

# "Curling graces" and "vermin" : problems with the ornaments for Corelli's op. 5

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„CURLING GRACES“ AND „VERMIN“.<sup>1</sup>  
 PROBLEMS WITH THE ORNAMENTS FOR CORELLI'S OP. 5

by NEAL ZASLAW

*To the memory of Christopher Hogwood (1941–2014)*

In 2013 Christopher Hogwood and Ryan Mark published a corpus of ornaments for Corelli's iconic violin sonatas as notated by violinists between 1710 and the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> In a clear, practical manner, their edition provides one solution to the difficulties of presenting diverse sets of ornaments – difficulties that defeated earlier attempts to publish that material.<sup>3</sup> The new edition is a signal accomplishment. And now that these sets of ornaments are readily available, the need arises to seek satisfactory answers to questions about why they were written down, what their relationship to Corelli's, his contemporaries' and subsequent generations' practices may have been, and what 21<sup>st</sup>-century performers and scholars could do (and perhaps, too, should avoid doing) with them. This essay represents an attempt to pick up where I left off two decades ago in „Ornaments for Corelli's Violin Sonatas, Op. 5“.<sup>4</sup> My remarks fall into four sections, the first of which deals with where things stand now, the second with sources, the third with chronology, and finally, why such concerns matter.

*I. Where do things stand now?*

Since my 1996 essay and the clutch of articles in *Early Music* stimulated by it, further research on op. 5 has appeared in various scholarly publications.<sup>5</sup> The new edition of op. 5 ornaments is of a different order, however, because it will reach many musicians who do not follow the specialised publications in which such scholarly writings appear and who, until now, have had only very partial access to this material.

The edition is ingeniously organised into eight fascicles – four for Sonatas 1–6, four for Sonatas 7–12. Each group of four contains a score volume and three parts. The score volume offers a lengthy introduction, facsimiles of sources, an Urtext edition of Corelli's original Roman edition of 1700 with a parallel version of

<sup>1</sup> „Curling graces“ and „vermin“ are expressions for free ornamentation coined by Roger North. See John Wilson (ed.), *Roger North on Music. Being a Selection from his Essays Written during the Years c. 1695–1728*. London: Novello, 1959.

<sup>2</sup> Arcangelo Corelli, *Sonatas for Violin and Basso continuo, op. 5, with Contemporary Embellishments, and a Keyboard Realisation by Antonio Tonelli (1686–1765)*, ed. by Christopher Hogwood and Ryan Mark, Kassel et al.: Bärenreiter, © 2013 (BA 9455), two vols.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Gartmann, „Research Report of a Non-edition. Difficulties in Editing Corelli's Op. V“, *Studi corelliani VI*, 191–209.

<sup>4</sup> In: *EM* 24/1, 95–116.

<sup>5</sup> See Barnett, Gregory, „Arcangelo Corelli“, in: *Oxford Bibliographies Online. Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011; especially the section on ornaments.



the same with basso-continuo realisations by Antonio Tonelli (1686–1765), and finally a critical commentary. The three parts contain, respectively, the same Urtext edition of the Rome 1700 score („Violone o Cimbalo“), a violin part only of the same, and an ornamented violin part of only those movements for which ornamented versions from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century are known. Where multiple sets of ornaments survive for a single movement, they are presented in roughly chronological order. This arrangement of parts and scores makes it easy for performers to have, side-by-side on their music stands, the original and the ornamented versions of any given movement. When I recall the amount of time and money one had to expend to acquire this material in the late 1970s, I realise what a gift the new edition is, and will be, to scholars and instrumentalists as a foundation for teaching, research, critical writing, and performance.

It would be a shame, however, if the edition's excellence and utility were to create an impression that now what remains to be tidied up comprises only minor matters and that, therefore, it is time to move on to other pursuits.<sup>6</sup> What follows suggests a few avenues of thought, research and action that perhaps may prove fruitful in the next few years.

## II. Sources

I begin by discussing a few of the sources not found in the new edition. Figure 1 shows the edition's table of surviving sources of ornaments for entire movements of op. 5. I have superimposed two symbols on the table (\* and #) to indicate, respectively, sets of ornaments that remain anonymous and sets that are not included in the edition. The editors discuss the omitted sources and explain why each was put aside, citing incompleteness, superficiality, arrangements for instruments other than violin, or origination later than their cutoff date.

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Burghley * #							1-3					
Cambridge *									1			
Cateni					5							
Dubourg					1, 3		3	1-4	1-4	1-5	1-5	
Eastman * #	1											
Festing					1, 3		3	1-3	1-4			
Forli * #									4			
Galeazzi #			3									
Geminiani									1-4			

<sup>6</sup> I wish to state unambiguously that I am *not* suggesting that Hogwood and Mark themselves believed that their edition precluded the need for further thought, research and action. I fear, rather, that others might jump to that unwarranted interpretation.



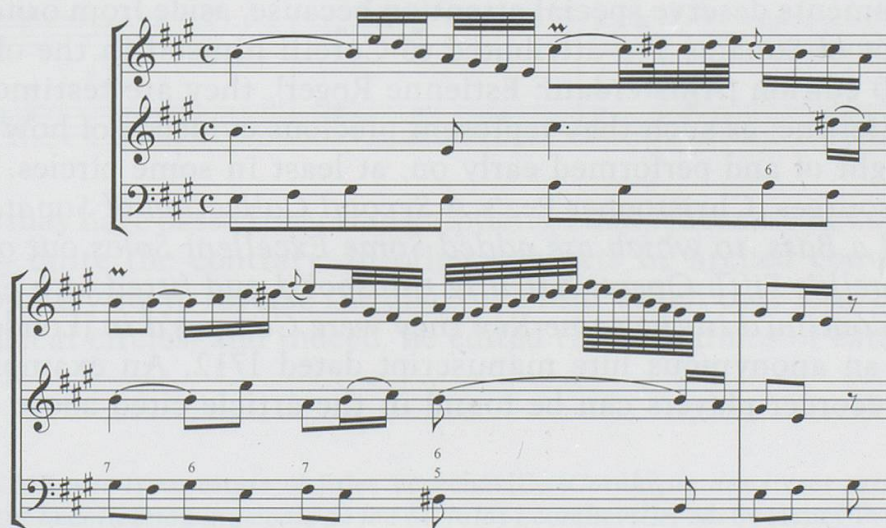
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Lund *			1									
Madan #	3						1, 3	1			2	
Manchester *							1-3	1-3	1	1	1	
McGibbon					1, 3, 5		1, 3	1	1, 3, 4	1, 3, 4	1, 3, 5	
McLean					5					4		
Roger	1, 4	1, 4	1, 3	1, 4	1, 3	1, 4						
Roman				1-4	1, 3	1				1-5	1	
Tartini	1						3	1, 3	1			
Valentini					5							

\* indicates sets of ornaments that remain anonymous  
 # indicates sets that are not included in the edition

Fig. 1: Table from Hogwood’s edition (see n. 2, page 179) with my additions.

„Incompleteness“ refers to the fact that the edition presents fully ornamented movements rather than ideas for occasional isolated passages. I am unsure why brief examples should automatically be considered of lesser utility than longer ones – depending on cases, of course. Besides, the edition is inconsistent in this regard. Why, for instance, include a lovely ornamented version for the end of the Allemanda (op. 5, no. 8/2) by Michael Christian Festing while excluding an intense fragment for the beginning of op. 5, no.11/1 written anonymously in an 18<sup>th</sup>-century English edition (see Ex. 1)?<sup>7</sup>

Ex. 1: Ornaments for the opening only of the Sonata in E, Op. 5, no. 11: first movement, written anonymously in a printed edition by John Walsh, London.



<sup>7</sup> NZ-Wt = Alexander Turnbull Library (Wellington, New Zealand), Special Printed Collections. See Peter Walls, „Performing Corelli’s Violin Sonatas, Op. 5“, *EM* 24/1 (1996), 133–142.



By „superficiality“ (my expression) I have in mind sources in which there are no „curling“ (so-called „arbitrary“) graces, but only a few small, „necessary“ ornaments – unaccented passing notes, appoggiaturas, trills, turns, mordents, etc., and sometimes also stereotypical cadential figurations. It is undeniably true that, compared to torrents of hemi-semi-demiquavers, such *agréments* look modest on the page, but I suggest that they represent a fundamental element of what we are trying to understand, master, teach or perform. Example 2 contains an instance of such jottings applied to op. 5, no. 7/3, transcribed from a learner’s music-book in the British Library.<sup>8</sup>

Ex. 2: „Necessary“ ornaments for the Sonata in *d*, op. 5, no. 7: third movement, from an 18<sup>th</sup>-century learner’s book.

The third category of ornaments omitted from the new edition comprises those intended for instruments other than the violin. The idioms and technical constraints of various instruments are certainly not negligible considerations, but the principles underlying ornamentation are similar among them and can shed light on practices relevant to violinists. Two instances of non-violin ornaments deserve special attention because, aside from ornaments for the Adagios of Sonatas 1–6 attributed to Corelli himself in the often-reproduced 1710 edition (Amsterdam: Estienne Roger), they are testimonies from Corelli’s lifetime; as such they represent precious evidence of how his works were thought of and performed early on, at least in some circles. I know of two such sources, Christopher Pez’s *A Second Collection of Sonatas for Two Flutes and a Bass, to which are added Some Excellent Solos out of the First Part of Corelli’s Fifth Opera; Artfully transpos’d and fitted to a Flute and a Bass, yet Continu’d in the same Key they were Compos’d in* (London: Walsh, 1707) and an anonymous lute manuscript dated 1712. An example of Pez’s ideas for recorder players can be found in the article cited above in note 4;

<sup>8</sup> GB-Lbl, Add. ms. 38,188.



a transcription of an ornamented Sarabande (op. 5, no. 7/3 again) from the lute manuscript is presented as Example 3.<sup>9</sup>

Ex. 3: Lute tablature ornaments for the Sonata in *d*, op. 5, no. 7: third movement, transcribed by Adrienne Mairy.

Lute MS (1712)

Sarabanda. Largo

Corelli (1700)

5

9

13

Hogwood may have passed over transcriptions, but not because he condescended to them – quite the contrary. In other contexts he argued convincingly in their favour, trying to reverse the disrepute into which they long been held in many musical circles; and indeed, he edited three volumes of early keyboard

<sup>9</sup> The lute MS was from estate of Jules Ecorcheville (*Catalogue des livres rares et précieux composant la collection musicale de feu M. Jules Ecorcheville*, ed. by Henry Prunières, Paris: Em. Paul, 1920, 52). The transcription by Adrienne Mairy was published in Marc Pincherle, *Feuillets d'histoire du violon*, Paris: G. Legoux, 1927, 139–140. I haven't been able to discover the MS's present owner.



transcriptions of various movements and entire sonatas from Corelli's op. 5.<sup>10</sup> True, an ornamented transcription is a somewhat different genre from an ornamented original. Nonetheless, anyone wishing to investigate systematically the 18<sup>th</sup> century's heterodox approaches to *violin* ornamentation of op. 5 will surely want to refer to the ornamentation of such transcriptions, including of course the *clavier* volumes. We need the fullest possible array of sources to re-establish the then-common pedagogical sequence for learners:

- 1) first learn to play an Adagio beautifully *come sta*,
- 2) add 'necessary' ornaments – the *agréments*,
- 3) then work on 'arbitrary' or 'curling' graces,
- 4) and finally, for the advanced pupil, begin to explore 'vermin'.

I have three points to make about Roger North's tart expression „vermin“, for ornaments that went beyond what he considered tasteful.<sup>11</sup> The first is that criticism of the blackest 18<sup>th</sup>-century examples of ornamentation is an aspect of the classicisation of Corelli's image and reputation, which Alberto Sanna explains in another essay in this volume.<sup>12</sup> A second point is that, when rendered with comprehension, competence and conviction, some of these so-called „vermin“ begin to reveal their own logic and beauty. Finally, North's expression was merely one skirmish out of many in the still-ongoing battles over the role of virtuosity in communicating (or lessening) music's truth and beauty.

A last reason given in the new edition for leaving aside some sources concerns chronology: some sets of ornaments are said to be 'too late' to have had a connection with a 'true' Corelli tradition – after all, styles do evolve. This is a tricky notion, and one perhaps not yet fully worked through.

### III. Chronology

An example of ornamentation not in the new edition because of lateness is the Adagio, op. 5, no. 3/3 graced by Francesco Galeazzi (Ex. 4), omitted on the grounds that, published only in 1817, it embodies a 19<sup>th</sup>-century conception.<sup>13</sup> But does it? Galeazzi was born in 1758 in Turin, where the violinists who trained him were pupils of Giovanni Battista Somis (1686–1763), himself a pupil of Corelli. If by virtue of having studied with Corelli's pupil Geminiani, the British violinists Mathew Dubourg and Michael Festing and the Swedish J. H. Roman<sup>14</sup> may be regarded as Corelli's artistic grandchildren, then

<sup>10</sup> Bologna: Ut Orpheus, in preparation.

<sup>11</sup> See n. 1. „Vermin“ means „parasites“ or approximately the same as *das Ungeziefer, insetti parassiti*, or *vermine*.

<sup>12</sup> See in this volume Alberto Sanna, „Contrapuntally Crafted, Harmonically Eloquent. Corelli's Sonatas and the Compositional Process in the Late 17<sup>th</sup> Century“, pp. 73–88.

<sup>13</sup> Francesco Galeazzi, *Elementi teorico-pratici di musica con un saggio sopra l'arte di suonare il violino*, Ascoli, <sup>2</sup>1817, tipped-in foldout.

<sup>14</sup> The composer-violinist Johan Helmich Roman was in England, circa 1715–1721.



Galeazzi is his great grandchild. And there is something else about Galeazzi's ornaments that should be mentioned: they are among the few known to be written by an Italian in Italy, rather than in England catering to the interests and tastes of the English gentry.

Ex. 4: Two sets of ornaments by Francesco Galeazzi for the Sonata in *a*, op. 5, no. 3: third movement (see n. 9).

The image displays two systems of musical notation, each consisting of three staves. The top two staves of each system are in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The music is in 3/4 time and the key signature has one sharp (F#). The first system shows a melodic line with a complex ornament consisting of a series of sixteenth-note runs, followed by a simpler ornament. The second system shows a similar melodic line with a different ornament, also featuring sixteenth-note runs. The piano accompaniment in the bass clef consists of simple chords and single notes.



9

Musical score for measures 9-11. The system consists of four staves. The top two staves are for the right hand, and the bottom two are for the left hand. Measure 9 features a complex right-hand melody with many sixteenth notes and a trill. The left hand provides a simple harmonic accompaniment with quarter notes and rests.

12

Musical score for measures 12-14. The system consists of four staves. The right hand continues with intricate sixteenth-note patterns and trills. The left hand accompaniment remains simple, using quarter notes and rests.

15

Musical score for measures 15-17. The system consists of four staves. The right hand features dense sixteenth-note passages and trills. The left hand accompaniment consists of quarter notes and rests.

18

Musical score for measures 18-20. The system consists of four staves. The right hand continues with complex sixteenth-note figures and trills. The left hand accompaniment is simple, using quarter notes and rests.



21

Musical score for measures 21-24. It consists of four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The top two staves feature intricate, rapid sixteenth-note passages with various accidentals. The bottom two staves provide a harmonic accompaniment with longer note values and rests.

25

Musical score for measures 25-28. It consists of four staves. The top two staves have dense sixteenth-note runs. The bottom two staves have a more sparse accompaniment. Dynamic markings *sf* are present in the second and third measures of the second treble staff.

29

Musical score for measures 29-32. It consists of four staves. The top two staves continue with complex sixteenth-note patterns. The bottom two staves have a steady accompaniment. A key signature change to one flat is indicated at the beginning of measure 29.

33

Musical score for measures 33-36. It consists of four staves. The top two staves feature very dense and fast sixteenth-note passages. The bottom two staves have a simple accompaniment. A key signature change to two flats is indicated at the beginning of measure 33.



38

42

45

Galeazzi provides evidence that Corelli's adagios were still being ornamented in Rome in the late decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His system of four staves present (reading from the bottom up) Corelli's bass without figures, Corelli's violin part, a relatively simple set of ornaments, and then a more 'vermin'-infested set. Stacking up sets of ornaments above an unornamented melody and its bass line was a frequent practice in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, in a pedagogical volume on ornamented adagios by Carlo Zuccari.<sup>15</sup> Useful as

<sup>15</sup> Carlo Zuccari, *The True Method of Playing an Adagio*, London: A. Hummell (and reissued by Robert Bremner), 1762. Facimile ed. with an introduction by Christopher Hogwood. Launton: Edition HH, 2012.



this method is for study and teaching in seminar, studio or practice room, it works poorly in an edition meant for performance, as it creates an awkward number of page-turns. Yet, stacking up the ornaments facilitates a valuable exercise for violinists who wish to learn to ornament in a period style, namely: after mastering a few sets of ornaments for a single movement, jump from one version to another as the fancy takes you, in order to achieve new concatenations of ornamental riffs and clichés such that after a while you find yourself prepared to throw your own ideas into the mix. That this method was known to the 18<sup>th</sup> century is manifested by an overwrought example in which the caption, running at comical length across the tops of all the pages, advises creating any number of versions by jumping at will from any one staff to any other (there are 17 staves containing ornamented versions arrayed in score below the original Adagio and its figured bass).<sup>16</sup>

ADAGIO DE M<sup>r</sup> TARTINI Varié de plusieurs façons différentes, très utiles aux personnes qui veulent apprendre à faire des traits sous chaque note de l'Harmonie. On pourra remplir des lacunes qui se trouvent dans les variations par une des lignes au dessus et au dessous et par des traits arbitraires...

A final point about chronology. As already mentioned, aside from the 1710 ornaments attributed to Corelli, which Roger published in Amsterdam, the only ornaments for op. 5 notated during the composer's lifetime are for recorder and lute respectively (Ex. 3). Given their early dates, these ornaments need to be evaluated and interpreted, not put aside. The lute transcription exemplifies a thoroughgoing application of 'necessary' ornaments, while Pez's publication may provide the only example we have of arbitrary ornamentation of op. 5 prior to the publication of Corelli's own. This raises an aspect of chronology that may be somewhat obscured, perhaps by wishful thinking or by understandable enthusiasm at having 18<sup>th</sup>-century ornaments at our disposal. Corelli's violin sonatas were composed in the final decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, whereas the ornaments in Hogwood's edition, with the exception of those in Roger's 1710 publication, date from a generation or two after Corelli's lifetime. This is not a problem, unless we make the mistake of pretending that because X and Y studied with Corelli, they and their students would decades later have preserved in amber Corelli's performance practices (even assuming that they had acquired them in first place).

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Baptiste Cartier, *L'art du violon*, Paris: Decombe, several eds. 1798 et. seq. Foldout tipped into most copies, and also for sale separately.





Fig. 2: Caricature of Giovanni Battista Tibaldi by Pier Leone Ghezzi (see n. 17).

Consider, for instance, an inscription by Pier Leone Ghezzi on his caricature (1720) of the Roman violinist and composer, Giovanni Battista Tibaldi (see Fig. 2), who played under Corelli for some years and may even have studied with him: *Tibaldi sonator di violino, il quale in tempo di Arcangelo Corelli faceva la sua figura, ma presentemente non è più chiamato alle musiche perché sona all'antica.*<sup>17</sup> That poor Tibaldi was so far out of fashion a mere seven years after Corelli's death suggests a striking rate of change in performance styles – styles that the careless use of such expressions as „in the baroque style“ may too easily suggest were more monolithic and stable than they ever could have been.

In any attempt to re-imagine Corelli's own performance preferences, the problems involved in understanding the status of violinists' ornaments from the 1720s onward may be just as complex as the problems in understanding ornamented versions intended for recorder, lute, flute, gamba or keyboard. The two types simply pose different kinds of challenges of interpretation. Just as Galeazzi belongs to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Corelli belongs to the 17<sup>th</sup>. If one

<sup>17</sup> Giancarlo Rostirolla, *Il „Mondo novo“ musicale di Pier Leone Ghezzi, con saggi di Stefano La Via e Anna Lo Bianco*, Rome: Skira, 2001, 102 („The violinist Tibaldi cut a fine figure in Corelli's time, but nowadays is not much in demand for concerts because he plays in an old-fashioned manner.“)



accepts the point that something of potential importance to violinists can be learned from lute or recorder ornaments, then how much the more so for the 1710 Adagios, whose title page avers that they were „ornamented by Corelli himself“ – whether those embellishments were by him or not!<sup>18</sup>

Another tradition of ornamenting Corelli's sonatas discussed in the new edition concerns the creation of sets of variations upon the short binary dance movements of the *sonate da chiesa*. Hogwood included seven sets composed for the gavottas of Sonatas 10 and 11, by the violinists Dubourg, McLean, McGibbon, and Roman, and many other examples from the 18<sup>th</sup> century survive.<sup>19</sup> There is much more to be learned about this tradition for dance movements in sonatas, which was as wide spread as the practice of free ornamentation of adagios. One could easily make a case that those absurdly brief dances really *must* be performed as theme and variations, in order to render them in reasonable proportion to the sonatas' other movements. At the time such improvised variations were a universal practice of, for example, those who fiddled for social dancing, many of whom were also active in church, chamber and theater.

A matter broached in the new edition is the question of what may have been played before or after the sonatas, and perhaps also between movements. Hogwood includes in an appendix Tonelli's *Preludi per tutti li Tuoni*, which prove to be fully-contrapuntally-realised, four-bars-long clavier variations over the bass line *do re mi fa sol do sol do*, rendered 24 ways in 24 keys.<sup>20</sup> He also reproduces from a publication entitled *Select Preludes or Voluntarys for ye Violin by the most eminent Master in Europe* (London: Walsh, 1705) a single, fully-written-out prelude for solo violin attributed to Corelli. Regardless of who actually created this prelude, it is unmistakably paraphrased from the second Allegro of Corelli's first sonata. The other prelude attributed to Corelli in this publication is definitely by Corelli since, as Hogwood points out, it is the third movement of Sonata 6 minus its bass. More could be said about the functions such notated violin or clavier preludes may have fulfilled. Perhaps performers can find the courage to venture further afield from traditional models of concert presentation to revive such notions.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In the article cited in note 4 I argued for their authenticity. The same conclusion has been reached independently by Rudolf Rasch, „Arcangelo Corelli en het jaar 1700“, in: *De eeuw-wende 1700*, Utrecht: Kluckhuhn, 1991, vol. III, 9–33, here 27–30; and Michael Talbot, „Full of Graces: Anna Maria Receives Ornaments from the Hands of Antonio Vivaldi“, *Studi corelliani VI*, vol. 1, 253–268, here 254–255.

<sup>19</sup> Robert E. Seletsky, „18th-century Variations for Corelli's Sonatas, Op. 5“, *EM* 24/1, 119–130.

<sup>20</sup> Corelli, *Sonatas, op. 5* (see n. 2), pp. 56–57.

<sup>21</sup> Preluding was still a living practice as late as 1937, as one can hear from the recording of the 61-year-old Josef Hofmann in concert at the old Metropolitan Opera House in New York, which has been reissued several times on LP and on CD.



#### IV. *Why does all this matter?*

I reiterate that I am in no way criticising Christopher Hogwood for what he included in or excluded from his edition. He conceived a practical plan to publish the majority of the important sources, and in order to do that he developed and followed certain reasonable editorial guidelines for triage. For this one can only be grateful.

Perhaps because the importance of ornaments for op. 5 seems so plainly obvious to me, demonstrating that was not my goal in this essay. Two other matters did, however, motivate my research. The first is this: if we do not continue to explore, discover and re-think music to which some of us have devoted our lives and careers, our scholarship and our performances will become stale and irrelevant – pitfalls that from its inception the ‘early-music movement’ tried to remedy.

The second matter that concerned me is a subset of the first: *We still know next to nothing about how Corelli performed!* Much as we like to quote them in our program notes, purported eyewitness accounts are not very helpful in that regard, especially if, instead of simply serving to pique our curiosity, they fan the flames of hero worship and idealisation. Should we believe the Englishman who reported that when Corelli performed, his „eyes will sometimes turn red as fire; his countenance will be distorted, his eyeballs roll as in an agony, and he gives in so much to what he is doing that he doth not look like the same man?“<sup>22</sup> Or should we believe classicising accounts, for instance Corelli’s pupil Geminiani describing his teacher’s performance as „learned, elegant and pathetic“ and his tone as „firm and even“, resembling „a sweet trumpet“.<sup>23</sup> Hoisting favourite artists onto an imagined Mount Parnassus is not the way to a deeper understanding, nor is re-inscribing them in the old binary trope of Angels and Devils.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Annotation by the anonymous translator of François Ragueneau, *Parallèle des italiens et des françois en ce regarde la musique et les opéra* (Paris, 1702) as *A Comparison between the French and Italian Musick and Opera’s*, London: printed for William Lewis, next Tom’s Coffee-House in Russel-Street, Covent-Garden; and sold by John Morphew, near Stationers-Hall, 1709, 20–21.

<sup>23</sup> John Hawkins, *A General History*, London: printed for T. Payne and Son, at the Mews-Gate, 1776, 674–676.

<sup>24</sup> Concerning angels and devils, see Neal Zaslau, „Locatelli’s Influence on Leclair. Myth or Reality?“, in: Fulvia Morabito (ed.), *Locatelli and the Violin Bravura Tradition*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2015 (Studies on Italian Music History 9), 29–41.