

7. Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643), *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*  
(*balletto or dramatic madrigal*)

**Text and Translation**

1.

Tancredi, che Clorinda un uomo stima,  
Vol ne l'armi provarla al paragone.  
Va girando colei l'alpestre cima  
Ver altra porta ove d'entrar dispone.  
Segue egli impetuoso onde assai prima  
Che giunga in guisa avvien che d'armi suone,  
Ch'ella si volge e grida: "O tu, che porte  
Correndo sì?" Rispose: "E guerra e morte."

Tancredi, thinking Clorinda to be a man,  
Wishes to test her in combat.  
She wanders about the rocky peak  
Toward another gate that she may enter.  
He follows her so impetuously that before  
He reaches her his armor clatters,  
So that she turns and cries: "You, what do you bring,  
Running so?" He replies: "War and death!"

2.

"Guerra e mort'havrai," disse. "Io non rifiuto  
Darlarti se la cerchi," e fermo attende.  
Nè vol Tancredi, ch'ebbe a piè veduto  
Il suo nemico, usar cavallo, e scende,  
E impugna l'uno e l'altro il ferro acuto  
Ed aguzza l'orgoglio e l'ira accende.  
E vansi incontro a passi tardi e lenti  
Quai due tori gelosi e d'ira ardenti.

"War and death you will have," she says. "I do not refuse  
To give it to you, if you seek it," and stopping, she waited.  
Tancredi does not wish, seeing his enemy  
On foot, to use his horse; he dismounts,  
And each seizes his sharp sword,  
Whetting his pride, his anger igniting.  
And they advance upon one another with steps slow and heavy,  
Like two bulls jealous and with anger burning.

[*Sinfonia*]

3.

Notte, che nel profondo oscuro seno  
Chiudesti e nell'oblio fatto sì grande,  
Degno d'un chiaro sol, degno d'un pieno  
Teatro opre sarian sì memorande,  
Piacciati ch'indi il tragga e'n bel sereno  
Alle future età lo spieghi e mande  
Viva la fama lor e tra lor gloria  
Splenda del fosco tuo l'alta memoria.

Night, you who within your deep dark breast  
Conceal in oblivion a feat so great  
—Worthy of clear daylight, of a full  
Theater, would be events so memorable—  
May it please you that I bring it forth and, in the open,  
To future ages reveal and proclaim it.  
Long live their fame and, in their glory,  
Let shine the lofty memory of your darkness!

4.

Non schivar, non parar, non pur ritrarsi  
Vogliono costor nè qui destrezza ha parte.  
Non danno i colpi hor finti hor pieni hor scarsi;  
Toglie l'ombra e'l furor l'uso dell'arte.  
Odi le spade orribilmente urtarsi  
A mezzo il ferro e'l piè d'orma non parte.  
Sempre il piè fermo e la man sempre in moto,  
Nè scende taglio in van nè punta a voto.

They neither flinch, nor parry, nor retreat,  
Nor does dexterity here play a role.  
They do not give blows now feigned, now full, now weak;  
The darkness and their rage prevent the use of strategy.  
Hear their swords clashing horribly  
In the middle of the blades—and their feet remain planted.  
Their feet always firm, hands always in motion,  
No stroke falls in vain, nor any swordpoint astray.

5.

L'onta irrita lo sdegno alla vendetta  
E la vendetta poi l'onta rinnova,  
Onde sempre al ferir, sempre alla fretta  
Stimol novo s'aggiunge e piaga nova.  
D'hor in hor più si mesce e più ristretta  
Si fa la pugna e spada oprar non giova;  
Dansì coi pomi e infelloniti e crudi,  
Cozzan con gli elmi insieme e con gli scudi.

Dishonor [when one is struck] spurs anger to revenge,  
And revenge then renews dishonor;  
Thus constantly to wounding and to haste  
New stimulation is added, and new wounds.  
Closer and closer they mingle, and closer  
Grows the fight, so that swords are useless;  
They strike with their pommels, roughly and cruelly,  
They butt each other with their helmets and shields.

6.

Tre volte il cavalier la donna stringe  
Con le robuste braccia ed altre tante,  
Poi da quei nodi tenaci ella si scinge,  
Nodi di fier nemico e non d'amante.  
Tornano al ferro e l'un e l'altro il tinge  
Di molto sangue, e stanco ed anelante  
E questi e quegli alfin pur si ritira  
E dopo lungo faticar respira.

Three times the knight squeezes the lady  
With strong arms, and each time  
From that tenacious embrace she frees herself  
—The embrace of a fierce enemy, not a lover.  
They return to the sword, and each stains it  
With much blood; exhausted and breathless,  
Each finally retreats  
And after long struggles breathes.

7.

L'un l'altro guarda e del suo corpo esangue  
Sul pomo della spada appoggia il peso.  
Già de l'ultima stella il raggio langue  
Sul primo albor ch'è in oriente acceso.  
Vede Tancredi in maggior copia il sangue  
Del suo nemico e sè non tanto offeso.  
Ne gode e insuperbisce. O nostra folle  
Mente ch'ogni aura di fortuna estolle!

The one regards the other, the weight of his pale  
Body resting on the pommel of his sword.  
By now the rays of the last star are languishing  
In the first dawn that has risen in the east.  
Tancredi sees the greater quantity of blood  
Shed by his enemy and that he himself is not so badly hurt;  
In this he rejoices and is proud. Oh, our foolish  
Mind, that praises every breath of fortune!

8.

Misero, di che godi? O quanti mesti  
Fiano i trionfi ed infelice il vanto!  
Gli occhi tuoi pagheran, s'in vita resti,  
Di quel sangue ogni stilla un mar di pianto.  
Così tacendo e rimandando questi  
Sanguinosi guerrier cessaro alquanto.  
Ruppe il silenzio alfin Tancredi e disse,  
Perchè il suo nome l'un l'altro scoprisse:

Wretched man, in what do you rejoice? How sad  
Will be your triumphs, how unhappy your boasting!  
Your eyes will pay, if living you remain,  
For each drop of that blood with a sea of tears.  
Thus, waiting silently, these  
Bloody warriors stopped for a while.  
Breaking the silence, finally, Tancredi spoke,  
So that each might discover the other's name:

9.

“Nostra sventura è ben che qui s'impieghi  
Tanto valor dove silenzio il copra.  
Ma poi che sorte ria vien che ci nieghi  
E lode e testimon degni de l'opra,

“It is indeed our misfortune to be employing here  
Such valor, when silence covers it.  
But since an adverse fate denies us  
Praise and witnesses worthy of our deed,

Pregoti, se fra l'armi han loco i prieghi,  
Che'l tuo nome e'l tuo stato a me tu scopra,  
Acciò ch'io sappia, o vinto o vincitore,  
Chi la mia morte o la mia vita honore.”

10.

Rispose la feroce: “Indarno chiedi  
Quel ch'ho per uso di non far palese,  
Ma, chiunque io mi sia, tu innanzi vedi  
Un di quei duo che la gran torre accese.”  
Arse di sdegno a quel parlar Tancredi  
E “In mal punto il dicesti,” [indi riprese,]  
“E'l tuo dir e'l tacer di par m'alletta,  
Barbaro discortese, alla vendetta.”

11.

Torna l'ira nei cori e li trasporta  
Benche deboli in guerra a fiera pugna  
U'l'arte in bando, u'già la forza è morta,  
Ove invece d'entrami il furor pugna!  
Oh che sanguigna e spaziosa porta  
Fa l'una e l'altra spada ovunque giugna  
Nell'armi e nelle carni! e se la vita  
Non esce, sdegno tienla al petto unita.

12.

Ma ecco homai l'hora fatal è giunta  
Che'l viver di Clorinda al suo fin deve.  
Spinge egli il ferro nel bel sen di punta  
Che vi s'immerge e'l sangue avido beve,  
E la veste che, d'or vago trapunta,  
Le mammelle stringea tenere e lieve,  
L'empie d'un caldo fiume. Ella già sente  
Morirsi e'l piè le manca egro e languente.

13.

Segue egli la vittoria, e la traffitta  
Vergine minacciando incalza e preme.  
Ella, mentre cadea, la voce afflitta  
Movendo, disse le parole estreme,  
Parole ch'a lei novo spirto ditta,  
Spirto di fè, di carità, di speme,

I pray you—if in war there is a place for prayers  
—To reveal to me your name and station,  
So that I may know, whether in defeat or victory,  
Whom my death or my life honors.”

The fierce woman replied: “In vain you ask  
That which I am not accustomed to reveal,  
But, whoever I am, you see before you  
One of the two who burned the great tower.”<sup>1</sup>  
Burning with rage at this speech, Tancredi  
Replied: “It was poorly calculated to say that;  
Both your speech and your silence equally invite me,  
Ignoble barbarian, to vengeance.”

Anger returns to their hearts and carries them,  
Although weakened, to war. Oh fierce battle,  
Where skill is abandoned and strength is already dead,  
Where instead of these things, [only] rage fights.  
Oh what a bloody and spacious gateway  
Makes each sword wherever it reaches  
Into armor or flesh! And if life  
Does not depart, it is because anger holds it united to their  
breast.

But see, now the fatal hour has arrived  
When the life of Clorinda to its end must come.  
He thrusts the end of his sword into her beautiful breast,  
So that it immerses itself and eagerly drinks the blood,  
And the garment, with gold beautifully embroidered,  
That clasps her tender, delicate breasts,  
Fills with a hot stream. She already feels  
Herself dying and her feet give out, weak and  
collapsing.

He follows up his victory, and the wounded  
Maiden is menacingly pursued and pressed.  
She, as she falls, her afflicted voice  
Moving, speaks her final words,  
Words spoken to her by a new spirit,  
A spirit of faith, charity, and hope,

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<sup>1</sup> Clorinda had been one of two Muslim warriors responsible for burning the siege tower that the Christians had been using their attack on Jerusalem.

Virtù che Dio l'infonde, e se rubella  
In vita fu, la vol in morte ancella.

Virtues that God instills in her, for though a rebel  
In life was she, he wishes her in death his servant.

14.

“Amico, hai vinto. Io ti perdon, perdona  
Tu ancora—al corpo no, che nulla pave—  
All'alma sì. Deh per lei prega e dona  
Battesmo a me, ch'ogni mia colpa lave.”  
In queste voci languide risuona  
Un non so che di flebile e soave  
Ch'al cor gli scende ed ogni sdegno ammorza  
E gli occhi a lagrimar l'invoglia e sforza.

“Friend, you have won. I pardon you; pardon  
Me as well—not my body, which fears nothing—  
But my soul. Pray for it, and give  
Baptism to me, which all my sins washes.”  
In this dying voice there resounded  
Something so mournful and soft  
That it rose to his heart and all anger died,  
And his eyes to tears were induced and forced.

15.

Poco quindi lontan, ne sen del monte,  
Scaturia mormorando un picciol rio.  
Egli v'accorse e l'elmo empì nel fonte,  
E tornò mesto al grande ufficio e pio.  
Tremar sentì la man mentre la fronte  
Non conosciuta ancor sciolse e scoprio.  
La vide e la conobbe e restò senza  
E voce e moto. Ahi vista! ahi conoscenza!

Not far from there, in the hollow of the mountain,  
Gushed murmuring a little stream.  
He ran to it and filled his helmet in the spring,  
And returned sadly to his great and pious duty.  
He felt his hand tremble as the face,  
As yet unknown, was unmasked and revealed.  
He saw her and recognized her and was struck  
Voiceless and motionless. What vision! What revelation!

16.

Non morì già che sue virtù accolse  
Tutte in quel punto e in guardia al cor le  
E premendo il suo affanno a dar si volse  
Vita con l'acqua a chi col ferro uccise.  
Mentre egli il suon de'sacri detti sciolse,  
Coi di gioia trasmutossi e rise,  
E in atto di morir lieta e vivace  
Dir pareva: “S'apre il ciel, io vado in pace.”

He did not yet die, for gathering his strength  
Together in one place, he set it to guard his heart, mise;  
And putting aside his anguish turned to give  
Life with water to her whom with iron he had killed.  
While he unfurled the sound of the sacred words,  
She, with joy transformed, smiled,  
And, at the moment of death, happy and full of life,  
Seemed to say: “Heaven opens; I go in peace.”

—Torquato Tasso (*Gerusalemme liberata*, Canto xii, stanzas 52–62 and 64–68)

## Edition

Our edition is, as in Selection 4, an earlier twentieth-century one. Although largely true to the original partbooks of Monteverdi's Eighth Book of Madrigals, the editor has added indications of dynamics and tempo as well as a realization of the figured bass. Monteverdi's original dynamics are spelled out in italics, as in measures 171–72, where the word *piano* is closely followed by *forte*.<sup>2</sup> Also original are a number of other indications given in regular type, translated below:

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<sup>2</sup> The editor's suggestion to play a crescendo here is surely a correct interpretation of Monteverdi's intention.

- m. 18: *motto del cavallo* = “motion of the horse”
- m. 73: *sinfonia* = “instrumental passage”
- mm. 80 and 106: *passaggio* probably refers to what would later be called a ritornello
- m. 174: *qui si lascia l'arco, e si strappano le corde con duoi ditti* = “here the bow is put down and the strings are pulled with two fingers”—that is, a strong pizzicato
- m. 183: *qui si ripiglia l'arco* = “here the bow is taken up again”
- mm. 366ff.: *arcata sola* = “in one bow,” that is, go from *forte* to *piano* in a single bow
- m. 445 (strings): *queste ultima nota va in arcata morendo* = “this last note is bowed [so as to] die away”
- m. 445 (Clorinda): *lunga voce in piano* = “long note, becoming soft”

Omitted from this edition is another indication at m. 133: *principio della guerra* = “beginning of the battle.”

The archaic triple-time signatures at m. 18 and elsewhere probably imply a specific tempo relationship with the preceding common-time sections. The editor suggests equating each half-measure of this triple time with a quarter note in the preceding section (see m. 38). But this and other editorial tempo equations in the score probably assume too slow a tempo for the common-time sections, whose beat might fall instead on the half note.

## Performance Issues

Monteverdi's foreword specifies that the accompanying instruments were probably meant to be what we would call a string quartet—two violins, viola, and an instrument resembling the cello—plus a contrabass viola da gamba and harpsichord. Many aspects of violin construction and technique at this date differed from those of modern instruments but can be reconstructed from surviving instruments, pictures, and written accounts. By the same token, the nature of early-Baroque Italian harpsichords is fairly well understood, although the precise manner of realizing the figured bass is more difficult to ascertain. The editorial continuo realization in our edition was intended for the piano and omits the arpeggiation and other ornaments that a harpsichordist of Monteverdi's day would probably have employed. Although the interpretation of the harmony is largely correct, many details of the realization, such as the high register in measures 108–9 and the passing notes in measures 118–23 (in part to reflect changing notes in the voice), are contrary to seventeenth-century practice.

Monteverdi directs that the playing reflect the changing emotional character of the text, implying changes of tempo and dynamics beyond those indicated in the score. Similarly, the narrator is enjoined to sing in a way that reflects the “emotions of the oration” and not to add any embellishments except in Stanza 3, the invocation of Night.

The composer's foreword also describes an early staged performance in which the two characters sang in costume as they acted out the scene; Tancredi even made his entrance on some sort of hobby horse (*a cavallo mariano*)! Presumably this stage machine, as well as the stage action, was stylized rather than realistic; Monteverdi's foreword suggests that the action was choreographed so that the actors moved and struck their blows in time with the music. Today this work is usually performed in concert, without staging, but one wonders how the musical effects might be enhanced by appropriate lighting, scenery, costume, and action.