

**Thomas Morley's
First Book of Madrigals to Four Voices.
A Pastoral Romance**

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ABSTRACT

All the important lutenist song-writers from the Elizabethan Age such as Thomas Campian, Robert Jones, John Dowland, Thomas Morley, Philip Rosseter, Thomas Ford, William Corkine or Francis Pilkington were undoubtedly acquainted with the arrangement of poems in sequences suggested in the Sonnet Cycles. Thomas Morley's *First Book of Madrigals to Four Voices* (1594) is maybe one of the most significant examples of this. The sequenced reading of this set of madrigals by Morley clearly indicates that the author selects and locates the poems within his work with the sole intention of creating a madrigal cycle. The cycle allows the author to provide his audience with an amorous story similar to those found in the pastoral romances that were so popular at the time. The later inclusion of four new songs, two of them in his Italian Collection (1597) and the other two in the 1600 second edition of his work, definitely lends support to the sequenced reading of this set of madrigals as an amorous story characteristic of any pastoral romance. It also makes the reading particularly interesting. Without these four new songs, Morley's *First Book of Madrigals to Four Voices* would have never reached the listener of the time as the conventional amorous story of two shepherds who can finally enjoy the happy ending expected in pastoral romances.

During the period between 1597 and 1612, a collection of about thirty volumes of songs by important lutenist song-writers such as Thomas Campian, Robert Jones, John Dowland, Thomas Morley, Philip Rosseter, Thomas Ford, William Corkine, or Francis Pilkinton was issued in England. Some time later, this collection starts to be considered a mere combination of music and verse. It is generally assumed that its authors' only purpose when making up these volumes was to "enhance the beauty of the recitation

through the simplicity of music.”¹ Criticism has not paid enough attention to the possibility that these authors could have had a clear objective in mind when selecting, locating and organizing the poems within their volumes the way they did. Therefore, these authors’ possible interest in providing their song-books with an internal organization in sequence similar to that of the Elizabethan Sonnet Cycles, has been neglected for a long period of time.²

The problem is that by the time these volumes were written, their authors were undoubtedly acquainted with the arrangement of poems in sequences. Thomas Morley’s *First Book of Madrigals to Four Voices* (1594) is a quite significant example of this. Not surprisingly, read as a sequence of twenty poems, this work by Morley turns out to be the conventional amorous story of two shepherds called Philistus and Clorinda. This fact is of primary importance, because Philistus and Clorinda’s story is quite similar to any of the amorous stories that can be found in any pastoral romance of the time. Moreover, the importance of Morley’s example comes given by his later addition of four poems, two of them to his 1597 Italian Collection, and the other ones to a second edition of his *First Book of Madrigals* published in 1600. This addition of four new poems definitely supports the approach to his book of madrigals as the amorous story of any pastoral romance. The only difference is that Philistus and Clorinda’s story is made up of twenty-four selected poems.

The main goal of this paper is to carry out a sequenced reading of Morley’s volume, always pointing to the reasons why the additional poems included in later editions are basic to achieve this goal. Through the sequenced reading of Morley’s *Book*, the paper makes explicit the narration of the amorous story of a pastoral romance that has remained implicit in the *Book* by Morley for a long period of time. In this way, the paper shows that

¹ In the General Preface to his *The English School of Lutenist Song Writers*, E.H. Fellowes talks about the collection as follows (1920:iv): “We have in this collection of volumes a rich store of national song, the music of which is wedded to superb verse belonging to the finest period of our national literature. And the words were set by these lutenist composers with a true appreciation of their poetic value; their sole purpose was to enhance the beauty of the recitation of such lines through the medium of simple musical expression as opposed to any idea of elaborate device. It was their wonderful success in carrying out this special purpose placed this group of English song-writers among the highest rank”.

² In the introduction to her edition of the *Elizabethan Sonnet Cycles: Licia* by Giles Fletcher and *Phillis* by Thomas Lodge, Martha Foote Crow (1896:9) points to the opening sonnet of Chapman’s *Mistress Philosophy* (1595) as an example of critical attitude against the monotony of the popular Cycles. In 1597, it is impossible for the lutenist song-writers such as Morley not to know the characteristics of a genre that was being called into question as early as 1595. William O. Harris (1971:451-469) provides further information about the popularity of the Elizabethan Sonnet Cycles.

Morley, like the rest of the lutenist song-writers of his time, was perfectly aware of the sequenced readings provided in the Sonnet Cycles. There is no better reason for this author to definitely make up his mind to combine music not only with "the beauty of the recitation" but also with lyrics organized in such a way as to reach the listener of his madrigals as the conventional amorous story to be found in any pastoral romance.

In her *Elizabethan Poetry. A Study in Conventions, Meaning and Expression*, Hallet Smith talks about pastoral love in the following terms:

Love is simple in essence, but the variety and complexity of its consequences make for a total paradox. Though there is no jot of reason in love, the lover invariably reasons about it. Pastoral provides amply for this paradox. It utilizes for the purpose various devices which taken out of their context seem absurd. The most common perhaps is the "cross-eyed Cupid" situation, in which A loves B, B loves C, C loves D, and D loves A. It is used in Montemayor, and of course it is a device in Lodge's *Rosalynde* and Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, as well as in the woodland part of a *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The paradox is that love itself is so simple; the Lyric and plot elements of pastoral romance work together to enforce the contrast between simplicity and complexity. (Smith 1952:17-18)

The "Cross-eyed Cupid" situation, linked to the great popularity of pastoral romances by the time Morley's *First Book of Madrigals to Four Voices* (1594) was first published, clearly justifies the sequenced reading of this set of madrigals by Morley as a pastoral romance.³ Unsurprisingly, read as a sequence of 20 poems, Thomas Morley's *First Book of Madrigals to Four Voices* (1594) turns out to be a conventional love triangle in which Philistus, A, falls in love with the false Clorinda, B, while she is blindly in love with Thyrsis, C (in turn probably in love with a fourth D) being that the reason why he ends up disdaining the false Clorinda himself. From the very beginning of this set of madrigals, the shepherd Philistus is perfectly aware of his beloved Clorinda's infatuation with Thyrsis. Despite his efforts to comfort himself, the forsaken shepherd keeps on suffering from Clorinda's unrequited love till he meets the nymph Lycoris. Philistus' fortune is supposed to change after his meeting with Lycoris. The nymph's situation is quite similar to Philistus' own amorous story. She is also a forsaken nymph

³ As Jusserand (1966: 217) explains, "Greeks, Romans, Italians, Spaniards, the French and the English, have differed in a multitude of points, but they have one and all delighted in pastorals. No class of heroes either in history or in fiction has uttered so much verse and prose as the keepers of sheep." In fact, as Jusserand states in his introduction, "Not a line of Shakespeare was put into French before the eighteenth century, while prose fictions by Nash, Greene and Sidney were translated more than a century earlier" (27).

who has been unable to prevent her false beloved Dorus to forsake her. But very soon, Philistus realizes that Lycoris's love pleasures can not substitute Clorinda's love, and he starts suffering again for his old beloved's unrequited love.

In the first song of the *Book*, the shepherd Philistus reflects upon the impossibility of moving his beloved Clorinda, blindly in love with Thyrsis, to live with him and be his love. In order to do that, the forsaken lover makes use of a metaphor that allows him to identify Clorinda's beauty with the warm seasons: spring and summer. In contrast, this metaphor also fits Philistus' intention to relate the cruelty of Clorinda's heart with the cold autumn:

April is in my mistress' face,
And July in her eyes hath place;
Within her bosom is September,
But in her heart a cold December. (I:1-4)⁴

With the metaphor in the first song of the *Book*, Philistus emphasizes the cold, disdainful cruelty of his beloved Clorinda; not to be expected in such a warm, beautiful woman. In this way, he can justify his attitude in the second song of the *Book*, where he definitely makes up his mind to renounce to Clorinda's unrequited love:

Clorinda false, adieu, thy love torments me:
Let Thyrsis have since he contents thee.
O grief and bitter anguish!
For thee, unkind, I languish! (II:1-4)

Immediately afterwards, in the third song of the *Book*, Philistus tries to convince himself of the fact that Clorinda's love for Thyrsis is just a way for the nymph to prove the honesty of the love he says to profess her:

Why sit I here, alas, complaining
With sobs and groanings my disdainings?
O this mirth contenteth
Whom grief of mind tormenteth.
Cease this weeping, fool, she does but this to prove thee; (III:1-5)⁵

⁴ All quotations from Morley's *First Book of Madrigals* have been taken out of Thurston Dart's revised edition of Edmund H. Fellowes' previous work. The reviser provides the "Lyrics Set to Music by Thomas Morley in his *First Book of Madrigals to Four Voices*."

⁵ It is common to find nymphs who prove the honesty of their lovers before accepting them in pastoral romances such as Montemayor's *Diana*, Greene's

But, right away, in the second part of this same third song, the forsaken Philistus realizes that, in thinking so, he is just trying to comfort himself in vain:

Away, away, false comfort! no thou canst not move me.
You that saw too much, mine eyes, shall dearly buy it,
You that made my heart believe I did espy it.
Hence false comfort! in vain thou dost ease me;
Away, I say, thou canst not please me. (III:6-10)

Once he is aware of his real condition as a forsaken lover, the shepherd Philistus devotes the following three songs of the *Book* to complain about Clorinda's cruel inability to pity neither his sufferings, nor his love labours. The last two lines of Song V are a good example of this: "See a nymph unkind and cruel/ So to scorn her only jewel!" (V:3-4).

After so much suffering, a new female character appears in Song VII. It is at this point that Philistus meets a nymph called Lycoris, who has been also forsaken by her cruel beloved Dorus:

Her lovely cheeks in dew of roses steeping,
Lycoris thus sat weeping,
Ah Dorus false, that hast my heart bereft me,
And now unkind hast left me,
Alas cannot my beauty move thee? (VII:1-5)

Lycoris's amorous story is so similar to his own, that it starts reminding Philistus of the cruelty of love, making him feel sad once again. Not surprisingly, it is Lycoris herself who unexpectedly changes Philistus' mind by making him fall in love again. As a nightingale in the month of May, Lycoris is full of kindly lust and, "Love's inspiring", devotes herself to invite forsaken shepherds such as Philistus to stop weeping in order to be able to enjoy the pleasures of love: "Come, lovers, follow me, and leave this weeping. / See where the lovely little God lies sleeping" (XI:1-2). However, it is important to take into account that when she talks about the "pleasures of love," Lycoris is just making reference to that kind of lustful love that can be only enjoyed while not being caught by the darts of Cupid: "Hence follow me away, begone, dispatch us! / And that apace, lest, if he wake, he catch us" (XI:9-10).

Menaphon, or even the continuation of *Rosalynde* by Thomas Lodge carried out by Shakespeare in *As You Like It*.

Lycoris is the one to invite the shepherds of the forest to enjoy the pleasures of love, being the kind of non-idealized shepherdess to be neither wooed nor moved with presents. Because of this, Philistus is totally disappointed, and makes up his mind to definitely forsake her:

I will no more come to thee,
That flout'st me when I woo thee;
Still ty hy hy hy thou criest,
And rings and pins and gloves deniest. (XIII:1-4)

Philistus is used to suffering from Clorinda's unrequited love without getting any kind of favor in exchange. For this reason, the shepherd does not manage to understand Lycoris's attitude to love: always away from Cupid's darts, but enjoying his pleasures with no need of woos or complaints. Lycoris's amorous invitation to other shepherds in Song XV can work as a kind of motto summarizing the nymph's attitude:

Sport we, my lovely treasure!
For why? long love serving
Asketh equal deserving.
Let be our sportful pleasure
To kiss the while, love's token.
Joy more that can be spoken! (XV:1-6)

The lustful happiness of the rest of the shepherds in the Book he is unable to share, makes Philistus feel bad again in the last two songs of the 1594 edition. This time, the shepherd does not only wish to die while complaining about the cruelty of love in general terms, but also to meet her beloved Clorinda again.⁶ With this intention, and always in case they just meet her by chance, Philistus asks the nymphs of the mountains to provide his beloved with the garlands of flowers he has made to move Clorinda to be his love with presents. He also asks the nymphs to let Clorinda know with a kind kiss that she is the only one he would never forsake:

Gentle nymphs that tread these mountains,
Say, whilst sweetly you sit playing,
Saw you my sweet Daphne straying,
Straying along your crystal fountains?

⁶ In the song, Philistus addresses Clorinda as "his Daphne."

If so you chance to meet her,
Kiss her and kindly greet her;
From me these garlands take her,
And say I'll ne'er forsake her. (XX:1-8)

The pastoral romance that can be read out of Thomas Morley's (1594) edition of his *First Book of Madrigals to Four Voices* does not present the happy ending to be expected in a conventional pastoral romance, where "cross-eyed Cupid" love paradoxes get usually solved at the end through the ceremonies of marriage. Maybe because of that, in the (1597) Italian Collection of this same Book of Madrigals, Morley decided to add two other songs taken out of his *Two Canzonets. Or Little Short Songs to Four Voyces* (1597), trying to provide the pastoral romance implied in his set of madrigals with a happy ending in this way. The first of these two songs starts with a question in which a character speaking in first person asks his/her heart the reason why it has "taken, forgotten, and forsaken" (no. 8 in the original). In the same song, the addressed "heart" tries to justify his/her behavior answering that it is impossible not to carry out all those actions when burning in love:

My heart why hast thou taken
And forgotten and forsaken?
Thou dost it lest, inspired
With his flames, thy heart be fired. (8:1-4)

In the second song added in the Italian Collection, a character assures in first person that his/her heart is still burning in love. In this way, his/her listener can be aware of the fact that this character's past amorous problems have not been able to prevent his/her heart from keeping on working:

Still my heart frieth,
Yet it never dieth.
Ah! that my love hath not some mortal firing
And that no storms may quench his heart inspiring. (9:1-4)
[no. 9 in the original]

At first sight, it does not seem difficult for the listener of the madrigals to identify the shepherd Philistus with the "heart" addressed in the two songs added in Morley's Italian Collection. It is not to be forgotten that, throughout the different songs of this Book by Morley, the shepherd Philistus does not only make up his mind to forget Clorinda's love in order to be able to accept Lycoris's invitation to enjoy the pleasures of love. He also forsakes the nymph Lycoris before ending up searching for his old beloved Clorinda.

Nevertheless, the reception of this set of madrigals as a pastoral romance becomes clearer once the two new songs are included in Morley's (1600) edition of his *First Book of Madrigals to Four Voices*. In the first of these two songs, a character tells in first person the story of a maid he/she heard complaining about her beloved's disdain: "A pretty merry maid that long before had walked / 'Hey ho! trolly lo! heavy heart,' quoth she, / 'My lovely lovely lover hath disdained me'" (XXI:4-6). In the second, the encounter between this character and the forsaken pretty maid takes place already:

On a fair morning as I came by the way,
Met I a pretty maid in the merry month of May,
When a sweet love sings his lovely lovely lay,
And every bird upon the bush bechirps it up so gay. (XXII:1-4)

Following the same process of relating the songs in the *Book* by Morley to convey Clorinda and Philistus' conventional love story that is being carried out in this paper, the listener of these songs is perfectly able to identify the "pretty maid in the merry month of May" in the last song above with the "forsaken pretty nymph" of the previous song. In the same way, the "pretty maid that long before had walked" in the first song included in the (1600) edition, can be also identified with the "sweet Daphne straying along the crystal fountains" the shepherd Philistus was looking for in the last song of the (1594) edition. Thus, the two songs taken out of Morley's *Canzonets. Or Little Short Songs to Foure Voyces* (1597) make much more sense, and turn out to be the dialogue Philistus and Clorinda keep after finally meeting in the second song of the (1600) edition. Apart from Lycoris and the nymphs of the mountains, Clorinda is the only one in the whole set of madrigals who knows Philistus' past. Because of this, she is the only one who can demand an explanation from him once they meet. And, no doubt, Philistus is the one who can not only try to justify himself for having forgotten Clorinda; but also make her know that he remains passionately in love with her despite the past events: "Still my heart frieth, / yet it never dieth" (9:1-2). In this way, Clorinda finally realizes that Philistus keeps on loving her despite the fact of having taken, forgotten and forsaken in the past: "Ah! that my love hath not some mortal firing / And that no storms may quench his heart inspiring" (9:3-4).

As has been proved above, the sequenced reading of Thomas Morley's *First Book of Madrigals to Four Voices* carried out in this paper clearly shows that Morley purposefully selected and located the songs within his work with the intention of creating a madrigal cycle that would allow him to provide his audience with an amorous story similar to those of the pastoral romances so popular at the time. The inclusion of four new songs,

two of them in his Italian Collection (1597) and the other two in the (1600) (second) edition of his work, definitely lends support to the sequenced reading of Morley's set of madrigals. It also makes the reading particularly interesting. Without these four new songs, Thomas Morley's *First Book of Madrigals to Four Voices* would have never reached the listener of the time as the conventional amorous story of two shepherds who can finally enjoy a happy ending.

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