025 (Münchner Veröffentlichungen zur Musikgeschichte, 83), DOI:

10.5282/ubm/epub.128701

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Liliencron u. a., Leipzig 1892-1931

DTB Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Bayern, hrsg. von Adolf

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Zitate aus *Das italienische Madrigal / The Italian Madrigal* erfolgen in der Regel in der Sprache und Ausgabe des jeweiligen Aufsatzes. Im Sinne dieses Bandes, dem es um eine Re-Lektüre unter den Bedingungen von Original und Übersetzung geht, werden entsprechende Stellen bei Bedarf in den Fußnoten in der jeweils anderen Sprache wiedergegeben.

Sämtliche im Band enthaltenen Links wurden zuletzt überprüft am 14.03.2025.