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## A Note on the Origin of Ariadne in Mantua

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The autograph of this letter in the Colby Library is unsigned. It was Vernon Lee's rough draft, much scratched and revised, but she labeled it "Exact copy." Her reaction to Lillah McCarthy's two suggestions—that she rewrite the play within the play and cut out the fourth act altogether—seems a natural one. The fifth act, which contains the play within the play, accomplishes the author's purpose. The stage-directions and the speeches are finely turned, beautiful prose. This fifth act is exactly what Vernon Lee wished it to be. As for the proposal to omit the fourth act altogether, this was to ask the author to cut the very act where the conflict, which is the theme of the play, is given dramatic personification! It is therefore not surprising that Vernon Lee responded as she did.

As a result of her reply to Lillah McCarthy's proposals, the project was dropped, and so far as I know, *Ariadne* has never been given on the English stage. I have heard that it *was* given, in Florence, in one of the later years of Miss Paget's life; but I have been unable to verify this, or to learn whether the play was given in English or in Italian, or whether Miss Paget attended the performance. Doubtless she did, and I like to imagine her gratification.



### A NOTE ON THE ORIGIN OF *ARIADNE IN MANTUA*

By *ERMANNIO F. COMPARETTI*

**I**N trying to locate the source of her *Ariadne* among her impressions of Mantua, Vernon Lee, looking into her "mind one day, found that a certain song of the early seventeenth century . . . had entered that Palace of Mantua, and was, in some manner not easy to define, the musical shape of what must have happened there. And that," she says, "was the story I have set forth in the . . . little

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Drama." The song she refers to was an air, *Amarilli*, by Caccini, printed in an anthology by Parisotti and placed just next to Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna*. Perhaps, as she says, it is not easy to define exactly the manner of this transposition of musical shape to literary narrative, but if one understands something of Mantua and of Mantuan music in the period which haunts Vernon Lee's fancy, the insistence of her "half-lapsed recollection" coupled with the vitality of her labor over the air by Caccini (she refers to working "over and over the piece and its French translation") makes the ultimate literary inspiration and her explanation of it very logical.

The time of the play *Ariadne in Mantua* (late sixteenth century) was also a period of new and momentous musical achievement in Italy, particularly Northern Italy. A surprising share of this activity was centered in Mantua at the brilliant court of the Gonzagas. Duke Vincenzo, in an artistic rivalry with such eminent houses as the Medici in Florence and the Este in Ferrara, to both of which he was related, was zealous in attracting the best artists, poets and musicians to Mantua. In 1590 he appointed as "singer and player of the viola" one of the most talented young musicians, Claudio Monteverdi. Within a few years the brilliant achievements of this composer brought international recognition to Mantua as a foremost center of musical activity. As early as 1592 Monteverdi published a set of madrigals, the texts of eight of which were selected from Giambattista Guarini's *Pastor Fido*, a pastoral drama. This is of special significance. As the name *pastorale* suggests, the subjects in these dramas dealt with natural scenes, with shepherds and sylvan deities, with fields and forests. Since they could be easily set to music because of their lyric content, brevity and language "flowery and sweet . . . so that it has melody in its every part," *pastorale* were the highly important predecessors of the *dramma in musica* or opera, the form in which Monteverdi won the greatest renown.

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In 1600 Duke Vincenzo visited Florence to represent the Gonzagas at the marriage of Henry IV of France to Maria de Medici. It was here that he first became aware of the new and revolutionary Florentine *dramma in musica*. At least two of these, the earliest of operas, were performed as part of the elaborate festivities of the occasion. Though it is not certain that Monteverdi accompanied the Duke on this visit, there is some evidence that he did. In either case he was well informed on the new developments in Florence although not immediately interested. Communications between the two cities were close; many Florentine artists and composers, including Giulio Caccini, had performed in Mantua. Since Caccini was perhaps the strongest exponent of the new expressive style of singing, his songs were received with much enthusiasm in Mantua. One of these was the *Amarilli* mentioned by Vernon Lee.

It was not until the spring carnival of 1607 that Monteverdi performed his famous opera *Orfeo* which far surpassed in dramatic power and musical skill the earlier Florentine efforts. *Orfeo* definitely established opera as a new and vital musical form and launched it on its brilliant career. The immediate popularity of *Orfeo* was overwhelming. The Mantuans had long been partial to this legend. More than a century earlier, Angelo Poliziano had produced his celebrated pastorale *Orfeo*. As tribute to this poet, Andrea Mantegna in 1474 had included a picture of him in the frescos of the Camera dei Sposi in the Gonzaga palace. And now Monteverdi's *Orfeo* seemed to climax what had long been a cherished community tradition.

Of equal dramatic power was Monteverdi's second opera *Arianna*, commissioned by Duke Vincenzo for the wedding of his son and heir Francesco with Margarita di Savoia in 1608. Unfortunately all the music of this work has been lost, except for the well-known *Lament of Arianna* (English, *Ariadne*) referred to by Vernon Lee in her preface. This is a song of extraordinary emotional power, perhaps the fin-

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est example of the new operatic style of expressive singing so well formulated in Caccini's important book, *Le Nuove Musiche*, a few years earlier.

In the annals of music history we rarely find such an alliance as that of Duke Vincenzo, so eager for lavish performances and continual new music, with Monteverdi, the greatest composer of his time. The walls of the Mantuan palace witnessed in this alliance one of the last brilliant flourishes of the Renaissance and the beginning of modern music. It is not surprising that to Vernon Lee, a lover of Italy and Mantua, and herself so gifted, there would be rich suggestion for a strain of early seventeenth-century song within those walls which still stand in an empty palace.



### "COACHING" AN ILLUSTRATOR

THROUGH the kindness of Mr. Travis Gill, the Library has acquired an extremely interesting letter in the autograph of Arthur Locker, for many years editor of the London *Graphic*. (He was the editor who, when *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was being serialized in the *Graphic*, objected to the scene in which Angel Clare carried the three dairymaids across the flooded lane, and made Hardy substitute a rickety wheel-barrow for Clare's sturdy arms!) The letter now at Colby was written by Locker to Robert Barnes concerning the illustrations which Barnes was to prepare for Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

THE GRAPHIC,

190, Strand, LONDON.

June 5th. 1885

Robert Barnes Esq.

Dear Sir,

I believe Mr. Cav. Thomas has written to you enclosing Mr. Hardy's letter about his story: "The Mayor of Casterbridge." He enclosed a