

# Lessons in Music, Lessons in Love

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In Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (c.1590s; first folio 1623), two eager suitors seek to gain access to the fair Bianca, who has been "closely mew'd... up" by her over-protective father, and "[kept] from all access of suitors... until the elder sister [the shrewish Katherine] first be wed" (1.1.178; 1.2.257–1.2.259). In spite of strictly controlling his daughters' social contact, Baptista, who is, in his own words "very kind, and liberal/To mine own children in good bringing-up," actively seeks "Schoolmasters [to]... keep within [his] house/Fit to instruct [their] youth" in "music, instruments, and poetry." Upon hearing this, both of Bianca's would-be lovers disguise themselves as tutors, for they clearly see a chance for an intimate and amorous encounter. Hortensio describes his intentions, saying,

Now shall my friend Petruchio do me grace,  
And offer me disguis'd in sober robes  
To old Baptista as a schoolmaster  
Well seen in music, to instruct Bianca;  
That so I may by this device at least  
Have leave and leisure to make love to her,  
And unsuspected court her by herself.  
(*The Taming of the Shrew*, 1.2.128–1.2.134)

Hortensio's idea is not a new one, nor will Shakespeare be the last to use this device, for indeed the ruse of obtaining access to and courting an unmarried girl through her lessons, especially lessons in music, appears frequently upon the stage, both dramatic and operatic. Cleante poses as Angelique's music tutor in Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire* (1673)—first performed with musical interludes by Marc-Antoine Charpentier; librettist Apostolo Zeno's *Gl'inganni felice* features a Prince disguised as a musician in order to engage in political and amorous intrigues (1695); and Count Almaviva pretends to be a replacement music master, Don Alonso, on his third visit to the well-guarded Rosine, in Beaumarchais' *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775)—a play set to music by no less than six composers. To this list of masquerading musicians,

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one might even add Nanki-Poo (*The Mikado*, Gilbert and Sullivan 1885) or the Phantom (*The Phantom of the Opera*, Lloyd Webber, based on Gaston Leroux 1986) whose disguises as travelling minstrel and mysterious voice teacher allow them access to their beloved. However reworked, these dramatized music lessons are extensions of a conventional Renaissance device, for one of the stock scenes of Commedia dell'Arte involves Flaminia tricking her parents or ward into letting her lover, disguised as a music or dance instructor, into the house. Yet this dramatic device in itself may in fact be a case of art mirroring life. By Shakespeare's time, the music lesson as a potential for amorous intrigue had become a commonplace not only in literature, art and drama, but also in Renaissance social commentary and educational treatises, fuelled as much by a philosophical equation of music and love as by very real instances of a pupil being seduced by her (or his) tutor. This article will discuss scenes of musical seduction in literature, legend and art, drawing on parallels found in diaries, court records and other real life scenarios, examining the amorous potential of an actual lute lesson, and presenting early modern arguments for and against girls' music education. Our exploration will reveal how the music lesson came to be a pivotal artistic device, impelling early modern art and literature into the realm of social commentary. Each artistic reworking reveals an intricate, if sometimes ambiguous or contentious, critique of music and love, both physical and philosophical—a marriage which was indissoluble in the social complex of the early modern era.

The music lesson as a scene of illicit love surfaces in literature and legend in the early Middle Ages, where it suffuses the narratives of history's most famous, forbidden lovers. Perhaps it might surprise some to learn that Tristan and Isolde were not the innocent victims of a misplaced love potion, as Wagner tells us. Rather, Gottfried von Strassburg suggests in his middle-high-German romance (1210), the potion served merely to awaken latent feelings, kindled much earlier in their relationship during music lessons. From the time that Tristan, disguised as the minstrel Tantris, was engaged as a harp-teacher at the Irish court, Gottfried writes, "the young Princess was constantly under his tuition, and he devoted much time and energy to her. One by one he laid before her for her consideration the best things that he knew, both in book-learning and the playing of instruments." (von Strassburg, *Tristan*, 1210). As a result of Tristan's tuition, all who heard Isolde play and sing were moved by "her wondrous beauty that stole with its rapturous music hidden and unseen through the windows of the eyes into many noble hearts and smoothed on the magic which took thoughts prisoner suddenly, and, taking them, fettered them with desire." (*Tristan*, p. 148). As the music works its enchantment on the young couple themselves, Tristan praises Isolde's beauty superfluously, and Isolde, who, Gottfried tells us, "scanned his body and his whole appearance with uncommon interest", finds that "whatever a maid may survey in a man... all pleased her very well." (*Tristan*, p. 173). Gottfried's narrative attends to the physical aspects of Tristan and Isolde's infatuation as a natural outcome of their spending much time together and gazing on each other's physical beauty, but the emotional and mental entanglement is described as supernatural. The music lessons emphasize Isolde's hands or voice—"whenever they played, her fingers

touched the lyre most deftly and struck notes from the harp with power.... Moreover, this girl so blessed with gifts sang well and sweetly.... and her tutor, the minstrel, much improved her” (*Tristan*, p. 147); Tristan is also engaged in Isolde’s intellectual education through instruction in “Bienséance” which “often refreshed [the princess’s] mind.” (*Tristan*, p. 147). For Gottfried, natural love involves both mind and body, but the natural outcome of these lessons becomes supernatural as Isolde’s accomplishments increase. Gottfried ends up comparing Isolde “to the Sirens, who with their lodestone draw the ships towards them.... Thus, I imagine, did Isolde attract many thoughts and hearts that deemed themselves safe from love’s disquietude.” (*Tristan*, p. 148). Tristan and Isolde both fall under this magical enchantment, and a potentially pure love engendered by beauty, both physical and aural, during music lessons and performance, becomes dangerously intensified when they drink the potion.

If the role of music education in Tristan and Isolde’s affair was too subtle for its Medieval audience, the fate of Heloise and Abelard, two real-life lovers who were both musicians, stood as a strong warning to fathers or guardians who sought to educate their daughters. The twelfth-century affair is recorded in Abelard’s biography, *Historica Calamitatum*, as well as in the couple’s surviving letters which were translated into French in the fourteenth century by Jean de Meun. Like Baptista, Canon Fullbert wished his niece Heloise (1101–1164) “to have the best education he could possibly procure for her,” and so the philosopher, theologian, and musician Peter Abelard joined their household as Heloise’s tutor. (Abelard c. 1135, *Historia Calamitatum, The Story of My Misfortunes*). Although their letters attest to a genuine and abiding love, Abelard’s self-professed seduction of his student led to pregnancy, elopement, castration, and separate lives lived out in convent and monastery. In retellings of their story, music is often implicated as a catalyst for Heloise and Abelard’s mental and emotional entanglement; as an inducement to love, the music lesson here has immoral implications dangerous for the mind, but blatantly physical consequences.

While these famous couples quickly became the subject of musical, literary, and, more recently, cinematic legend, other real-life cases of teacher-student seduction served as warning and welcome gossip throughout early modern Europe. Though undoubtedly most cases were dealt with privately, those brought to public trial offer interesting insights into Renaissance perceptions of sexual crime and punishment. In 1642, Dionora Luppi accused the musician Giovanni Carlo del Cavalieri before Venice’s Council of Ten of not only seducing her 13-year-old daughter Silvia during their music lessons, but also of attempted abduction and murder. (Glixon 1996). The biggest obstacle to justice here seems to be the fact that Giovanni already had a wife and so could not be made to marry his victim. As Cohen and Cohen point out, “law and custom ordain[ed] that a man who carrie[d] off and deflower[ed] a virgin must marry her himself or at least provide funds so she c[ould] either espouse another or take the veil.” (Cohen and Cohen 2000, p. 127). In Florence a few years earlier, the musician Pompeo Caccini (son of the famous Giulio) was fined 100 lire plus a dowry of 75 scudi for getting his student, Ginevra Mazziere, pregnant, and in this case, the two eventually married.

(McGee 1990; See also Ruggiero and Brown 1985). In the case of Bernardino Pedroso, a Spanish music master who ran away with his pupil Ottavia Rosignoli, the sentence and punishment is missing from the Papal court transcripts of his trial. We are told that under torture Bernardino confessed to a relationship with his younger female student; however he insisted that Ottavia was not a virgin when he met her, and that he treated her like a sister, helping her to run away from an abusive family. Ottavia, on the other hand, maintains throughout the trial that Bernardino was her first and only lover; she is supported by her family and key witnesses, likely in an attempt to have the court order their marriage (See Cohen and Cohen 2000).

At the center of perhaps the most famous early modern case of a teacher seducing (or in this case sexually assaulting) his student, is another educated, musical woman, the artist Artemisia Gentileschi.<sup>1</sup> The seven-month-long trial for rape held in 1612 ensured that scandal would remain attached to Gentileschi's name for life, but this did not entirely ruin her artistic reputation. From 1638–1641, for instance, Gentileschi secured an important commission from the English court of King Charles I, to paint ceiling frescoes for the Queen's house at Greenwich. With the salacious history of the Tudors still within living memory, the seduction of a young girl by her tutor was an unremarkable scandal in England. To mention just one of the many famous cases attached to the English court, Henry VIII's third wife, Catherine Howard, admitted to having succumbed to the amorous attentions of her music teacher, Henry Manno, when she was fifteen, although she later swore the relationship was not consummated. In each of these scenarios the trial records are concerned solely with the physical nature of the relationship. The music lesson here is seen as an inducement to physical love only, its spiritual or mental influence is negligible to the legal issues at hand.

What then, was so enticing about a music lesson that it could harbor seduction and rape, or, in the case of Shakespeare's hopeful suitors, augured love and marriage? Of course the opportunity of being in close contact with one's beloved, possibly without a vigilant chaperone, was the biggest draw for Hortensio and Lucentio. But more than this, the amorous connotations of music, "the food of love," combined with the physical intimacy inherent especially in a lute lesson, proved a dangerous combination. The very first lesson in Medieval or Renaissance music was, as Hortensio reminds us, the gamut—the basic scale of pitches that encompasses the combined average range of the (male) human voice (men and boys). Before singing or playing, a music student would learn by rote to name these pitches and place them in their proper hexachords, using the Guidonian hand—an image reproduced in countless music tutors and treatises—as a mnemonic device. One of the most widely circulated music instruction books, Thomas Morley's *Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (1597), starts with this very lesson. The protagonist Philomathes, has been shamed into studying music for the first time after attending a dinner party where he was the only guest who could not sing from a part book, and so he seeks out a music master:

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<sup>1</sup> Artemisia's musical skill is attested by her *Self-Portrait as a Lute-Player* (1615–1617).

*Master.* [I will teach you] With a good will: But haue you learned nothing at all in Musicke before?

*Philomathes.* Nothing. Therefore I pray begin at the very beginning, and teach me and as though I were a childe.

*Master:* I will do so: And therefore behold, here is the Scale of Musicke, which wee tearme the Gam.

(Morley 1597, A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke).

We will remember that Bianca, who considers herself an experienced musician, reacts angrily to being taught as though she were a child; at Hortensio's suggestion that he "must begin with rudiments of art,/To teach you gamut in a briefer sort," she hotly declares, "Why, I am past my gamut long ago"(3.1.69). The next lesson, after learning the gamut by rote, would involve playing the notes of the scale upon the lute—a step which could require the teacher to touch the hands of his student in order to place the fingers upon the correct frets. It is this physical contact that Katherina objects to so strenuously in her music lesson. Hortensio relates the encounter in Act two:

I did but tell her she mistook her frets,  
 And bow'd her hand to teach her fingering  
 When, with a most impatient devilish spirit,  
 'Frets, call you these?' quoth she 'I'll fume with them.'  
 And with that word she struck me on the head,  
 And through the instrument my pate made way:  
 And there I stood amazed for a while,  
 As on a pillory, looking through the lute,  
 While she did call me rascal fiddler  
 And twangling Jack, with twenty such vile terms,  
 As she had studied to misuse me so.  
 (*The Taming of the Shrew*, 2.1.148–2.1.158)

The physical intimacy and sexual impropriety which is only hinted at here, is quite overt in the earlier *Taming of a Shrew*, which portrays Katherine's lute lesson on stage complete with verbal repartee that goes beyond bawdy punning to blatant crudity (causing critics to dismiss this scene as decidedly un-Shakespearean).

After learning scales, notes and fret positions, a student would progress to simple tunes, first monophonic and then with harmony, and here a further dangerous inducement to love is introduced. The myriad of lute instruction books and handwritten collections for ladies, such as the Margaret Board lutebook, the ML lutebook, Jane Pickering's lutebook, and the Mary Burwell Lute Tutor (c.1670), all include tunes with titles and sometimes lyrics relating to love. "Light of love," "Go from my window," "John come kiss me now," and other such tunes are standard pieces for the beginner, even though the titles and lyrics might seem to encourage amorous adventures. Instruction is also included concerning female deportment when playing outside of the lesson, in company, and this does not always advocate modesty: the Burwell Tutor offers advice on how to display oneself, so that "the beauty of the arm, of the hands and of the neck are advantageously displayed in playing of the lute." (Quoted in Zecher 2000, p. 769). If his lessons had advanced further, Hortensio may have gotten as far as playing lute duets with his student—an even more dangerous pastime especially when, as in an example from Dowland's *First Book of Songs or Ayres*, the duet is (as directed in the table of contents) "for two to play

upon one lute.” This feat is only possible if one participant, presumably the female student, sits upon the lap of the other; her partner must then stretch his arms around to reach the lute in front, embracing both her and the instrument—a posture which would surely have been perceived as completely inappropriate for any virtuous, unmarried Renaissance girl, and might easily provide opportunity for another kind of embrace. The lute lesson in this guise could hardly avoid amorous overtones.

Thus the music lesson becomes, in Renaissance understanding, a conflagration of both physical and mental entanglement. The physical intimacy proffered by playing the lute together with the intellectual stimulation of learning a new art, especially one philosophically linked with love, opens both mind and body to the possibility of an amorous or sexual encounter. The fact that music itself was seen as possessing the ability to magically alter one’s mental state and capture the heart, even as the beauty of the performer conquered through the eyes of the beholder, intensified the danger of learning (or hearing) music, beyond that of the other arts.

In the early seventeenth century, the music lesson as a scene of seduction, already common in literature and social commentary, begins to infuse Dutch genre painting. The theme is long lived, as it is taken over in the eighteenth century by French artists, and resurfaces again in English painting in the nineteenth century. While many artists explore this theme, perhaps most well-known are the paintings by Vermeer, which may serve to complicate our exploration of music tuition and seduction. In Vermeer’s *The Music Lesson* (c.1662–1664; oil on canvas, 74 × 64.5 cm; London, The Royal Collection) a young woman stands at a virginals, her back to us, but her face visible in the mirror behind the instrument. A male tutor stands at the side watching her; his right arm rests on the instrument case, and his left on a staff; his bass viol and bow lies on the floor in front of them. A Motto on the virginals reads: “MVSICA LETITIAE CO[ME]S MEDICINA DOLOR[VM]” (Music is the companion of joy, balm for sorrow), giving a wholesome and somewhat spiritual flavor to the scene. Vermeer’s painting thus redeems the music lesson from its supposed immoral connection. Yet, the distance with which we observe the couple, the intimacy of their position, and their complete ignorance of our gaze imbues their relationship with something clandestine if not illicit (Fig. 1).

We have a stronger indication of music’s connection with love in *Girl interrupted at her music* (Vermeer c.1660–1661) and *A young woman standing at a virginal* (Vermeer, c.1670–1672), both of which show a picture of Cupid hanging on the back wall. In *The Concert* (Vermeer, c.1665–1666; oil on canvas, 72.5 × 64.7 cm; Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum) and *A young woman seated at a virginal* (Vermeer, c.1670–1672); a known painting by Dirck van Baburen entitled *The Procuress*, is depicted in the background, in which the lute figures prominently in the hands of a courtesan. In these works, we move from music as a symbol of relational harmony, to music as an instigator of love, and, finally, music as a sign of female promiscuity. The level of moral implication is of course open to interpretation: David R. Smith maintains that “the painting of Cupid behind the couple in... [*Girl Interrupted*] is an emblem of true and faithful love,” (Smith 1987, p. 428) and Arthur Wheelock suggests that use of Baburen’s *Procuress* in Vermeer’s two later paintings does not necessarily imply immorality within in these music scenes, but may in fact seek only to contrast a low life use of music with its refined and proper use in high



**Fig. 1** Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *The Music Lesson (A lady at the Virginals with a Gentleman)*, c.1662–1664 (oil on canvas, 74 × 64.5 cm)/London, The Royal Collection © 2011 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

society. (Wheelock 1981, pp. 120–122). The juxtaposition of the two instruments, lute and virginals, may also point to this social apposition within Vermeer’s paintings. However, the association of the music lesson with sexual impropriety was so prevalent by the mid-seventeenth century, that Vermeer could not have escaped this prevailing implication. While his manner is by no means as direct as is found in numerous sixteenth-century *Concerts*, paintings of musical courtesans (with or without a prodigal son to spiritualize the image), or even the perhaps misnamed *Music Lesson* by Sebastiano Florigerio, yet Vermeer is quite consciously commenting on the societal correlation of music and sexual encounter.<sup>2</sup> By directing a voyeuristic

<sup>2</sup> Gianni Dagli Orti, *The Prodigal Son with courtesans*, Ambrosius Benson’s *Concert after the meal*, or Michiel Parrhasio’s *Courtesan Playing Lute* offer good examples of these genre paintings. In Florigerio’s *Music Lesson*, which seems to depict a Venetian academy or salon, a richly attired young woman (possibly a courtesan) sits centrally, surrounded in the foreground by three



**Fig. 2** Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *A Young Woman Standing at a Virginal*, c.1670–1672 (oil on canvas, 51.7 × 45.2 cm)/© The National Gallery, London

gaze toward the music-making woman and including the background paintings of *Cupid* and *The Procuress*, Vermeer is, albeit subtly, drawing his audience's attention once again to the age-old union of music and forbidden love (Figs. 2, 3, and 4).

It is one of those interesting dichotomies surrounding the philosophical perception of music, that music lessons should be so tainted with illicit love while, at the same time, girls' musical education was highly esteemed in the upper classes of Renaissance society. As Danijela Kambaskovic discusses in her article, a similar philosophical dualism is observable in early modern ideas about love. (Kambaskovic 2014). On one hand, it is the source of spiritual inspiration and a personal search for transcendence; on the other, it is a danger to man's rationality, morality and

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well-dressed men, all reading from a single altus partbook and keeping time with a finger; in the background, three more men and a veiled older woman (a duenna or procuress?) look on. See Shephard (2010); Davies (2006); or Slim (2002).



**Fig. 3** Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *The Concert*, c. 1658–1660 (oil on canvas, 72.5 × 64.7 cm)/ © Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA, USA/The Bridgeman Art Library

his rightful place in the hierarchy of God’s creation. On the positive side of the argument, educators such as Richard Mulcaster, Bathshua Makin, and John Essex commend music as an accomplishment that, Essex says, “refines the Taste, polishes the Mind; and is an Entertainment... that preserves [young women] from the Rust of Idleness, that most pernicious Enemy to Virtue.” (Essex 1722). Music was especially recommended for “princely maidens above all” whose education, Mulcaster believes, should consist “in perfecting of those forenamed four, reading well, writing fair, singing sweet, [and] playing fine.” (Mulcaster 1581, *Positions*). Thus, in schools like those run by Bathshua Makin, who was governess to Charles I’s daughter, girls spent “half the time” in “work of all sorts, as: Dancing, Music, Singing, Writing, Keeping accounts. The other half to be employed in gaining the Latin and French tongues.” (Makin 1673, *An essay to revive the ancient education of gentlewomen*, p. 191). Music here is considered a proper and productive subject for a noblewoman’s education, and an aid to virtue.



**Fig. 4** Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, c.1670–1672 (oil on canvas, 51.5 × 45.5 cm)/© The National Gallery, London

In a trend perhaps started by Gottfried’s depiction of the Irish princess Isolde, many notable literary and dramatic heroines are described as musically well-educated. Anne Frankford, another lute-smashing woman from Thomas Heywood’s *A Woman killed with Kindness* is an accomplished musician; her skill as a lutenist and singer are prized “ornaments,” on a level with her noble birth, princely education, her fluency in various languages, and her physical beauty. Anne’s counterpart, the now impoverished Susan Mountford, is similarly accomplished, for she was once “Mistress Sue, trick’d up in jewels” who “sung well, [and] play’d sweetly on the lute” (3.3.23–3.3.24). Here, lute playing is a sign of social class and is allied with wealth and virtue, both of which, these heroines exemplify, can be lost.

*Sir Charles.*

Master Frankford,

You are a happy man, Sir, and much joy

Succeed your marriage mirth: you have a wife

So qualified, and with such ornaments

Both of the mind and body. First, her birth  
 Is noble, and her education such  
 As might become the daughter of a prince;  
 Her own tongue speaks all tongues, and her own hand  
 Can teach all strings to speak in their best grace,  
 From the shrill'st treble to the hoarsest base.  
 To end her many praises in one word,  
 She's Beauty and Perfection's eldest daughter,  
 Only found by yours, though many a heart hath sought her.  
 (*A Woman killed with Kindness*, 1.1.12–1.1.24)

Shakespearean princesses are equally well-educated in music. Marina, the daughter of Prince Pericles, can read music and, following another Renaissance convention, she shames the nightingale into silence when she sings to her lute:

Now to Marina bend your mind,  
 Whom our fast growing scene must finde  
 At Tharsus, and by Cleon trained  
 In Musicks letters, who hath gaind  
 Of education all the grace,  
 Wich makes hie both the art and place  
 Of generall wonder...  
 ... when too'th Lute  
 She sung, and made the night b[ir]d mute  
 That still records with mone.  
 (*Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, Quarto, 4.0)

Lavinia, daughter of the noble Titus Andronicus, is musically gifted and she also sang and played the lute, that is, before her hands and tongue were chopped off:

Oh had the monster seene those Lillie hands,  
 Tremble, like aspen leaves, upon a Lute,  
 And make the silken strings delight to kisse them,  
 He would not then have tucht them for his life.  
 Or, had he heard the heavenly Harmonie,  
 Which that sweete tongue hath made,  
 He would have dropt his knife and fell a sleepe,  
 As Cerberus at the Thracian Poets feete.  
 (*Titus Andronicus*, Quarto 1, 2.4.1117–2.4.1124)

In an apocryphal-Shakespearean example, Sabren, daughter of the Trojan King Locrine and his royal mistress, is again a trained lutenist; in describing her inability to plunge the suicidal knife into her breast, the dramatist mingles images of chastity and courteous love with music (her “virgins hands... [which] tune the amorous Lute”):

Ay me, my virgins hands are too too weak,  
 To penetrate the bullwarke of my brest,  
 My fingers us'd to tune the amorous Lute,  
 Are not of force to hold this steely glain,  
 So I am left to waile my parents death,  
 Not able for to work my proper death.  
 (*The Tragedy of Locrine* 5.6.2113–5.6.2118)

Lute-playing in these instances is a sign of nobility, chastity, and marriageability. Indeed, the supreme example of a virginal, lute-playing princess was Queen

Elizabeth herself, the most eligible maiden in England.<sup>3</sup> Hence it is no surprise to find Shakespeare and Heywood's lute-playing heroines described as inherently marriageable, their lute-playing a symbol of their fitness for wifely duty and devotion. The noble Marina is "a wench full grown,/Even ripe for marriage-rite" (4.0); and Anne Frankford, as her brother, Sir Francis, notes, "A perfect wife already, meek and patient!" (1.1.3944). In Henry IV Part 1, Owen Glendower's daughter performs a wifely act by singing to her husband, Lord Mortimer, before he heads into battle (3.1). This music-marriage connection is even parodied in depictions of bourgeois society: the goldsmith's wife Maudlin, in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, makes sure her daughter Moll has "played over all [her] old lessons o' the virginals" in time to meet her proposed husband Walter (1.1.1). In contrast, the Welsh charlatan falsely engaged to Maudlin's son sings unaccompanied bawdy songs, and in *The Roaring Girl* Moll "Cutpurse" Frith avoids the lute or virginals, and instead picks up a manly viol to accompany her singing.<sup>4</sup>

For Ophelia, Desdemona and Queen Katherine, lutes and lute-songs serve to underscore a fidelity wronged or a virtue lost. Ophelia's entrance in Act 4, scene 5 so moved early spectators that her appearance, "playing on a Lute, and her haire downe, singing," was recorded as a stage direction in the first 'bad' quarto of 1603 (*Hamlet* act 4, scene 5). Her musical ramblings indicate that her madness is caused not solely by her father's death, but by Hamlet's indiscretion and abandonment: her loss of virtue is revealed in lines from popular lute songs, such as "Let in the maid, that out a maid ne'er departed more," and "Quoth she, before you tumbled me, you promised me to wed."<sup>5</sup> Desdemona's impending doom is lent a particular pathos by her distracted singing of the popular lute song, "O Willow, Willow," which survives with lute tablature in the Lodge Book (c.1570), the Dallis Lutebook (c.1583) and an anonymous British Museum manuscript simply known as Additional 15117 (See Joiner 1969). Queen Katherine's deep melancholy, caused by her husband's unjust accusations, is only briefly assuaged when she requests her maid to "Take thy lute, wench: my soul grows sad with troubles;/sing and disperse 'em, if thou canst" (*King Henry VIII*, 3.1). The lute, an instrument that should be a symbol of domestic harmony, becomes, in the hands of Shakespeare's most important heroines, a visible and audible symbol of broken domesticity, accentuating madness and foreshadowing death.

Despite the common practice and professed virtue of giving girls a musical education, there was an equally strong argument on the other side of the debate. Early feminists like Mary Astell believed that music lessons were not in the best interest of a young girl as they took too much time away from more serious and productive

<sup>3</sup> Queen Elizabeth I was well known to be an accomplished player of the virginal. Her musicianship is also attested by Nicholas Hilliard's miniature, *Queen Elizabeth playing the lute* (c.1576).

<sup>4</sup> This is a notable revision of the real Moll cutpurse who is recorded to have "sat there upon the stage in the publique viewe of all the people there p[rese]nte in Mans apparel and playd upon her lute & sange a songe"; in Kastan and Stallybrass (1991), p. 220.

<sup>5</sup> Carroll Camden is one of the first to assert that it is "the pangs of despiz'd love" rather than Polonius' death which causes Ophelia's madness; see Camden (1964).

study. Others had a moral objection, believing that music in the hands of a woman was a dangerous inflamer of passions, suitable only, as Shakespeare's Richard III comments, for lascivious pleasures within a lady's chamber:

Grim-visag'd war hath smooth'd his wrinkled front,  
 And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds  
 To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,  
 He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber  
 To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.  
 (*King Richard the Third*, 1.1.9–1.1.12)

Pietro Bembo combined the two arguments, when he wrote to his daughter in 1541, cautioning her against the study of music:

Playing music is for a woman a vain and frivolous thing. And I would wish you to be the most serious and chaste woman alive. Beyond this, if you do not play well your playing will give you little pleasure and not a little embarrassment. And you will not be able to play well unless you spend ten or twelve years in this pursuit without thinking of anything else. What this would mean to you you can imagine yourself without my saying more. Therefore set aside thoughts of this frivolity and work to be humble and good and wise and obedient. Don't let yourself be carried away by these desires, indeed resist them with a strong will.<sup>6</sup>

These arguments draw on the idea that music itself is intrinsically seductive, rather than condemning the seductive environment of the music lesson. Thus playing music is, in Bembo's eyes, the antithesis of female chastity. Such a belief was bolstered by the inseparable connection of music, especially lute-playing, with the famed courtesans of Rome, Florence and Venice, who were renowned for their learning, cultural accomplishments, and musical skill, as well as for their beauty and sexual expertise. Their numerous depictions in art, music, literature, and Renaissance commentary have been amply explored in scholarship by Margaret Rosenthal, Martha Feldman, Bonnie Gordon, Richard Leppert, Julia Craig-McFeely, and others who have concluded that music, particularly singing and playing the lute, figured prominently in the self-fashioning of the *cortegiane oneste*, and led to the lute becoming a symbol of prostitutes and procuresses, especially within seventeenth-century art and literature.

Such continental fashions naturally impressed the English who were enamoured of all things Italian. The English traveller Thomas Coryat (1577–1617) comments upon the musical skill of the Venetian courtesan, saying,

she will endeavour to enchaunt thee partly with her melodious notes that she warbles out upon her lute, which she fingers with as laudable a stroake as many men that are excellent professors in the noble science of Musicke; and partly with that heart-tempting harmony of her voice.<sup>7</sup>

Lute-playing courtesans proliferate in English drama. In John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan*, Franceschina entertains and enchants a shocked Malheureux, singing and playing "The darke is my delight," an anonymous setting of which is found in Giles Earle's Songbook. (1615, *British Library Additional Ms.* 24665). In *The*

<sup>6</sup> Bembo quoted in Tomlinson (1998), p. 70 and 333.

<sup>7</sup> Corvat, quoted in Santore (1988), p. 58.

*Honest Whore*, Thomas Dekker uses the lute in two contrasting scenes where the instrument serves to underscore the courtesan Bellafront's conversion from vice to virtue. Musical courtesans also feature in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Captain* (1609–1612), Rowland's *Doctor Merrie-Man* (1609), and the anonymous *Blurt, Master-Constable; or, The Spaniards Night-Walke* (1601–1602), while George Ruggle's *Ignoramus* (1630) and Thomas Middleton's *Your Five Gallants* (1607) feature brothels disguised as music schools for girls. This may be another instance of drama echoing life, for the English Satirist Stephen Gosson describes how impoverished musicians became clever brothel owners, as if it were an everyday event:

If any part of musicke have suffered shipwrecke and arrived by fortune at their finger endes, with shewe of gentility they take up faire houses, receive lusty lasses at a price for boordes, and pipe from morning till evening for wood and coale. If their houses bee searched, some instrument of musicke is laide in sighte to dazell the eyes of every officer; all that are lodged in the house (are said to) come thither as pupilles to be well schooled.  
(Gosson 1579, *The Schoole of Abuse*)

On the continent, even convent schools came under the censure of moralists, so much so that the Council of Trent ordered in 1563 all “Ospedali and women’s convents to stop all performances of polyphonic music.” (Quoted in Wiesner 1993, p. 158). By the late seventeenth-century, immorality was so widely associated with girls’ music education that Pope Innocent XI issued an edict (in 1686 renewed in 1703) which forbade “all women—single, married, or widowed, as well as nuns—to learn music for any reason from any man including their fathers or husbands, or to play any musical instrument.”<sup>8</sup>

With such strong moral censure, and avid arguments on both sides of the debate, female music-making was a fertile ground indeed for Renaissance dramatists. To return to our opening example, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare uses the music lesson not merely as a conventional pairing of love and art; rather, through the two music-lesson scenes (Bianca’s on-stage, and Katherine’s off-stage), he comments on and overturns gendered perceptions of virtue and vice, love and marriage. At first, music appears to be functioning as a sign of female virtue, clearly contrasted by the two sisters: the exceedingly eligible Bianca seems the more virtuous to her male audience, for she “taketh most delight/In music, instruments, and poetry” (1.1.91–1.1.92), while the shrewish, lute-smashing Katherine appears to scorn both music and feminine virtues. However, the music lessons that take place reveal a different nature altogether. While Bianca stops short of smashing the lute against her tutor’s head, her reposts during this scene are petulant and (dare-we-say) shrewish, revealing a willful temperament—“I’ll not be tied to hours nor ’pointed times,” she pouts, “But learn my lessons as I please myself” (3.1.19–3.1.20); “call you this gamut?” she mocks poor Hortensio, “Tut, I like it not!” (3.1.77).<sup>9</sup> Though Bianca may appear virtuous, this “patroness of heavenly harmony” rejects the amorous overtures of her music tutor not out of a sense of virtue, but rather because she has

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Weisner (1993), p. 158. See also Bowers and Tick (1987), p. 139.

<sup>9</sup> Patricia Parker has also focused on the music lesson as the scene which most reveals Bianca’s hidden shrewishness. See Parker (2007).

already succumbed to his rival, the poet Lucentio.<sup>10</sup> Katherina, on the other hand, whose outward display seems to confirm her disdain of music as well as her violent misanthropy, in fact reacts virtuously to the inappropriate physical intimacy of her lute lesson. Shakespeare thus hints at the sisters' true natures which will be revealed more fully in the play's final scene. The supposedly virtuous and marriageable Bianca happily enters into an illicit affair and elopement, while Katherina, breaking the lute over her would-be tutor's head, holds tight to her virtue, refusing a lover, and only reluctantly accepting a husband. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare plays with music's symbolic virtue-vice dichotomy even as he overturns expectations—for Kate will be proved the dutiful wife at the end of the play, while the lute-playing Bianca is unbiddable. Ultimately, whether leading to virtue or vice, for Shakespeare, as for early modern society in general, the marriage of music and love remains unbreakable.

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<sup>10</sup> True to his calling, Shakespeare has poetry, specifically a passage from Ovid's *Heroides I*, win out over music; Patricia B. Phillippy comments insightfully on Shakespeare's choice of text and its gender implications in "'Loytering in love': Ovid's 'Heroides,' hospitality, and humanist education in 'The Taming of the Shrew'." Phillippy (1998).

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