

INFLUENCES, SYMBOLISM, AND SUBTEXT IN GIAN CARLO MENOTTI'S

THE UNICORN, THE GORGON AND THE MANTICORE

OR THE THREE SUNDAYS OF A POET

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ABSTRACT

Gian Carlo Menotti's madrigal fable, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore or The Three Sundays of a Poet*, bears the influences of various art forms and musical compositions. The work incorporates elements of ancient Greek theatre in three specific ways, namely the use of a chorus to offer commentary on the dramatic action, the combination of movement (dance) with music, and the use of a heroic figure. *The Unicorn* also has strong roots in the music of the Renaissance and Baroque eras, which are evident in the elaborate counterpoint as well as in the stylistic features of both the madrigal and madrigal comedy found in the work. Specifically, the work was inspired by Orazio Vecchi's madrigal comedy, *L'Amfiparnaso*, with which it shares similarities in form, harmony, text painting, and the use of onomatopoeia.

While *L'Amfiparnaso* utilizes stock characters of the *commedia dell'arte*, Menotti created his own characters for *The Unicorn*. However, certain parallels can be drawn between the personalities of Menotti's original characters and the stock characters of the *commedia dell'arte*, indicating a possible influence on the creation of Menotti's characters. Medieval bestiary and the associated mythology were also strong influences on Menotti, as evidenced by his selection of the mythical creatures the Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore as allegorical representations of youth, middle age, and old age. While scholars have read the libretto as contrasting the true artist (a trailblazer with original, authentic emotions) with those who simply copy the art they see (mimicking emotion instead of making their own judgments), a yet unexplored subtext includes Menotti's personal struggles with homosexuality in the conservative and judgmental society of

1950s America. This theme emerges through the thematic overtones of the work as well as through his usage of words and objects often associated with homosexuality.

DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to those individuals in my life who have made the completion of this doctorate a reality. First, I would like to dedicate this document to my parents, Charles and Susie Ledger, for their endless and unconditional support and love throughout my life and my educational and musical journey. Second, I would like dedicate this document to all of the music educators who nurtured and encouraged me and instilled in me the belief that I could have a career in music. I am grateful to Betsy Barron and Susie Vandergriff for their musical guidance through my early formative years while growing up in Lee County, Virginia. I am perhaps most indebted to the music faculty members at Emory & Henry College who supported, encouraged, and mentored me in the completion of an undergraduate degree in music after deciding that medical school was not for me: Prof. Mark Owen Davis, Dr. Trevor Smith, Dr. Matthew Frederick, Dr. Lisa Withers, Prof. Anita Coulthard, Dr. Bryan Bolzenthall, and Dr. Stephen Sieck. I am also grateful for the outstanding education I received from Bowling Green State University under the teaching of Dr. William Skoog, Dr. Mark Munson, Dr. Christina Laberge, and Prof. Jeanne Bruggeman-Kurp. My family from Osbourn High School, where I began my career as a music educator, also helped in the pursuit of this degree: Lynn Jost, Rev. Milton Rodgers, and all of my students, colleagues, and the choral boosters. Finally, I would like to thank the University of Alabama School of Music performance faculty who devoted so much energy to my training and development: Dr. John Ratledge, Dr. Marvin Latimer, Dr. Ken Ozzello, Dr. Jennifer Cowgill, Dr. Ray Chenez, and Dr. Brad Raymond.

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INTRODUCTION

Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore or The Three Sundays of a Poet* features movements that alternate between a *cappella* madrigals for mixed choir and interludes for chamber orchestra consisting of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, cello, bass, percussion (one player), and harp. Menotti intended that the work be staged with ten dancers who pantomime the story (delivered by the choir) and also dance during the orchestral interludes. Individual dancers perform the roles of the Man in the Castle (the Poet), the Count, the Countess, the Doctor, the Doctor's Wife, the Mayor, the Mayor's Wife, the Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore. Menotti included descriptions of the three mythical beasts, taken directly from *A Book of Beasts*, a translation of a twelfth century Latin bestiary by T. H. White. Menotti noted that "the imitations of the three monsters, as sported by the townsfolk, may be lifeless and be symbolized, for example, by glove-like puppets."¹ Despite the indication that dancing is to be incorporated into a performance, no instructions for the choreography are given; therefore, the movements are left to the choreographer's imagination.

The Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation commissioned the work, and it was dedicated to Selma Farr. The world premiere occurred on October 21, 1956, in the Coolidge Auditorium of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.² John Butler choreographed the first performance, and Robert Fletcher created the elaborate costumes worn by the dancers. Menotti staged the production, while Paul Callaway conducted the orchestra. The role of the Unicorn was

¹ Gian Carlo Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore or The Three Sundays of a Poet* (Miami: Belwin-Mills Publishing Corp., 1985), 4.

² John Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 111.

danced by Talley Beatty, the Gorgon by John Renn, the Manticore by Dorothy Ethridge, and the Poet by Swen Swenson.³

Menotti assigned the descriptive subtitle of *madrigal fable* to the work and stated that it was inspired by Orazio Vecchi's madrigal comedy entitled *L'Amfiparnaso*.⁴ The story of *The Unicorn* is allegorical, with the Poet's three pets representing the three stages of his life: the Unicorn symbolizing youth, the Gorgon symbolizing middle age or manhood, and the Manticore symbolizing old age.⁵ The fairytale is set in a town in which residents stroll along the promenade by the sea every Sunday afternoon. They first exchange pleasantries and then immediately gossip ferociously about one another, thereby revealing the shallow and petty society in which the story is set. A mysterious and eccentric poet resides in a castle in the town; he is a prominent subject of the townspeople's gossip, and they regard him as quite "strange" at the outset of the work.⁶

One Sunday afternoon, the Poet joins the rest of the townspeople strolling along the promenade and intrigues them all by leading a pet Unicorn on a silver chain. The town's residents decry this unusual behavior, describing it in their conversations as "scandalous."⁷ The women of the town soon have a change of heart, however, exclaiming to their husbands that they cannot continue living without their own pet unicorns. The men of the town acquiesce and obtain pet unicorns for their wives, who proudly stroll with them on the promenade the following Sunday. Nonetheless, the townspeople are confused when they see the Poet leading not his pet Unicorn but a pet Gorgon, instead. When asked what became of his Unicorn, the Poet states matter-of-factly that he grew tired of the Unicorn and killed him. The townspeople are appalled

³ Ken Wlaschin, *Gian Carlo Menotti on Screen—Opera, Dance and Choral Works on Film, Television and Video* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1999), 131.

⁴ John Gruen, *Menotti—A Biography* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), 124.

⁵ Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 111.

⁶ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

and declare the Poet “ungrateful” and “out of his mind” for killing his pet Unicorn.⁸ The women soon follow the Poet’s lead, secretly killing their unicorns and begging their husbands for gorgons to replace the slain pets. The pattern then repeats with the Manticore replacing the Gorgon as the choice pet in town.

On the following Sunday, the Poet does not appear on the promenade with the Manticore. Wondering if the creature suffered the same fate as the Unicorn and the Gorgon, the townspeople march to the castle to discover the truth, intent on arresting and torturing the Poet if indeed he has killed the Manticore. They are shocked to find the Poet on his deathbed, surrounded by all three of his pets, very much alive. The Poet chides the townspeople, calling them “foolish people who feign to feel what other men have suffered.”⁹ He goes on to remind them that they, not he, are “the indifferent killers of the poet’s dreams.”¹⁰ The Poet’s purpose in deceiving the townspeople was to teach them an important moral lesson concerning strength of conviction and remaining true to one’s own thoughts and feelings.

Overall, the work is tonal, although it does include some unorthodox harmonic passages, sudden major/minor chord changes, and distant modulations in the style of Carlo Gesualdo.¹¹ Menotti also incorporates surprising dissonances for dramatic purposes in the form of expanded tertian harmonies, added tones, non-harmonic tones, and modal mixture.¹² Rhythmic vitality is a hallmark of *The Unicorn*, which features mostly quick tempos, syncopated rhythms, changes between regular and irregular meters, and fast harmonic rhythm. The texture of the choral writing alternates between homophony and polyphony as the text requires. The orchestral

⁸ Ibid., 71-72.

⁹ Ibid., 149.

¹⁰ Ibid., 149-150.

¹¹ Victor Bilanchone Jr., “*The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore* by Gian Carlo Menotti: A Study of a Twentieth-Century Madrigal Fable” (D.M.A. essay, University of Miami, 1977), 71.

¹² Ibid., 70.

textures in the dance interludes are consistently polyphonic within the framework of dance rhythms. The text is original, witty, and singable. In his doctoral essay on *The Unicorn*, Victor Bilanchone Jr. provides historical considerations of the work (specifically concerning the madrigal comedy), an overview of the stylistic features and performance considerations of the work, and formal analyses of each movement. The current document will augment Bilanchone's essay and other literature regarding *The Unicorn* by providing detailed information about aspects of the work yet to be explored, including the historical influences of the work as well as various layers of symbolism and subtext.

The Unicorn uniquely embodies important influences in Menotti's compositional career and explores vital elements of his professional and personal life, specifically his relationship with critics and his homosexuality. Thus, *The Unicorn* represents perhaps the consummate personal statement in Menotti's repertoire up to this point in his life and career. *The Unicorn* draws from many art and literary forms including ancient Greek theatre, Renaissance and Baroque compositional techniques, Renaissance madrigal comedies, the *commedia dell'arte*, and medieval bestiaries. The work also draws from the supernatural and mythological realms, specifically the symbolism associated with the three creatures. Finally, the work provides insight into Menotti's emotional responses to harsh critiques of his compositions and reveals his view of his work as art for art's sake rather than art for the sake of acceptance, fame, and glorification. A subtext woven throughout the tapestry of the libretto also expresses the difficulties Menotti faced living openly as a homosexual in 1950s America.

CHAPTER 1

INFLUENCES

Ancient Greek Theatre

Ancient Greek theatre, which flourished in the fifth century B.C.E., is one of the earliest art forms influencing *The Unicorn*, largely in its use of the chorus as a central feature of the drama, the concept of music as movement, and the idea of a hero or heroic figure. The townspeople in *The Unicorn* function like a Greek chorus in their continuous commentary on the Poet's actions and in their role in advancing the plot, as the chorus was the "life and soul of the drama" in ancient Greek theatre.¹³ The chorus featured prominently in performances of Greek dramas and bore a physically interpretative function through dance, which in the Greek world included any physical action enhanced by rhythm and action.¹⁴ The chorus was used to "reflect the rhythm of the play in visual terms," even at points in the dramas when they were not delivering lines.¹⁵ The combination of music and dance in *The Unicorn* recalls the close ties between these two art forms in Greek culture. Finally, the Poet embodies numerous qualities associated with the typical Greek hero.

Throughout the libretto of *The Unicorn*, the chorus performs a similar function in its guise as the townspeople. The chorus is responsible for introducing the protagonist (the Poet) to the audience before he appears or speaks for himself. The townspeople continuously offer commentary on his actions and behavior as he parades a different member of his menagerie

¹³ J. Michael Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

along the promenade each week. For example, they express abhorrence, shock, and curiosity each time the Poet appears with one of his three pets. They also strongly react to the news that he has killed the Unicorn and the Gorgon, mourning the loss of both creatures while simultaneously wondering why the Poet's actions are so extreme. The townspeople are also crucial in advancing the plot by first mimicking the Poet's choice of pet and then by killing their pets and obtaining new ones when they perceive changes in the Poet's tastes. The plot would be virtually nonexistent if not for the actions of the townspeople displaying undesirable traits that relay the moral of the story to the audience. In *The Unicorn*, unlike ancient Greek theatre, the chorus is also the subject of critique, meaning the audience must identify with character flaws represented by the chorus in order to learn the lesson Menotti attempted to impart.

Interestingly, the appearances of the Poet are brief and limited to strolling with each of his three pets along the promenade, performing a dance with the Unicorn in his castle, and lying on his deathbed at the end of the work. He merely serves as a catalyst for the important actions, which are given to the chorus. In ancient Greek theatre, the chorus played a vital part in the early plays of Aeschylus, in which they experienced various predicaments. While the individual characters were responsible for triggering or embodying the predicament, the audience nonetheless was intended to identify more closely with the "plight and passions of the chorus" as they experienced the predicament created and/or experienced by the major characters.¹⁶ The same certainly is true for the audience throughout a performance of *The Unicorn*, during which the foils, quirks, and actions of the townspeople advance the plot. While the Poet serves as the source of intrigue and drama for the townspeople, the townspeople amuse the audience in the same ways as the Poet.

¹⁶ Richard C. Sewell, *In the Theatre of Dionysos* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2007), 48.

In ancient Greek theatre, the commentary or actions of the chorus often advanced the plot by creating a need for a particular character to enter; thus, the character would enter, deliver his lines, and then exit.¹⁷ Likewise, the advancement of the plot of *The Unicorn* depends upon the townspeople. Only when they have the opportunity to react to the latest creature the Poet parades before them can the plot advance to the next stage. The Poet then enters with a new pet, explains to the townspeople that he killed his previous pet, and exits. Menotti's use of the townspeople to bridge appearances by the Poet recalls the way in which the chorus danced and sang to connect passages in ancient Greek dramas while the primary character was offstage changing costumes, or in the case of the Poet in *The Unicorn*, offstage preparing to enter with another of his pets.¹⁸

The chorus of ancient Greek theatre also prompted main characters to explain certain situations and thereby advanced the plot, as in Aristophanes' *Clouds* when the chorus urges Strepsiades to explain how a dispute arose.¹⁹ Comparably, the townspeople press the Poet for an explanation regarding the whereabouts of his pet from the previous Sunday. Another use of the chorus by Greek playwrights involved the group delivering moral commentary, such as in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, when the chorus establishes a moral position of pious worship when they sing how "violent arrogance begets the tyrant" Oedipus.²⁰ Yet another similarity between Menotti's townspeople and the Greek chorus is the latter's tendency to share the main characters' emotions, such as in Euripides' *Ion* when the chorus, consisting of Creusa's servants, serves to "amplify her desires and intentions," as they "pray for the defeat of Ion, and even encourage the attempted murder."²¹ Similarly, the residents of the Poet's town share (albeit

¹⁷ Leo Aylen, *The Greek Theater* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1985), 159.

¹⁸ Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁰ Aylen, *The Greek Theater*, 144-145.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

disingenuously) the Poet's preference for pets and also emulate their perceptions of the Poet's intentions when they kill their own pets and obtain new pets.

The Unicorn also shares with ancient Greek theatre the use of female characters to embody dramatic emotions. Richard C. Sewell discusses the centuries-old differences in male and female behavior that society has deemed acceptable; both the theatrical works of ancient Greece and *The Unicorn* present these societal views. Greek men were expected to refrain from showing particular emotions, while women were allowed to demonstrate wide ranges of emotion. Therefore, Aeschylus often preferred using choruses written for female characters (albeit played by men) to deliver dramatic emotions.²² Likewise, Menotti uses the Countess' emotional outbursts to her husband concerning her desires for new pets to drive the plot forward. Her feelings of envy and her misperceived adherence to social precedent set by the Poet serve to develop the plot of Menotti's *The Unicorn*.

Menotti's use of dancing in *The Unicorn* represents a continuation of another important feature of ancient Greek dramas, namely the wedding of music and movement. The Greeks believed that everything which sounded also moved.²³ Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, who founded the movement-through-music philosophy, asserts that Greek musicians must have had vast experience with physical movement in order to have composed the music they did.²⁴ According to Therees Tkach, the concept of the complete performer, the singer-dancer-actor imperative to many theatrical and operatic works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, is grounded in "Greek philosophies and practices as early as the time of Christ."²⁵ Thus, the chorus was

²² Sewell, *In the Theatre of Dionysos*, 49.

²³ Therees Tkach, "Contemporary Choral Music With Dance and Movement," *The Choral Journal* 22, no. 1 (September 1981): 22, accessed August 12, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23545747>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

expected to dance as they sang in unison,²⁶ but the movement was not merely an element of staging; it was a vital feature of the culture.²⁷ Leo Aylen describes dance as by far the most important element of Greek theatrical production. Furthermore, the use of dancing by the chorus emerged from the centrality of dancing as part of Greek society and culture.²⁸ The concept of dancing was so engrained in the culture that audiences immediately recognized and reacted to both good and bad dancing.²⁹

Aylen regards contemporary performances that use a stationary Greek chorus as nonsensical, and compares such a group to a chorus in a modern musical remaining immobile while singing.³⁰ Although singing and dancing in *The Unicorn* are performed by different groups, the collaboration nevertheless embodies the same concept of *Gesamtkunswerk*, or song, dance, groupings, color, and spectacle functioning together as a complete art form.³¹ The combined singing and dancing of Greek choruses would have affected the emotions of many people because they used combined modalities of expression.³² In Homer's *The Odyssey*, for example, the chorus danced the story that the bard was singing, supplying "an extra visual dimension to the story."³³ As such, the joining of music and dance in *The Unicorn* allows Menotti to reach a broader audience through the use of two art forms, one aural and one visual. Menotti's libretto provides the choreographer with all of the information needed to produce effective movement and reinforce both plot and character, just as the text in ancient Greek dramas served as straightforward choreographic instruction for the movements of the chorus.³⁴

²⁶ Aylen, *The Greek Theater*, 107.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 53.

³⁴ Aylen, *The Greek Theater*, 133.

The idea of a hero or heroic figure also featured prominently in ancient Greek drama³⁵ and is an important feature of *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*. The Greeks defined a hero as someone with morals and standards much higher than those of typical mortals.³⁶ In fifth century Athens, the heroic idea was central to the Greeks' thinking, art, and literature. Heroism by its very nature could be achieved by few men, if any, but the ideal was always present for contemplation.³⁷ In *The Unicorn*, Menotti was influenced by this idea of heroic humanism. In her dissertation entitled "Hero and Anti-Hero: The 'Oedipus Tyrannus' of Sophocles in Twentieth-Century Music," Elaine Waxgiser Newman describes the hero as "different" and "set apart from other men."³⁸ She describes him as "isolated from the other characters, either formally, or by what he says and does."³⁹ This description applies to Menotti's Poet. He lives alone and more often than not remains isolated from the other townspeople. He is also isolated from them by his actions, which primarily consist of parading his unusual pets along the promenade and his purported murder of two of them.

Newman also describes the Greek hero as always aware of his unique traits, such as when Oedipus boasted of having solved the riddle of the Sphinx.⁴⁰ The Poet is similarly endowed with self awareness. He shamelessly parades his unusual creatures through the town, and later, without flinching, he humorously (though untruthfully) boasts of his murders of the creatures, claiming they either began to bore or annoy him. Finally, Newman describes the hero as "unyielding" and one who "maintains his resolve."⁴¹ The same is true for the Poet in *The Unicorn*. His unorthodox and seemingly deviant behavior proves a complex ploy to teach the

³⁵ Elaine Waxgiser Newman, "Hero and Anti-Hero: The 'Oedipus Tyrannus' of Sophocles in Twentieth-Century Music" (Ph.D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1973), 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

townspeople a moral lesson about individuality and strength of conviction. Like the Greek heroes, the Poet is morally superior to the townspeople, and in the end, he uses his unique taste for pets to illuminate the weakness and inferior ethics inherent in the lower mortals who inhabit his town.

Renaissance and Baroque Music

Renaissance and Baroque musical forms and techniques also influenced the composition of *The Unicorn* due to the influence of Menotti's composition teacher, Rosario Scalero. Under his guidance, Menotti developed a deep understanding of and appreciation for early musical forms and techniques that would greatly influence his entire compositional career. First and foremost, Menotti used the name and form of the Renaissance madrigal for the individual choral movements of the work. Second, numerous forms of counterpoint feature prominently throughout the work, including fugal writing, canonic writing, and imitation. Monteverdian influences are also found in *The Unicorn*, specifically Menotti's treatment of dissonances in the style of the *seconda prattica* and the incorporation of independent orchestral accompaniment for two movements which resembles the *basso continuo* used in some of Monteverdi's later madrigals. Finally, in his doctoral essay on *The Unicorn*, Victor Bilanchone Jr. notes other influences of early music, including Menotti's treatment of harmony and use of double-dotted rhythms.

The influence of early music reaches back to Menotti's days of studying composition with Scalero⁴² at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.⁴³ Scalero incessantly drilled him in the art of writing fugues⁴⁴ and exposed him to other forms of

⁴² Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 111.

⁴³ Gruen, *Menotti—A Biography*, 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

counterpoint as well.⁴⁵ From Scalero, Menotti learned the history and theory of musical forms, studying and analyzing the works of some of the greatest Italian masters of polyphony, such as Palestrina, Di Lasso, and Monteverdi.⁴⁶ His earliest works while studying at Curtis thus “consisted of motets, madrigals, and canons, music involving techniques that he would put to highly inventive use in later years,” according to John Gruen.⁴⁷

Years later, when Menotti taught at Curtis, his own teaching style resembled that of Scalero. Menotti’s student Stanley Hollingsworth once recalled to Gruen how Menotti would focus almost exclusively on counterpoint in his teaching.⁴⁸ Lee Hoiby similarly recalled studying Palestrina counterpoint during the entirety of his first year as Menotti’s student. Furthermore, he said that Menotti never discussed harmony, the musical language of Bach, or figured bass. Hoiby asserted that he learned how to develop his own compositional skills from the strict contrapuntal techniques he learned from Menotti while studying at Curtis.⁴⁹

Menotti’s fondness for early music is evident in the use of the term *madrigal* for all but two of the individual choral movements throughout the work. The madrigal was a secular vocal genre that first flourished during the Renaissance and generally consisted of unaccompanied, polyphonic, through-composed settings of various types of poetic verse. Menotti’s madrigals in *The Unicorn* resemble the madrigals of the Renaissance in their frequent use of polyphony and free verse. They are also through-composed and unaccompanied; only the “Eighth Madrigal” and “The March to the Castle” include orchestral accompaniment.

Counterpoint is prominently used throughout *The Unicorn* in various forms. Menotti included fugal (Figure 1), canonic (Figure 2), and imitative writing (Figure 3). The fugal section

⁴⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 82.

in the “Second Madrigal” is comprised of a subject and free counterpoint. The subject is first stated by the basses with each successive statement of the subject by the altos, tenors, and sopranos beginning a whole step higher than the previous statement. Following the statement of the subject by the sopranos, a brief episode features melodic material derived from the fugue subject.

Figure 1. Fugal writing, "Second Madrigal," mm. 17-28

(♩ = 88)
Andante mosso ed agitato, quasi allegro

pit - y, some laughed with scorn:
pit - y, some laughed with scorn:
pit - y, some laughed with scorn:
pit - y, some laughed with scorn: 'What a scan - dal-ous sight to see a grown-up man prom-e-nade a u - ni-corn in plain day -

What a scan - dal-ous sight to see a grown-up man prom-e-nade a u - ni-corn in plain day - light, — all through the cit - y, What a scan - dal-ous sight

light — all through the cit - y, through the cit - y, all through the cit - y, through the cit - y in plain day-light, — all through the

through the cit - y, all through the cit - y, through the cit - y in plain day-light! What — a scan - dal-ous sight. —

to see a grown up man prom-e-nade a u - ni-corn in plain day- light — all through the cit - y, through the cit - y in plain

cit - y in plain, — in plain day - light! —

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Figure 2. Canonic writing, “Second Madrigal,” mm. 44-50

The image shows a musical score for two voices in a 4-part setting. The top voice (Soprano) and the bottom voice (Bass) are shown. The lyrics are: "if one can pluck the pea-cock and flee the bee; if one can ride the horse and hook the hog; if one can tempt the mouse". The score illustrates canonic writing, where the second voice enters with the same melody as the first voice, but delayed by a certain interval. Red boxes highlight the overlapping phrases between the two voices.

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Figure 3. Imitative writing, “Fourth Madrigal,” mm. 1-4

The image shows a musical score for five voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Baritone, and Bass. The tempo is marked "Adagio, ma non troppo" and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Why are you sad, my dar-ling? What shall I are you so sad, so sad?". The score illustrates imitative writing, where each voice enters with the same melody, but at different times. The lyrics are written below the corresponding voice parts. The score includes dynamic markings like *p* and *legato*.

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In her discussion of *The Unicorn*, Meredith Lillich states that it “combines ancient Monteverdian contrapuntal harmonies with sharp, modern accents, in a chamber-music scale

which recalls the thinly scored *Amahl* or his earlier *The Old Maid and the Thief*.⁵⁰ She also notes that the work is similar to “the first proto-operas of the late sixteenth century, in which actors pantomimed stories related by madrigal groups,” observing that Menotti even used the same musical organization, consisting of a succession of madrigals and orchestral interludes.⁵¹ Like Lillich, John Ardoin also asserts that the work was influenced by the madrigals of Monteverdi.

These vague mentions of Monteverdi’s influence on *The Unicorn* by Lillich and Ardoin can perhaps be made more specific by drawing attention to two of Monteverdi’s most important contributions to music during the transitional period between the Renaissance and the Baroque. The first was his style of voice leading that often involved unprepared dissonances between voices. Monteverdi allowed voices to leap into vertical seconds, fourths, and sevenths, which according to the rules of *prima prattica* had to be approached by step and resolved to the closest adjacent consonance such as a third or a sixth.⁵² Monteverdi asserted this more liberal approach to dissonance as an important feature of the *seconda prattica*, in which the text was to be served often at the expense of the well established rules surrounding the treatment of dissonances.⁵³ In the “Introduction” of *The Unicorn*, which is primarily consonant, Menotti wrote a dissonance of a major second between the alto and tenor parts to accentuate the continuation of the opening phrases following a quarter rest. The dissonance is approached by a downward leap of a minor third in the alto part and an upward leap of a major third in the tenor part (Figure 4).

⁵⁰ Meredith Lillich, “Menotti’s Music Dramas,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 11, no. 4 (December 1959): 279, accessed August 12, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3204753>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Richard Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, Western Music in Context: A Norton History, ed. Walter Frisch (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2013), 252.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Figure 4. Dissonances approached by leap, "Introduction," mm. 1-4

SOPRANO
There once lived a Man in a Cas - tle and a strange

ALTO
There once lived a Man in a Cas - tle and a strange

TENOR
There once lived a Man in a Cas - tle and a strange

BASS
There once lived a Man in a Cas - tle and a strange

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In the "Second Madrigal" of *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, Menotti used the interval of a minor seventh between the sopranos and altos to emphasize the first syllable of the word "pity," which the sopranos approach by an upward leap of a perfect fourth (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Dissonances approached by leap, "Second Madrigal," mm. 15-16

laughed with pit - y, some laughed with pit - y, some laughed with

laughed with pit - y, some laughed with pit - y, some laughed with

y, some laughed with pit - y, some laughed with

y, some laughed with pit - y, some laughed with

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The second of Monteverdi's innovations Menotti used in *The Unicorn* is the adoption of the *basso continuo* in five-part madrigal polyphony in the last six works from his fifth book of madrigals,⁵⁴ including *M'è più dolce il penar* (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Inclusion of basso continuo, *M'è più dolce il penar*, mm. 1-4

XIII. *M'è più dolce il penar*

The musical score shows six staves. The vocal parts (CANTO, QUINTO, ALTO, TENORE, BASSO) have lyrics: "M'è più dol - ce il pe-nar per A - ma - ril - li". The B.S. (Basso Continuo) part is a figured bass line. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, and accidentals.

M'è più dolce il penar, by Claudio Monteverdi
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While most of the movements for chorus in *The Unicorn* are to be sung *a cappella*, the highly contrapuntal “Eighth Madrigal” (Figure 7) and “The March to the Castle” (Figure 8) are written for chorus and a thinly scored orchestral accompaniment independent of the voice parts and providing harmonic support similar to the *basso continuo* parts Monteverdi included in some of his later madrigals.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Anderson, *Baroque Music from Monteverdi to Handel*, with a preface by Nikolaus Harnoncourt (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1994), 22.

Figure 7. Inclusion of orchestral accompaniment, “Eighth Madrigal,” mm. 1-3

The musical score for the 'Eighth Madrigal' is presented in five staves. The top four staves are for the vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The Soprano and Alto parts have lyrics: 'Do not ca-ress the'. The Tenor and Bass parts are currently silent. The fifth staff is for the Orchestration (ORCH.), which begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The tempo is marked 'Allegro, ma molto moderato' with a quarter note equal to 132 beats per minute (♩ = 132). The mood is 'p leggiero'. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The music is in common time.

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Bilanchone Jr. notes other specific techniques and elements from the Renaissance and Baroque eras that surface in *The Unicorn*. The work has a strong modal emphasis throughout, making it unique in Menotti’s compositional output.⁵⁵ He also asserts that the tonal ambiguity, including the use of modes, modal mixture, and modulations, is often found in early music. Furthermore, he observes that Menotti used harmony for purposes of color and drama throughout the work, utilizing expanded tertian harmony, added tones, and non-harmonic tones to produce dissonances.⁵⁶ He notes, however, that Menotti did not completely obliterate the “consonant archaic flavor of the Renaissance madrigal comedy,” but instead achieved variety within the consonant writing through the use of “sudden major/minor chord changes and distant

⁵⁵ Bilanchone Jr., “*The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore* by Gian Carlo Menotti: A Study of a Twentieth-Century Madrigal Fable,” 62.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

modulations” similar to the style of Gesualdo.⁵⁷ The modal alterations also lead to the use of less conventional cadences, including plagal cadences, found throughout *The Unicorn*.⁵⁸ Baroque influences Bilanchone Jr. notes include the frequent use of block and terraced dynamics⁵⁹ and the persistent use of double-dotted eighth and thirty-second note rhythms (often found in the French overture) in both the choral and orchestral writing in “The March to the Castle”⁶⁰ (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Double-dotting, “The March to the Castle,” mm. 1-5

The image shows a musical score for the vocal parts and piano accompaniment of "The March to the Castle" from the opera *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*. The score is for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Piano. The tempo is marked "Allegretto moderato" with a metronome marking of ♩: 84-88. The lyrics are: "Slow, much too slow, is the judgment of God. Quick is the thief". The piano part features double-dotted eighth and thirty-second note rhythms.

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Madrigal Comedy

The Unicorn emerges from the Renaissance genre of the madrigal comedy, a significant musical development in the final decades of the sixteenth century.⁶¹ Menotti’s madrigal fable shares three main features with the madrigal comedy genre. First, *The Unicorn* shares structural

⁵⁷ Ibid., 70-71.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 71-72.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁶¹ Jerome Roche, *The Madrigal* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), 68.

similarities with the madrigal comedy genre in that it consists of a series or cycle of madrigals united by a continuous plot and character developments. Second, *The Unicorn* features sudden textural shifts between polyphony and homophony for the purpose of textual emphasis. Finally, like the composers of madrigal comedies, Menotti used alternating voice groupings to differentiate between the lines of different characters in conversation.

The madrigal comedy developed largely as a result of the madrigal-singing tradition engrained in cultural academies, and it was primarily intended for private rather than public entertainment.⁶² Works belonging to this genre generally consisted of a complete dramatic cycle of madrigals that incorporated elements of dialogue between various characters.⁶³ This structural description closely resembles that of *The Unicorn*, which also consists of a series of madrigals featuring dramatic scenes and dialogue between the characters as their personalities are presented to the audience and continuously develop throughout the work. Cecil Adkins explains that the concept of a cycle became popular among composers of madrigals because it allowed for extra-musical connections to join a series of pieces.⁶⁴ Alexander Striggio was among the first composers to use the cyclic idea in the production of a unified set of madrigals, specifically with the focus on the chatter of women at the wash in *Il cicalamento delle donne al bucato*.⁶⁵ Striggio's text bears a striking resemblance to Menotti's focus on the gossip of the townspeople in *The Unicorn*, especially the unpitched onomatopoeic chatter in the "First Madrigal" (Figure 9).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Cecil Adkins, preface to Orazio Vecchi, *L'Amfiparnaso—A New Edition of the Music with Historical and Analytical Essays* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 5.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Figure 9. Unpitched onomatopoeic chatter, “First Madrigal,” m. 29

TEN. I

“Bla bla bla bla bla la la la bla bla bla bli bla

bla bli bla bli bla bli bla bla bli

bla bli bla bli bla la la la la bli

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The madrigal comedy genre thus appealed more to the “human level” than the overly sophisticated and serious works the academies had previously favored.⁶⁶ *The Unicorn* also exists on the “human level,” with its depictions of petty, gossiping townspeople who mimic what they perceive as the latest social trends instead of remaining true to their own convictions.

Monteverdi had also anticipated sectional divisions common to the genre in some of his later madrigals, some of which incorporate dialogue and action, making the works similar in structure to scenes from opera, ballet,⁶⁷ and *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*. Monteverdi’s eighth book of madrigals contains such works: *Lamento della ninfa* (Lament of the Nymph) utilizes a solo soprano singing in dialogue with three male voices (Figure 10), while

⁶⁶ Roche, *The Madrigal*, 68.

⁶⁷ David Schulenberg, *Music of the Baroque*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 76.

Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda (The Combat of Tancredi and Clorinda) uses three solo voices as well as a string ensemble and continuo⁶⁸ (Figure 11).

Figure 10. Use of solo voice in dialogue with choral voices, *Lamento della ninfa*, mm. 28-31

The image shows a musical score for the vocal parts and basso continuo of *Lamento della ninfa*, measures 28-31. The score is written in 6/8 time and includes the following parts:

- CANTO**: Solo voice part with lyrics: "Le tre parti cantino piano. A - mor A -"
- TENORE PRIMO**: Choral voice part with lyrics: "- Di - ce - a,"
- TENORE SECONDO**: Choral voice part with lyrics: "- Di - ce - a,"
- BASSO**: Choral voice part with lyrics: "- Di - ce - a,"
- BASSO CONTINUO**: Continuo part with figured bass notation: (♯) (♯)

The score is marked with a tempo of $\text{♩} = 3$ and a dynamic of *piano*. The measure numbers 28, 29, and 30 are indicated at the top of the vocal staves.

Lamento della ninfa, by Claudio Monteverdi
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⁶⁸ Ibid.

**Figure 11. Use of solo voices, string ensemble, and continuo,
Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda, mm. 1-3**

VIOLA DA BRACCIO SOPRANO
(VIOLINO PRIMO)

VIOLA DA BRACCIO ALTO
(VIOLINO SECONDO)

VIOLA DA BRACCIO TENORE
(VIOLA)

CLORINDA

TANCREDI

TESTO

Tan - cre - di che Clo - rin - da_un o - mo

BASSO CONTINUO:
CLAVICEMBALO
VIOLA DA BRACCIO BASSO
(VIOLONCELLO)
VIOLA DA GAMBA CONTRABBASSO
(VIOLONE)

Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda, by Claudio Monteverdi
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Monteverdi included a short preface in the eighth book, which details the “original quasi-theatrical productions” of the two works.⁶⁹ The *Combattimento* was first staged in 1624 in the palace of a noble Venetian patron, where the roles of the two characters, the knight Tancredi (tenor) and his opponent Clorinda (soprano), utilized choreographed pantomime in addition to singing.⁷⁰ The work thus shares the element of choreographed action with ballet⁷¹ and the much later madrigal fable of Menotti. The *Combattimento* is also unprecedented for its incorporation of instrumental music within a primarily vocal work,⁷² providing yet another link between

⁶⁹ Ibid., 77.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

Monteverdi and Menotti, who alternated *a cappella* choruses with instrumental dance interludes and composed instrumental accompaniment for two of the vocal movements.

In the last third of the sixteenth century, when the madrigal comedy was being developed, some composers began abandoning strict contrapuntal writing and favored the use of more chordal writing. This change allowed rapid shifts in harmonic and vocal color that directly served the text interpretation.⁷³ This style of composition is evident in *The Unicorn*, which alternates freely between contrapuntal writing and declamatory homophonic writing as the text requires.

Madrigal comedies often used groups of voices in the manner of conversations—a style anticipated in the dialogues of Donato and Striggio that would be developed not only in the genre of the madrigal comedy but also in opera.⁷⁴ Adkins asserts that the use of dialogue allowed composers to develop a dramatic story within a single madrigal.⁷⁵ The use of groups of voices in a conversational format is prominent in *The Unicorn*, as Menotti constantly depicts conversations between husbands and wives, between residents of the town and the Poet, and among various townspeople.

Between 1590 and 1630, Italian composers produced over twenty works described as madrigal comedies.⁷⁶ They all share a common element of regional song types, which contributes to musical variety and also provides a source of humor through the use of regional dialects.⁷⁷ Adkins divides all of the surviving works in the madrigal comedy genre into four groups based on the degree of plot coherence and character development throughout the cycle. The madrigal comedies with movements connected only by the collective title of the complete

⁷³ Adkins, preface to Orazio Vecchi, *L'Amfiparnaso*, 5.

⁷⁴ Roche, *The Madrigal*, 68, 70.

⁷⁵ Adkins, preface to Orazio Vecchi, *L'Amfiparnaso*, 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

work comprise the first group. The madrigal comedies of the second group use the same characters or ideas throughout to provide a minimal degree of connection, but they still lack internal development. Examples in the third group utilize characters and musical forms of the pastorale but still lack significant plot development. The fourth and final group consists of madrigal comedies based on scenarios from the *commedia dell'arte* and are the most internally developed of the genre. Orazio Vecchi's *L'Amfiparnaso* falls into the fourth group.⁷⁸

Vecchi's *L'Amfiparnaso*

Menotti stated to Gruen that *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore* was inspired by Vecchi's 1597 madrigal comedy *L'Amfiparnaso*,⁷⁹ an early operatic prototype⁸⁰ and the work for which Vecchi is best remembered.⁸¹ The two works are similar in formal construction and musical style. Formally, they are both constructed from a series of madrigals linked by a continuous plot and character development, though *The Unicorn* is more formally cohesive than *L'Amfiparnaso*. Musically, both composers effectively used textural shifts between polyphony and homophony for textual emphasis. Alternating groupings of voices to represent different characters in dialogue with each other are also prominent features of both works. Expressive text-painting is typically found in the madrigal and is present in both works in various forms. Finally, both composers cleverly and creatively used onomatopoeia effects to enhance the delivery of the text.

The title of *L'Amfiparnaso* literally means "the two slopes of Parnassus," which symbolizes the *mélange* of comedy and tragedy found in the work.⁸² Bilanchone Jr. states that

⁷⁸ Ibid., 5-6.

⁷⁹ Gruen, *Menotti—A Biography*, 124.

⁸⁰ Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 111.

⁸¹ Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1959), 433.

⁸² Roche, *The Madrigal*, 70.

the title may also refer to the presence of both a major and minor plot and/or the combination of the stock characters and situations of the *commedia dell'arte* and music.⁸³ The work consists of fifteen pieces grouped into a prologue and three acts of fourteen connected scenes.⁸⁴ Like Menotti, Vecchi wrote his own text. While the story utilizes a number of stock characters from the *commedia dell'arte*, Vecchi created the characters of the story's two lovers, Lucio and Isabella.⁸⁵ Gustave Reese describes the overall tone of *L'Amfiparnaso* as comical in nature; nonetheless, serious moments such as Isabella's lament on the supposed death of her lover Lucio are prominent.⁸⁶

L'Amfiparnaso and *The Unicorn* are similar in overall structure and concept. As such, they both consist of a series of madrigals linked by a continuous plot and overarching character development. *L'Amfiparnaso* consists of two parallel plots, one comic and the other serious. Vecchi's new characters, Lucio and Isabella, are the central characters of the serious plot. The two young people are in love, but Isabella is also pursued by Captain Cardon, a boastful Spanish bully. Lucio, fearing that Isabella loves the captain instead, attempts suicide, but some nearby shepherds prevent him from succeeding. In actuality, Isabella is receptive to the romantic advances of Captain Cardon only because she wishes to incite jealousy in Lucio. Once she learns of Lucio's supposed demise, she attempts to kill herself but is halted by her servant, Frulla, who informs her that Lucio is in fact alive. Lucio and Isabella are reunited in a serious, dramatic madrigal near the end of the work, and the final madrigal features the celebration of their subsequent wedding. The comic subplot revolves around Pantalone's attempts to marry his daughter to Doctor Gratiano and the hilarity that ensues from their scheming.

⁸³ Bilanchone Jr., "*The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore* by Gian Carlo Menotti: A Study of a Twentieth-Century Madrigal Fable," 33.

⁸⁴ Reese, *Music in the Renaissance*, 433-434.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 434.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

The Unicorn differs in plot construction in that the multiple scenes and groups of characters upon which the madrigals alternately focus are interrelated. The plot and subplot of *L'Amfiparnaso* are unrelated; instead, they are merely parallel in that they both deal with themes of love, one comic and the other serious. The madrigals in *The Unicorn* clearly shift focus between the townspeople and the Poet walking along the promenade and the scenes between the Count and the Countess in which the Count attempts to comfort his wife's sorrow surrounding the latest pet for which she is longing. Unlike Vecchi's comic scenes involving Pantalone and Doctor Gratiano, Menotti's scenes focusing on the Count and the Countess directly relate to the other scenes and madrigals in the work and also greatly affect the subsequent plot developments.

Vecchi's madrigal comedy lacks the instrumental dance interludes utilized by Menotti's madrigal fable. Bilanchone Jr. observes that while most madrigal comedies are essentially *a cappella* compositions (only four of the surviving fifteen include instrumental accompaniment), instruments might have doubled or filled in missing vocal parts during performances, as was typical of performance practice at that time.⁸⁷ Therefore, while *L'Amfiparnaso* includes no parts for instruments or even a *basso continuo*, instruments may have participated in the original performances, just as they do in a performance of *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*.

The opening movements of both works are quite similar in terms of texture, rhythm, and tempo. The "Prologue" of *L'Amfiparnaso* (Figure 12) and the "Introduction" of *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore* (Figure 13) are both homophonic and highly rhythmic. Both movements begin slowly and dramatically, but after several measures, they both utilize faster rhythms. Menotti's opening movement proceeds more quickly through the use of a tempo change from *andante* (quarter note = 88) to *allegro con moto* (quarter note = 138) while Vecchi merely

⁸⁷ Bilanchone Jr., "*The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore* by Gian Carlo Menotti: A Study of a Twentieth-Century Madrigal Fable," 23.

created the illusion of a tempo change, using longer note values at the beginning followed by shorter note values. Vecchi and Menotti both used phrases with rapid rhythms to deliver the text in an energetic, speech-like manner. Both composers also intentionally set the stressed syllables of important words to longer notes, especially near the ends of phrases. They also varied the texture by using various voice groupings following homophonic openings written for the entire ensemble.

Figure 12. Similarities to Menotti in texture, rhythm, and tempo, "Prologue," m. 1-13

The image displays a musical score for the "Prologue" of *L'Amfiparnaso* by Orazio Vecchi. It consists of three systems of music, each with five staves. The first system (measures 1-4) features a vocal line and four piano accompaniment staves. The lyrics are: "Ben- che sia- t'u si, O spet- ta- to- ri illu-". The second system (measures 5-8) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "stri, So- lo di con- tem- plar Tra- gi- ci- a- spet- ti O co- mi- ci- ap- pa- ra-". The third system (measures 9-13) shows a more complex piano accompaniment with sixteenth-note patterns. The lyrics are: "ti In va- rie quis'or- na- ti, In va- rie qui- se, in va- rie quis'or- na- ti, In va- rie quis'or- na- ti, Voi".

L'Amfiparnaso, by Orazio Vecchi
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Figure 13. Similarities to Vecchi in texture, rhythm, and tempo, “Introduction,” m. 1-12

Andante (♩ = 88) GIAN CARLO MENOTTI

SOPRANO
ALTO
TENOR
BASS

There once lived a Man in a Cas - tle and a strange
 There once lived a Man in a Cas - tle and a strange
 There once lived a Man in a Cas - tle and a strange
 There once lived a Man in a Cas - tle and a strange

Allegro con moto (♩ = 138)

man was he. He shunned the Coun - tess' par - ties; he yawned at town
 man was he. He shunned the Coun - tess' par - ties; he yawned at town
 man was he. He shunned the Coun - tess' par - ties; he yawned at town
 man was he.

meet - ings; he would not let the doc - tor take his pulse;
 meet - ings; he would not let the doc - tor take his pulse; he did not go to
 meet - ings; he would not let the doc - tor take his pulse; he did not go to
 he did not go to

The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore, by Gian Carlo Menotti
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While both works are contrapuntal, both composers used homophony to emphasize important sections of the text. In the fifth scene of Act II of *L'Amfiparnaso*, Vecchi

homophonically set the phrase “*O me felice Isabella! Poi che viv’ il mio bene, Anch’io vivrommi*” (“O fortunate Isabella! Since my beloved lives, I will also live”) to emphasize Lucio’s resolve to live once he discovers that Isabella is alive and truly loves him (Figure 14).

**Figure 14. Vecchi’s use of homophony for textual emphasis, “Act II, scene v,”
mm. 53-59**

The image shows a musical score for five voices, likely a madrigal. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of five staves. The lyrics are: "O me felice Isabella! Poi che viv' il mio bene, Anch'io vivrommi". The music is homophonic, with all voices singing the same words simultaneously. The score is numbered 55 at the beginning of the second system.

L'Amfiparnaso, by Orazio Vecchi
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The final scene of the madrigal comedy also features liberal use of homophony to declaim the joy of the long-awaited wedding between Lucio and Isabella (Figure 15).

**Figure 15. Vecchi’s use of homophony for textual emphasis, “Act III, scene v,”
mm. 76-80**

The image displays a musical score for four voices and basso continuo. The lyrics are: "voi cor-te-si e' il-lu-stri-spi-el-la-to-ri, ci da-te ve-ra-men-te Pa-er-vo-l se-gno, che vi sia pac-ciu-". The score is in a homophonic style, with all voices moving in parallel motion, emphasizing the text. The music is in a homophonic style, with all voices moving in parallel motion, emphasizing the text.

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Similarly, in *The Unicorn*, Menotti dispensed with contrapuntal writing to portray important phrases of the libretto in dramatic fashion via homophony. In the “Second Madrigal,” following contrapuntal sections, homophony emphasizes the phrases “What a scandalous sight!” (Figure 16) and “Why would a man both rich and well-born raise a unicorn?” (Figure 17)

**Figure 16. Menotti's use of homophony for textual emphasis, "Second Madrigal,"
mm. 38-40**

What a scan - dal-ous sight! What a scan - dal-ous sight!
 What a scan - dal-ous sight! What a scan - dal-ous sight!
 What a scan - dal-ous sight! What a scan - dal-ous sight!
 What a scan - dal-ous sight! What a scan - dal-ous sight!

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**Figure 17. Menotti's use of homophony for textual emphasis, "Second Madrigal,"
mm. 84-89**

Poco più largamente e maestoso

Why, why would a man both rich and well-born raise a u-ni-corn?"
 Why, why would a man both rich and well-born raise a u-ni-corn?"
 Why, why would a man both rich and well-born raise a u-ni-corn?"
 Why, why would a man both rich and well-born raise a u-ni-corn?"

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Menotti also masterfully used a homophonic texture at the end of the "Fourth Madrigal," which is predominately contrapuntal, to depict the husband's dramatic declamation that he will obtain a pet unicorn for his wife by the next day. In like manner, homophony is used at the end of the

corresponding movements depicting the arguments between the Count and the Countess regarding her desire for a pet gorgon and a pet manticore in the “Seventh Madrigal” and “Tenth Madrigal.” The phrase “Behold the Gorgon stately and proud” in the “Fifth Madrigal” is set homophonically for dramatic effect. Homophony also predominates in the final movement when the moral of the story is revealed, and all three of the Poet’s pets are found alive and well, lovingly watching over their dying owner.

A formal and textural device common to both works concerns the consistent use of alternating voice groupings to represent two parties in conversation with one another. In Act I, scene i of *L’Amfiparnaso*, the texture alternates between homophony and polyphony, as does the texture in Menotti’s “First Madrigal.” Both movements are conversational in nature and alternate between groupings of upper voices and lower voices to emphasize the conversational aspect and to clarify when different characters are speaking. Alternation between various three-voice groupings within an overall five-voice texture in the first scene of *L’Amfiparnaso* serves to delineate the lines of Pantalone, Pedrolino, and Hortensia (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Vecchi's use of alternating voice groupings to depict conversation, "Act I, scene i," mm. 30-39

The musical score consists of two systems of staves. The first system (mm. 30-34) features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a basso continuo line. The lyrics are: "Che ser-vi-to-re? Va-te-ne in ma-l'ho-ra, Va-te-ne in ma-l'ho-ra. Vec-chiac-cio ri-bam-bi-to! vo-stro ser-vi-tor. Che ser-vi-to-re? Va-te-ne in ma-l'ho-ra, Va-te-ne in ma-l'ho-ra. Vec-chiac-cio ri-bam-bi-to! Cre-stro ser-vi-tor." The second system (mm. 35-39) features the same vocal staves and basso continuo line. The lyrics are: "Cre-di ch'io sia un Don-na da par-ti-to? di ch'io sia un Don-na da par-ti-to? di ch'io sia un Don-na da par-ti-to? Pian, pian, ca-ra Ma-don-na! Vo-le-u che ve-di-ga U-na pa-ro-la sol Pian, pian, ca-ra Ma-don-na! Vo-le-u che ve-di-ga U-na pa-ro-la sol Pian, pian, ca-ra Ma-don-na! Vo-le-u che ve-di-ga U-na pa-ro-la sol".

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Menotti used similar voice groupings to emphasize the division of chatter and gossip between various townspeople, consistently setting the sopranos in conversation with the altos and the tenors with the basses (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Menotti's use of alternating voice groupings to depict conversation, "First Madrigal," mm. 32-34

pp
 "Thank you." "Good bye." "Oh, what a pomp-ous ass!"
 pp
 — "Thank you." "Good bye!" "Oh, what a pomp-ous ass!"
 pp
 — "Thank you." "Good bye." "Oh, what a fool!"
 pp
 — "Thank you." "Good bye." "Oh, what a fool!"

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Vecchi also used the conversational format in the second (Figure 20), third (Figure 21), and fifth scenes of Act II and the fourth scene of Act III, often alternating between the upper three voices and the lower three voices within a five-voice texture.

Figure 20. Vecchi's use of alternating voice groupings to depict conversation, "Act II, scene ii," mm. 11-16

15
 blas de mozz? Y di-gh'el que ac-com-pan' e'l so seg-nor.
 diabl'a-blas de mozz? Y di-gh'el que ac-com-pan' e'l so seg-nor.
 8
 Mai-si, mai-si, cha su- na la cam-pa- na, la cam-pa- na, la cam-pa-
 8
 diabl'a-blas de mozz? Y di-gh'el que ac-com-pan' e'l so seg-nor. mai-si, cha su- na la cam-pa- na, la cam-pa- na, la cam-pa-
 Mai-si, mai-si, cha su- na la cam-pa-

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Figure 21. Vecchi's use of alternating voice groupings to depict conversation, "Act II, scene iii," mm. 26-30

30

cru-de-le, Che mi gio-vès-ser fe-de-le?

de-le, Che mi gio-vès-ser fe-de-le?

de-le, Che mi gio-vès-ser fe-de-le? Che co-s'es es-ta? Ch'a-zeis, seg-no-ra? Por vy-da vues-tra, Con quien a-blais?

Che co-s'es es-ta? Ch'a-zeis, seg-no-ra? Por vy-da vues-tra, Con quien a-blais?

Che co-s'es es-ta? Ch'a-zeis, seg-no-ra? Por vy-da vues-tra, Con quien a-blais?

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Menotti next used the conversational effect in the “Fourth Madrigal,” which depicts the first instance of dialogue between the Count and the Countess. At first, the men are set in three-part *divisi* (TBB) to represent the Count while the sopranos, altos, tenors, and baritones collectively represent the Countess. In the “Sixth Madrigal,” Menotti’s conversational division more closely resembles that of Vecchi. In the opening, the sopranos and altos represent the townspeople inquiring about the Gorgon that the Poet is now leading through the town; the altos, like the middle voice in Vecchi’s five-voice texture, perform double duty and also sing with the tenors and basses to deliver the lines spoken by the Poet (Figure 22).

Figure 22. Menotti's use of alternating voice groupings to depict conversation, "Sixth Madrigal," mm. 1-5

Allegro (♩ = 138)

The musical score is for the Sixth Madrigal, measures 1-5. It is marked 'Allegro' with a tempo of 138 beats per minute. The score is written for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The music is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: 'And what is that? A Bloody-Nun, a were-wolf?' (Soprano and Alto), 'This is a Gor-gon.' (Alto and Bass), and 'And w' (Soprano and Alto). The Tenor part is mostly silent, with a few notes in measure 5. The Bass part has a 'div.' (diviso) marking in measure 5. The score shows alternating voice groupings: Soprano and Alto sing together in measures 1-2, then Alto and Bass sing together in measures 3-4, and finally Soprano and Alto sing together in measure 5.

SOPRANO
ALTO
TENOR
BASS

"And what is that? A Bloody-Nun, a were-wolf?" "And w

"And what is that? A Bloody-Nun, a were-wolf?" "This is a Gor-gon." "And w

"This is a Gor-gon."

div. "This is a Gor-gon."

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In the "Seventh Madrigal," the next scene featuring the Count and Countess, Menotti was also consistent with the alternation of voice groups to represent the husband and wife. The lower two or three voices within the five-voice (SSATB) texture consistently represent The Count, while the Countess is consistently represented by the upper three or four voices. Menotti's voice groupings in the "Sixth Madrigal" and "Seventh Madrigal" thus more closely resemble those of Vecchi throughout *L'Amfiparnaso* when compared to the "Fourth Madrigal."

The same technique next occurs in the opening of the "Ninth Madrigal," in which the sopranos represent the townspeople, and the altos, tenors, and basses represent the Poet. The final scene involving an argument between the Count and the Countess utilizes a six-voice (SSATBB) texture in which the women sing the role of the Countess and the men sing the role of the Count. Later in the madrigal, the tenors also sing with the women, followed by the altos occasionally joining the men. The final movement featuring this technique is the "Eleventh

Madrigal,” in which Menotti used soprano/alto and tenor/bass pairings, as well as pairings between soprano/bass and alto/tenor, to indicate different townspeople conversing.

Menotti and Vecchi used similar text-painting devices (musical elements used to literally and vividly portray text). In the opening scene of Act I of *L'Amfiparnaso*, Vecchi used “subtle changes of timbre and tessitura to imitate speech inflections.”⁸⁸ When Pantalone says to his servant, “*Si pianta rave, e no piantalimon. Su chiam'Hortensia, pezzo de poltron!*” (“One plants radishes not lemons. Call Hortensia, you lazy rascal!”), Vecchi first used the two lower voices and then added an upper voice to signify Pantalone’s mounting anger (Figure 23).⁸⁹

Figure 23. Vecchi’s use of a thickening texture for dramatic purposes, “Act I, scene i,” mm. 16-20

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The addition of another voice part in order to thicken the texture and build drama was also used by Menotti in *The Unicorn*. For example, in the “Second Madrigal,” Menotti continually added voices to show the townspeople’s shock and abhorrence concerning a man parading a unicorn

⁸⁸ Adkins, analysis of Orazio Vecchi, *L'Amfiparnaso*, 94.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

through the town. The basses begin, followed by the altos, tenors, and sopranos in a thickening and increasingly complex polyphonic texture (Figure 1). Menotti also used a thickening texture in the “Sixth Madrigal” to show the townspeople’s mounting anger and shock that the Poet has killed his Unicorn. The sopranos begin, to which Menotti then added the altos, basses, and tenors in a contrapuntal texture (Figure 24).

A thickening texture appears again in the “Ninth Madrigal” to build a crescendo of anger and surprise when the townspeople discover that the Poet has killed his Gorgon. The sopranos begin, followed by the altos, basses, and tenors in a building polyphonic texture.

Both Vecchi and Menotti used minor modes and vocal lines descending from an upper register to convey the sorrow of the text. In the second scene of Act I of *L’Amfiparnaso*, which depicts the love between the characters of Lelio and Nisa, the overall tone is serious due to Vecchi’s use of a minor mode and upper register for the beginning of the soprano line, which then descends (Figure 25).

Figure 25. Vecchi’s use of a minor mode, upper register, and descending line to text-paint, “Act I, scene ii,” mm. 4-6

The image shows a musical score for five voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor 1, Tenor 2, Bass) in a minor mode. The score is for measures 4-6 of Act I, scene ii. The lyrics are: Nar-ci-so, a-ni-ma mi-a, Col don di quel Nar-ci-ni-ma mi-a, Col don di quel Nar-ci-so, Col don di quel Nar-ci-ci-so, Col don di quel Nar-ci-so, Che vo-le-te voi dir, Che vo-le-te voi dir, a-ni-ma mi-a, Col don di Col don di quel Nar-ci-so, Col don di quel Nar-ci-

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Menotti similarly treated the serious text of the “Fourth Madrigal,” in which the Count attempts to alleviate the Countess’ sorrow regarding her lack of a unicorn. Here Menotti used a minor mode to convey the text, in addition to lines that often begin in the upper register and then

chromatically descend to portray vividly the Countess' sorrow (Figure 26). The text of the "Seventh Madrigal," in which the Countess bemoans her need for a gorgon, is treated similarly.

Figure 26. Menotti's use of a minor mode, upper register, and descending chromatic line to text-paint, "Fourth Madrigal," mm. 24-26

The musical score for measures 24-26 of the "Fourth Madrigal" is presented in four staves. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The music is characterized by a descending chromatic line in the upper register, which is used to text-paint the lyrics. The lyrics are "Ah, my mas-ter, my lord!" and "Ah, my mas-ter, my lord!". The score includes dynamic markings such as "cresc.", "ff", and "(marcato) ff".

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Both Vecchi and Menotti used many stepwise descending lines to convey sorrow. Vecchi utilized a stepwise descending three-note figure in the scene between Lelio and Nisa to depict the phrase "*che morì*" ("which died"), referring to the gift of Narcissus, with voices entering in descending order (Figure 27).

**Figure 27. Vecchi’s use of stepwise descending motion to text-paint, “Act I, scene ii,”
mm. 7-10**

The image shows a musical score for five staves, likely representing different vocal parts. The lyrics are: "so, Col don di quel Nár-ci-so, Che mo-ri, trop- p'a-man- d'il suo bel vi-so? a-ni-ma mi-a, Col don di quel Nár-ci-so, Che mo-ri, trop- p'a-man d'il suo bel quel Nár-ci-so, Col don di quel Nár-ci-so, Che mo-ri, trop- p'a-man- c so, a-ni-ma mi-a, Col don di quel Nár-ci-so, Che mo-ri, trop- p'a-man- c". Red boxes highlight specific melismatic passages in each staff, showing a stepwise descending chromatic three-note figure. The first box is in the first staff, the second in the second, the third in the third, the fourth in the fourth, and the fifth in the fifth. The number '10' is written above the first staff on the right side.

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In the “Sixth Madrigal” of *The Unicorn*, Menotti also used a descending chromatic three-note melismatic figure that occurs four times in a tenor solo to portray the sorrow the townspeople feel regarding the murder of the Unicorn, followed by brief dotted-eighth-sixteenth-note melismas for a vivid portrayal of the word “weep” (Figure 28).

Figure 28. Menotti's use of a descending melisma and dotted rhythms to text-paint, "Sixth Madrigal," mm. 61-63

The musical score for "Sixth Madrigal" (mm. 61-63) is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics: "Ban-ish all sleep. Weep for the dead. Weep...". The second staff is the piano accompaniment, with lyrics: "gain...". The third staff is the vocal line, with lyrics: "or a gain. Slain by Man. Weep...". The fourth staff is the piano accompaniment, with lyrics: "Oh gain. Weep for the dead.". The fifth staff is the vocal line, with lyrics: "for the U - ni - corn, the U - ni - corn. weep, weep.". The sixth staff is the piano accompaniment, with lyrics: "weep, weep.". A red box highlights a descending melisma in the upper voices and a dotted rhythm in the piano accompaniment. The tempo marking "poco rall." is present at the end of the score.

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Vecchi utilized descending stepwise motion combined with syllabic declamation to depict the phrase "*che volea precipitarsi*" ("wanted to throw himself into the gorge") in the fifth scene of Act II, when Isabella learns that Lucio has not died (Figure 29). Then, in the second scene of Act III, descending stepwise motion in the upper voices is used to set the word "*tormiente*" ("pain") in an expressive manner.

Figure 29. Vecchi's use of descending stepwise motion and syllabic declamation to text-paint, "Act II, scene v," mm. 35-37

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The score is for measures 35-37 of Act II, scene v of *L'Amfiparnaso*. The lyrics are: "ro che vo-lea pre-ci-pi-tar-si, è ve-ro che vo-lea pre-ci-pi-tar-si; Ma cer-ti che vo-lea pre-ci-pi-tar-si, che vo-lea pre-ci-pi-tar-si che vo-lea pre-ci-pi-tar-si; È ve-ro che vo-lea pre-ci-pi-tar-si, è ve-ro; Ma cer-ti". Red boxes highlight descending stepwise motion in the vocal lines, specifically in the phrases "che vo-lea pre-ci-pi-tar-si" in the Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts.

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Both Vecchi and Menotti also used ascending stepwise motion as a dramatic device. In the fifth scene of Act II of *L'Amfiparnaso*, Vecchi used ascending stepwise motion in the soprano and tenor lines dramatically to deliver the line “*Lucio vive?*” (“Lucio lives?”) when Isabella discovers that her lover has not succeeded in killing himself. Ascending stepwise motion combined with sixteenth note melismas to text-paint on the word “*vive*” (“lives”) in the ensuing contrapuntal section achieves a similar effect (Figure 30). Vecchi also used rhythmic ornaments further to portray the same word in the alto and tenor parts, though Menotti did not.

Figure 31. Menotti's use of ascending stepwise motion to text-paint, "Fifth Madrigal," mm. 35-37

lite. Fear-less and wild, his wings wide-spread.
 ALTO I
 street. Fear - less - and wild, wild, wild,
 ALTO II
 street. Fear - less - and wild. Oh:
 street. Fear - less and wild, he slow - ly sar - a - bands
 Oh:
 street. Fear - less and wild, he slow - ly sar - a - bands

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Menotti also used melismas that are not strictly stepwise or written in a single direction as expressive devices. In the "Sixth Madrigal," brief sixteenth-note melismas imitate the singing of nightingales, while in the "Seventh Madrigal," melismas on the word "voice" illuminate the silver clarion quality now missing from the Countess' voice due to the death of her unicorn and her longing for a gorgon.

Vecchi and Menotti used dissonance as an expressive device to enhance the text throughout their works. In the second scene of Act I of Vecchi's madrigal comedy, he used a dissonant cluster of D, E, and F via a 9-8 suspension followed by a dissonance between D and E via a 4-3 suspension on the word "morte" ("death") (Figure 32).

**Figure 32. Vecchi's use of dissonance via 9-8 and 4-3 suspension to text-paint,
"Act I, scene ii," mm. 30-33**

The image shows a musical score for five staves, likely representing two voices and a basso continuo. The lyrics are in Italian and repeat the phrase "pro-prio è mor-te, che l'a-mor pro-prio è mor-te." The score is marked with a 30 at the beginning. Two red boxes highlight specific dissonant intervals: one box highlights a 9-8 suspension between the upper and lower voices, and another box highlights a 4-3 suspension between the upper and lower voices. The lyrics are: pro - prio è mor - te, che l'a - mor pro - prio è mor - te. mor - te, che l'a - mor pro - prio è mor - te. che l'a - mor pro - prio è mor - te. l'a - mor pro - prio è mor - te, che l'a - mor pro - prio è mor - te. pro - prio è mor - te, che l'a - mor pro - prio è mor - te.

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In the first scene of Act II, Vecchi used a tritone of B flat and E between the upper two voices via an escape tone in the upper voice on the word "*crudel*" ("cruel") in the phrase "*Fia satio il tuo desio, Donna crudel, col precipitio mio*" ("Through my ruin, cruel woman, your wish shall be fulfilled") (Figure 33).

Figure 33. Vecchi's use of an escape tone dissonance to text-paint, "Act II, scene i," mm. 28-32

30

Don-na cru-del,

m'ho-ra Fia sa-tio il tuo de-si-o, Don-na cru-del, col

m'ho-ra, Fia sa-tio il tuo de-si-o, Don-na

m'ho-ra, Fia sa-tio il tuo de-si-o, Don-na cru-del

m'ho-ra, Fia sa-tio il tuo de-si-o, col pre-ci-

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Similarly, in Menotti's "Second Madrigal," while the sopranos and altos sustain the word "insane" and the tenors and basses sustain the word "pity," the composer wrote a dissonant cluster between C, D, F, and G created by neighbor motion in the tenor and bass voices (Figure 34).

Figure 34. Menotti's use of dissonance to text-paint, "Second Madrigal," mm. 13-14

Think-ing the man in - sane _____ some laughed with pit - y, some 1
 Think-ing the man in - sane _____ some laughed with pit - y, some 1
 Think-ing the man in - sane _____ some laughed with pit - y, _____ some 1
 Think-ing the man in - sane _____ some laughed with pit - y, _____ some 1

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Menotti then continued to use a C major triad with an added second on the word “pity” for subsequent repetitions. In the “Fifth Madrigal,” two soprano soloists sing a biting minor second on E and F with staccato articulation to portray the chirping of the critical cricket described in the text (Figure 35).

Figure 35. Menotti's use of dissonance to text-paint, "Fifth Madrigal," mm. 17-20

(2 Sop. Soli)
 crick-et, crit-ic-al crick-et, crit-ic-al crick-et,
 Sop. *p*
 He does not pause to ac - know-ledge the rack-et of the
 div. *p*
 He does not pause to ac - know-ledge the rack-et of the

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In the “Sixth Madrigal,” Menotti used a series of tone clusters via appoggiatura-like motion for expressive purposes in a passage that portrays the townspeople mourning the death of the Poet’s Unicorn (Figure 36).

Figure 36. Menotti’s use of dissonance to text-paint, “Sixth Madrigal,” mm. 58-60

The image shows a musical score for the "Sixth Madrigal" by Gian Carlo Menotti, measures 58-60. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "gain. For the U-ni-corn, U-ni-corn slain by Man will not leap ev-er a-". The piano part has lyrics: "Man. Man will not leap, will not leap ev-er a- Weep for the dead. For the dead weep." Red boxes are drawn around specific chords in both parts, highlighting dissonant clusters. The score is in 8/8 time and includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines.

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Onomatopoeia (a word that phonetically imitates or suggests the source of the sound it describes) features prominently throughout both *L’Amfiparnaso* and *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*. Vecchi used “pi-ri-pi” and “cu-cu-ru-cu” to imitate the sounds of birds, specifically chickens and pigeons, in the opening scene of Act I (Figure 37).

Figure 37. Vecchi's use of onomatopoeia, "Act I, scene i," mm. 11-13

The image displays a musical score for five staves. The first staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "pi-ri-pi, Cu-cu-ru-cu, cu-cu- ru- cu." The second staff continues with "Pi- pi-ri- pi, Cu- cu-ru-cu." and "Ah be- stia, ti vuol dir". The third staff has a rest followed by "Ah be- stia, ti vuol". The fourth staff has lyrics: "pi, Pi- pi- ri- pi, Cu- cu- ru-cu, Cu-cu-ru- cu." The fifth staff has lyrics: "Pi- pi- ri- pi, Cu- cu- ru-cu, cu-cu- ru- cu.. Ah be- stia, ti vuol". The music consists of rhythmic patterns of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests.

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In Act I, scene iii, he used “tan-ta-ra” to imitate the sound of an instrument being played, which Adkins claims is a trumpet (Figure 38).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Ibid, 95.

Figure 38. Vecchi's use of onomatopoeia, "Act I, scene iii," mm. 47-55

The image shows a musical score for five staves. The first staff is in 3/4 time and starts with a treble clef. The second staff is in 3/4 time and starts with a treble clef. The third staff is in 3/4 time and starts with a treble clef. The fourth staff is in 3/4 time and starts with a treble clef. The fifth staff is in 3/4 time and starts with a bass clef. The lyrics are: "Tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra-tà. Dot-tor, vu pa-rè à o via, che mi ve suo- no. Tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra-tà. Dot-tor, vu pa-rè à tor, o via, che mi ve suo- no. Tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra, tan-ta-ra-tà. Dot-tor vu pa-rè à".

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Vecchi used “trecu trecu tren” and “tronch tronch tronch” to describe the sounds of an instrument known as a *zambaiu* in the opening scene of Act III, followed by “tich tach toch” to imitate the sound of knocking on a door in the third scene of the same act. Vecchi also used nonsense words crudely to mock the Hebrew language, which Adkins says offer ample opportunity for “satire and characterization by the performers.”⁹¹

The most prominent and comical use of onomatopoeia in *The Unicorn* is combined with a sprechstimme-like effect and occurs in the “First Madrigal.” Menotti first rhythmically set “tcha tchara tcha tchi tcha” in the lines of the sopranos and altos (Figure 39), followed by “bla bla bli bla” in the tenor and bass lines to imitate the sound of crowds gossiping and chattering.

⁹¹ Ibid., 98.

Figure 39. Menotti's use of onomatopoeia and sprechstimme, "First Madrigal," m. 15

S.
tcha tchi tcha tchi tcha ra tcha tcha tcha tchi

A. I.
tcha tchi tcha tchi tcha tchi tcha tcha tchi

ALTO II
"Tcha tcha tcha tcha tcha ra tcha ra tcha tcha tcha tchi tcha

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In the "First Madrigal," Menotti set staccato descending eighth and sixteenth notes to imitate the sounds of laughter on "ha" (Figure 40) as well as on "ho" and "oh" in various rhythmic combinations in the "Seventh Madrigal" to imitate the sound of weeping.

Figure 40. Menotti's use of onomatopoeia, "First Madrigal," mm. 17-18

odd! Ha ha!" "How well_

odd! Ha ha!" "How well_

odd! Ha ha!" "How well_

odd! Ha ha!" "How well_

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Finally, in the “Tenth Madrigal,” Menotti cleverly included two eighth note hand claps to imitate the sound of the Countess slapping her husband during the argument in which she declares she must have a pet manticore (Figure 41).

Figure 41. Menotti’s use of onomatopoeia, “Tenth Madrigal,” mm. 54-56

The musical score consists of two vocal staves and piano accompaniment. The vocal lines are in 2/4 time. The first vocal line has lyrics: "Saying some-thing?" and "I heard you". The second vocal line has lyrics: "Saying some-thing?" and "I heard you". The piano accompaniment has lyrics: "I was a fool.)" and "“Oh noth-ing!”". A red box highlights the final two eighth notes of both vocal lines, which are eighth-note hand claps. Above the top vocal line, the annotation "(she slaps him) (hand claps) ☹️" is written. Dynamic markings include *p* and *ff*.

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Commedia dell’arte Characters

Unlike most of the characters in Vecchi’s *L’Amfiparnaso*, taken directly from *commedia dell’arte* stock characters, Menotti created his own cast of characters for *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*. Certain parallels can be drawn, however, between the colorful, strongly developed personalities Menotti created and the centuries-old masks of the *commedia dell’arte*, which means Menotti may have drawn inspiration from the genre just as Vecchi did almost four centuries earlier. The Poet shares qualities with Colombina; they are both independent and intelligent, and they seek to enlighten those persons around them. The

Countess' personality, marked by single-mindedness and a penchant for the dramatic, resembles that of Arlecchino, while her marital arguments sparked by these personality traits resemble typical *commedia* scenarios. The Countess also operates at both ends of the intelligence spectrum, appearing both clever and stupid in turn, as does the stock character of Pulcinella. She also shares with Pulcinella a love for quarrels, bloodshed, and deceit. Finally, the faults of Menotti's townspeople, which include jealousy, fickleness, and vanity, bear a resemblance to those faults of the generic lovers of the *commedia dell'arte*.

Colombina, a stock character from the *commedia dell'arte*, possesses qualities that mirror certain aspects of the Poet's personality. Rudlin describes her as the "only lucid, rational person in *commedia dell'arte*."⁹² While the Poet does live in a world of make-believe and constantly misleads the other residents of the town, he is also the most rational and independent person in the story. He does not kill any of his pets, even though he explicitly tells the townspeople that he has, thereby prompting them to do the same. In the "Twelfth Madrigal," he scolds the townspeople for their misinformed copycat behavior, calling them "foolish people who feign to feel what other men have suffered."⁹³ Furthermore, he explains that they, not he, "are the indifferent killers of the poet's dreams."⁹⁴ Like Colombina, who loves Arlecchino but sees through his façade and feels compelled to enlighten and help him "break the bounds of being a fixed type,"⁹⁵ the Poet also seeks to enlighten the townspeople and teach them to be true to themselves. Colombina is a lone figure,⁹⁶ just as the Poet faces similar solitude. She is also autonomous and self-sufficient with no negative attributes,⁹⁷ as is the Poet, if his penchant for

⁹² John Rudlin, *Commedia dell'Arte—An Actor's Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 130.

⁹³ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 149.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 149-150.

⁹⁵ Rudlin, *Commedia dell'Arte—An Actor's Handbook*, 130.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

lying can be forgiven due to its noble purpose. Rudlin also states that Colombina never acts on impulse and always thinks through things before acting.⁹⁸ The Poet's actions are similarly well-planned. While he leads the townspeople to believe he is rash and impulsive, in truth, he has carefully considered his words and actions with the sole purpose of teaching the townspeople an important life lesson.

The *commedia* stock character Arlecchino bears a striking resemblance to Menotti's character the Countess in *The Unicorn*. Rudlin describes Arlecchino as a character who can entertain only one idea at a time.⁹⁹ For example, although he deeply loves Colombina, his sexual appetite immediately causes him to focus on a new conquest when he encounters an attractive woman.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the Countess' ability to focus on only one idea at a time is the only dimension of her personality to which the audience is privy. In all three madrigals featuring arguments between the Countess and her husband, her actions and emotions are driven by a single factor: her desire for a new pet so she can keep pace with the latest trend established by the Poet. Arlecchino never considers the consequences of an action or learns from past experiences.¹⁰¹ The Countess suffers from the same personality flaw. On three occasions, she dramatically pleads with her husband for a new beast to be brought into their home after seeing the Poet's latest creature of the week, failing to learn the lesson he is trying to impart to her and the rest of the town's residents until the final movement of the work.

Like Arlecchino, the Countess responds to everything "in a way that is taken to apocalyptic proportions and then forgotten entirely—until the next time."¹⁰² Arlecchino often threatens to hang himself when he fears that Colombina no longer loves him, but his fear of

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 79.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

heights then prevents him from doing so. He then opts to tear himself apart and eat the pieces, which causes him to realize his hunger. Thus distracted, he goes in search of food.¹⁰³ Similarly, in the “Fourth Madrigal” of *The Unicorn*, the Countess wonders why she was ever born if she must endure a lifetime without a pet unicorn.¹⁰⁴

Her hysterics become exponentially more severe with each new creature she desires, and the dialogue between her and her husband is reminiscent of the typical exchanges between the young lovers of the *commedia*. In the “Seventh Madrigal,” the Countess falsely hypothesizes various causes of her unicorn’s impending death in front of her husband, although Menotti noted in the score that, in fact, she secretly has poisoned the creature.¹⁰⁵ She wonders if he has grazed on mandrake or hellebore or if he has caught a chill that will prove to be his undoing.¹⁰⁶ The Count quickly offers to replace it with a younger unicorn, but the Countess exclaims that a younger unicorn simply will not suffice because they have become “too commonplace.”¹⁰⁷ She declares that she wants a gorgon instead, and her husband laughs at this surprising proclamation. The Countess dramatically retorts that he must no longer love her and instead must love another woman, prompting her to threaten to return to her mother’s home.¹⁰⁸ When her threat does not succeed, her husband wishes her “Bon voyage,”¹⁰⁹ and she cries that since she has been abandoned and betrayed by him, she will “take the veil and die a nun.”¹¹⁰ The Count still is not moved, so next she brings their son into the argument, stating that he “has done no wrong,”¹¹¹ implying that he does not deserve to suffer from a broken home and family. An anguished fit of

¹⁰³ Ibid., 79-80.

¹⁰⁴ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 54-55.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 78.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 80-81.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 82-83.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 84-86.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 86.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 86-87.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 87.

crying, masterfully set to music by Menotti, finally moves the Count to procure a gorgon for his wife.¹¹² This second argument between the Count and Countess strongly resembles a frequently quoted dialogue between one of the generic pairs of young lovers in the *commedia*, in which they dramatically argue about how they no longer love one another and instead revile one another. The male lover declares that he could “never have imagined that heaven could become hell,” while the female exclaims that she could “never have been persuaded that Cupid could become Lucifer.”¹¹³ Both lovers also make dramatic proclamations about mourning and dying in a poetic display of repartee, which closely resembles the melodramatic scene between the Count and Countess in the “Seventh Madrigal” of *The Unicorn*.

The “Tenth Madrigal,” the longest and most elaborate of the three movements featuring the Count and Countess, resembles a stock *commedia* argument between Il Capitano and Colombina. Both this stock *commedia* scene between Colombina and Il Capitano and the final scene featuring the Count and Countess in *The Unicorn* masterfully combine melodrama with hilarity, suggesting a possible connection between the two. In the opening of the “Tenth Madrigal,” the Countess immediately mocks the Count when he asks why she is so sad and asks him if he is drunk, asleep, or simply blind.¹¹⁴ The Countess has just secretly stabbed her gorgon in the preceding movement, “Interlude V,”¹¹⁵ and now exclaims to her husband that he is the only one in the entire town unaware of her terrible plight.¹¹⁶ After he offers to obtain a new gorgon for her when she states that hers is lost, she is appalled at the suggestion and tells the Count that he has “no intuition or sense” and is “vulgar and dense.”¹¹⁷ The Countess proceeds by

¹¹² Ibid., 88-90.

¹¹³ Rudlin, *Commedia dell'Arte—An Actor's Handbook*, 111.

¹¹⁴ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 116-117.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 114.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 118.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 120-121.

saying that the gorgon breed is now “common and cheap,” and she wonders why he has not thought to offer her a manticore instead.¹¹⁸ He refuses, and she responds by calling him “a fool” and “a mule” and dramatically threatens to faint.¹¹⁹ She then wonders aloud why she even married him when she could easily have married a duke or a prince instead of “a count of no account.”¹²⁰ Colombina similarly insults Il Capitano, calling him a “slavering animal,” “tinpot tyrant,” and a “hypocritical hyena” as she taunts him for his flagrant storytelling.¹²¹ The Countess finally resorts to physical violence, slapping her husband twice, which causes him to acquiesce to her demands.¹²² Colombina also threatens violence against Il Capitano, declaring that she will “squeeze his head flat and pull his sardine off” and that since she is stronger, she will smash his head in and scramble his brains.¹²³

The Countess also bears a resemblance to the *commedia* character of Pulcinella. Rudlin observes that Pulcinella can be played as clever pretending to be stupid or vice versa.¹²⁴ The same is true for the character of the Countess. She can be considered a clever woman because of the way she secretly kills both her unicorn and gorgon and then pretends to be stupid and vulnerable in her masterful manipulation of her husband. She can also be seen as a stupid woman for simply copying the actions of the Poet without giving any genuine consideration to her own tastes and desires. She displays her cleverness as she kills her pets, lies about the killings, and proceeds to manipulate her husband into obtaining for her the latest creature en vogue. Like Pulcinella, the Countess is a “complete egotist.” She also “delights in quarrels” and “makes a

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 122.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 124.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 126.

¹²¹ Rudlin, *Commedia dell'Arte—An Actor's Handbook*, 125.

¹²² Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 127-129.

¹²³ Rudlin, *Commedia dell'Arte—An Actor's Handbook*, 125.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 141.

point of seeking them,”¹²⁵ as evidenced by the arguments she initiates with her husband. The audience can easily sense that she enjoys the drama she willfully creates. She also seems to share Pulcinella’s great pleasure for bloodshed,¹²⁶ showing no remorse or sorrow for her murders of the unicorn and the gorgon. Instead, she sees the killings as simply a means to an end. Like Pulcinella, though, the Countess does not boast or brag of her “nefarious acts.”¹²⁷ She instead lies about them in a manipulative and deceitful manner in order to fulfill her own selfish and egocentric desires. Because she is concerned only with her own feelings and desires, she shares with Pulcinella the inability “to receive human kindness” and also possesses no “concept of how to extend it to others.”¹²⁸

The generic group of lovers from the *commedia* realm embodies prominent traits seen in the townspeople in *The Unicorn*. Rudlin describes the young lovers of the *commedia dell’arte* scenarios as eternally jealous and fickle.¹²⁹ For example, the *commedia*-inspired lovers in Vecchi’s *L’Amfiparnaso*, Isabella and Lucio, exhibit such envious characteristics when they each fear that the other has fallen in love with someone else. They are fickle in their constantly evolving emotions regarding love and hatred for one another and their desires to kill themselves. Menotti’s townspeople in *The Unicorn* behave in a similar manner. They prove jealous and envious of both the Poet and the Countess, who begins a trend by copying the Poet’s latest pet choice. When the Countess appears with the newest creature, every couple in town then obtains the same creature in order to maintain status quo. They exhibit fickle tendencies when they obtain pets they previously derided the Poet for having. They also exhibit fickle behavior when they slay the same pets simply because the Poet and the Countess have done so. The *commedia*

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 109.

lovers are vain¹³⁰ and thus are frequently found looking into hand-mirrors, becoming extremely upset at any imperfection.¹³¹ Menotti's townspeople are also quite vain. Their concern with appearances and social standing leads them to obtain peculiar pets in order to keep pace with the Poet and the Countess. Like the lovers, they also experience self doubt regarding their emotions,¹³² and they choose to ignore their initial, genuine reactions of horror upon first seeing each of the creatures, which they then decide they must possess to remain in the upper echelon of society.

Mythology and the Supernatural

The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore is only one of numerous compositions in Gian Carlo Menotti's repertoire that shows the strong influence of mythological and supernatural creatures and subject matter. While mythological creatures play an important role in *The Unicorn*, Menotti also displayed a fascination with magic, Greek mythology, and aliens from outer space in a number of other vocal and choral works, which indicates Menotti's interest in paranormal subjects extends beyond this one composition. Menotti's fondness for such otherworldly subjects is thus evident throughout his compositional career. The plots of the ballet *Sebastian* (1944) and the opera *The Medium* (1946) concern magic and the supernatural realm, while the operas *Help! Help! The Globolinks!* (1968) and *A Bride from Pluto* (1982) focus upon beings from outer space. The operas *The Island God* (1942) and *Errand into the Maze*, as well as the cantata *For the Death of Orpheus* (1990), draw inspiration from Greek mythology.

The ballet *Sebastian* (premiered in 1944), one of his earliest works, clearly displays an interest in magic and supernatural powers. The scenario, created by Menotti, focuses upon a

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., 108.

¹³² Ibid., 109.

prince who falls in love with a well-known courtesan. His sisters, very possessive of his time and affections, practice black magic and seek to control the courtesan by obtaining one of her veils to place atop a wax effigy they have constructed in her likeness. Their Moorish slave, Sebastian, is also in love with the courtesan, and unbeknownst to the sisters, takes the place of the wax figure under the veil and thus sacrifices himself, bearing the brunt of the mystical arrows the sisters intend for the courtesan. His sacrifice breaks the power of their witchcraft and allows the prince and courtesan to be together.¹³³

The Medium (premiered in 1946), one of Menotti's most successful operas,¹³⁴ also focuses on the supernatural realm and was inspired by a deeply moving personal experience in Menotti's life. During a visit with a Dutch baron and his English wife who lived near the home Menotti shared with Samuel Barber, he attended a séance performed by the baroness, in which she appeared to go into a trance and speak to her deceased daughter, whose nickname was Doodly.¹³⁵ Menotti later remarked to Gruen that he was so moved by the experience that he found himself crying, because it was evident to him that the baroness actually believed she was communicating with her daughter. However, Menotti did not believe. This experience led him to ponder whether "belief was a creative power and whether skepticism could destroy creative powers."¹³⁶ This idea thus inspired the plot of *The Medium*, which revolves around Baba, a woman who performs séances. The plot contrasts Baba's beliefs with those of the other characters, regarding whether or not they actually have made contact with the supernatural realms.¹³⁷

¹³³ Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 108.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹³⁵ Gruen, *Menotti—A Biography*, 28.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹³⁷ Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 40.

Two other operas by Menotti demonstrate a preoccupation with extra-terrestrial beings. *Help! Help! The Globolinks!* (premiered in 1968) was written as a commission for the Hamburg opera and geared toward children. The story focuses on a group of children threatened by “some dangerous and seemingly indestructible extra-terrestrial beings who can express themselves only by electronic sounds.”¹³⁸ A young girl named Emily becomes the heroine of the story, and she discovers that the aliens can be defeated only by real music and saves the world from a potentially disastrous Globolink invasion simply by playing her violin.¹³⁹ Fourteen years later, Menotti still exhibited an interest in aliens with the premiere of his opera entitled *A Bride from Pluto* (premiered in 1982). In the plot, a young boy named Billy is banished from his home by his parents, and he discovers a spaceship from Pluto in his backyard. The Queen of Pluto emerges from the ship; she has been searching the galaxy for a husband and has selected Billy. She offers to give him anything he wants, but in exchange, she replaces his heart and soul with an electronic device that renders him immortal.¹⁴⁰ Both *Help! Help! The Globolinks!* and *A Bride from Pluto* demonstrate Menotti’s career-long interest in otherworldly creatures, which is also evident in *The Unicorn*.

Elements from Greek mythology also influenced and appeared in several of Menotti’s major works. *The Island God* (premiered in 1942) was one of Menotti’s earliest and least successful operas; the work was received so poorly by audiences and critics that the composer suppressed the distribution of the score.¹⁴¹ The opera takes place on a small, barren, and uninhabited Mediterranean island. The ruins of a temple built for a Greek god long since forgotten are all that remain on the island. Two people named Ilo and Telea arrive on the island,

¹³⁸ Gruen, *Menotti—A Biography*, 188.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ “North American Works Directory,” *A Bride from Pluto*, The National Opera America Center, accessed January 22, 2015, <http://www.operaamerica.org/applications/nawd/newworks/details.aspx?id=1079>.

¹⁴¹ Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 32.

fleeing their home country that had been invaded by enemy forces. Upon arriving on the island, Ilo throws himself to the ground at the temple and desperately begs for help. The god is brought back to life by Ilo's invocation, and Ilo swears to prove his faith and devotion by doing anything the god requests. The god first demands that Ilo rebuild his temple, which Ilo obediently does over the course of several years. A young fisherman named Luca arrives on the island, quickly seduces Telea, and promises her a better life. Telea is especially vulnerable to Luca's advances because she does not share Ilo's mysticism or devotion to the recently resurrected Greek god. When Ilo discovers Telea and Luca together, he prays for a fierce storm to chase the fleeing lovers, which the god provides. Telea and Luca escape, however, and Ilo begins destroying the temple out of anger and rebellion, believing the god has failed him. The god warns him that such a great offense is punishable by death. Nonetheless, Ilo realizes that the god fears him more than he fears the god, because the god lives only through Ilo's faith. If Ilo should die, the god also would die. Ilo smashes the alter, and the god punishes him with death and thus ironically dies along with him.¹⁴²

In 1947, Menotti composed music for the ballet *Errand into the Maze* with a scenario designed by Martha Graham, then at the forefront of American modern dance. The scenario is based on the Greek myth of the Labyrinth. Children from Athens are regularly sent to King Minos to be sacrificed to his minotaur, a half-man, half-bull creature who lives in the labyrinth, an impossible maze that offers no escape for the minotaur or his victims. Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, falls in love with the leader of the latest group of people to be sacrificed,

¹⁴² Ibid.

Theseus. She enters the maze with him, leaving behind a trail of thread that they and the other Athenians use to escape after Theseus kills the minotaur.¹⁴³

In his final years, Menotti continued to exhibit an interest in Greek mythology with the composition of the cantata *For the Death of Orpheus* (premiered in 1990) for tenor soloist, chorus, and orchestra, written for the Atlanta Symphony. The work was inspired by Rainer Maria Rilke's sonnets to Orpheus. In the cantata, the followers of Dionysius tear Orpheus' body into pieces and throw his bleeding head into the sea. His head keeps singing, however, and floats to a Greek island where a temple was built in his honor. Menotti stated his intention of the work as a commentary on the music of the day. He asserted that some people had done everything in their power to destroy good music, "but the head of Orpheus proves that true beauty goes on singing."¹⁴⁴ Menotti's use of Greek mythology in *The Island God*, *Errand into the Maze*, and *For the Death of Orpheus* indicates a life-long interest in mythological sources, specifically Greek mythology, which provides further evidence for the influence of ancient Greek theatre on *The Unicorn* in its use of a Greek-like chorus, the combination of movement and music, and the incorporation of a heroic figure in the Poet.

Medieval Bestiary

Menotti, in the creation of his plot and characters, was largely inspired by descriptions of three mythical beasts described in White's translation of a twelfth century Latin bestiary published under the title *The Bestiary—A Book of Beasts*. Menotti often elaborated on these descriptions or eliminated certain aspects of the original text in his performance instructions and

¹⁴³ Joseph Stevenson, "Description of Gian Carlo Menotti's ballet *Errand into the Maze*," All Music, accessed January 22, 2015, <http://www.allmusic.com/composition/errand-into-the-maze-ballet-mc0002358764>.

¹⁴⁴ Mary Campbell, "Menotti Still Searching for End to New Opera," *The Wichita Eagle*, May 20, 1990: 1C, accessed January 22, 2015, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/0EADB3D48A9F00E4?p=NewsBank>.

the libretto. Nevertheless, the medieval descriptions of the beasts greatly influenced numerous aspects of the libretto. In the preliminary pages of the score, Menotti provided physical and psychological descriptions of the Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore, which he credited as coming directly from *A Book of Beasts*.¹⁴⁵ In addition to providing descriptions of the three creatures to aid the conductor, producer, choreographer, and costumer, White's imagery is also used to describe the beasts for the audience in three of the madrigals. Menotti also used the information in other parts of the libretto to inform the townspeople's reactions upon their first sightings of the creatures.

White's translation of the medieval description of the Unicorn, borrowed in part by Menotti,¹⁴⁶ describes various aspects of the creature:

UNICORNIS the Unicorn, which is also called Rhinoceros by the Greeks, is of the following nature. He is a very small animal like a kid, excessively swift, with one horn in the middle of his forehead, and no hunter can catch him. But he can be trapped by the following stratagem. A virgin girl is led to where he lurks, and there she is sent off by herself into the wood. He soon leaps into her lap when he sees her, and embraces her, and hence he gets caught.¹⁴⁷

Illustration 1. Unicorn



Public Domain.

¹⁴⁵ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 4.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ T. H. White, ed., *The Bestiary—A Book of Beasts, Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1954; reprint, New York: Capricorn Books, 1960), 21-22 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

The “Third Madrigal,” which Menotti subtitled “Dance of the Poet and the Unicorn,”¹⁴⁸ is written for a three-part chorus of women’s voices directly addressing the Unicorn and describing him as “swift” and “leaping,”¹⁴⁹ directly showing the influence of White’s description. The women also warn the Unicorn about the danger of being enticed by the virgin. Menotti created a more detailed and vivid description of the virgin and the circumstances surrounding the Unicorn’s demise should he give in to her seduction. He described the virgin as “sleeping under the lemon tree, her hair adrift among the clover.”¹⁵⁰ The virgin “hides a net under her petticoat” and “silver chains around her hips,”¹⁵¹ and the women in Menotti’s chorus warn the Unicorn that if he kisses her, a hunter will then pierce his throat.¹⁵² The women further advise the Unicorn to remain at home in the dark wood and feast on the green laurel rather than succumb to the virgin’s crimson lips, which “are hard as coral and her white thighs” which “are only a snare.”¹⁵³ Menotti further elaborated on characteristics of the Unicorn in the “Sixth Madrigal,” in which the townspeople refer to the creature as pretty, gentle, and coy when they believe that the Poet has killed his Unicorn and replaced it with a Gorgon.¹⁵⁴

The medieval description of the Gorgon, borrowed in its entirety by Menotti in the preliminary pages of the score,¹⁵⁵ reads: “It is a beast all set over with scales like a Dragon, having no haire except on his head, great teeth like Swine, having wings to flie and hands to handle, in stature betwixt a Bull and a Calfe.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁸ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 43.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 47-48.

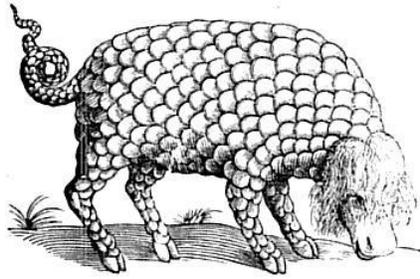
¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵⁶ White, ed., *The Bestiary—A Book of Beasts*, 266.

Illustration 2. Gorgon



Public Domain.

The “Fifth Madrigal” of *The Unicorn* is devoted to a vivid aural portrait of the Gorgon owned by the Poet. This madrigal refers to the original description when describing the creature’s wings widespread.¹⁵⁷ Menotti further described the physical appearance of the creature by stating that he is “tall, big, and loud.”¹⁵⁸ At the opening of the madrigal, Menotti added elements of personality to the original physical description of the creature, calling him “stately and proud” and noting that his eyes are “transfixed but not unaware of the envious stare of the common crowd.”¹⁵⁹ Menotti’s Gorgon is also “fearless and wild.”¹⁶⁰ He is completely unaffected by and unaware of those persons who stare, judge, or would seek to capture and/or kill him. He “does not see the smiling enemy” and “does not pause to acknowledge the racket of the critical cricket nor to confute the know-how of the sententious cow.”¹⁶¹ He also ignores the hunter and mixes with the elite in town while simultaneously frightening the children.¹⁶² Upon their first sighting of the Gorgon in the “Sixth Madrigal,” the townspeople are so shocked and horrified at his appearance that they ask the Poet, “And what is that? A Bloody Nun, a werewolf?”¹⁶³ While the townspeople initially thought that a pet unicorn was silly and absurd, they are clearly more

¹⁵⁷ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 66.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 63-65.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 66-67.

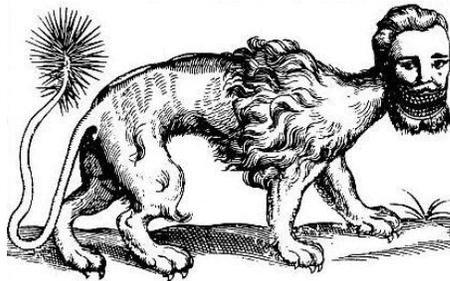
¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 68.

disturbed by the frightening, unusual appearance of the second mythological beast presented by Menotti and the Poet.

A Book of Beasts describes the Manticore:

A beast born in the Indies called a MANTICORA. It has a threefold row of teeth meeting alternately: the face of a man, with gleaming blood-red eyes: a lion's body: a tail like sting of the scorpion, and a shrill voice which is so sibilant that it resembles the notes of flutes. It hankers after human flesh most ravenously. It is so strong in the foot, so powerful with its leaps, that not the most expensive space nor the most lofty obstacle can contain it.¹⁶⁴

Illustration 3. Manticore



Public Domain.

White notes that the name of the creature is derived from an Old Persian word meaning “man-eater.”¹⁶⁵ In his borrowed description in the preliminary pages of the score, Menotti dispensed with the description of the Manticore as originating from the Indies and having the body of lion. He also did not include the portions of the text describing the creature’s strength and power or his penchant for eating human flesh.¹⁶⁶

The “Eighth Madrigal” is devoted to the introduction of the Manticore. As he did with the Gorgon, Menotti elaborated on the original description of the Manticore. The composer stated in the libretto that the Manticore’s glistening back will instantly elevate its piercing quills when

¹⁶⁴ White, ed., *The Bestiary—A Book of Beasts*, 51-52.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁶⁶ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 4.

touched.¹⁶⁷ Menotti's Manticore is also "almost blind."¹⁶⁸ Due to this condition, he sleeps with parchment that he believes contains Solomon's seal under his pillow in hopes that the relic will restore his sight.¹⁶⁹ The personality of the Manticore presented in *The Unicorn* is gentler and less severe than that of the creature described in *A Book of Beasts*. Menotti described the creature as a shy, lonely lover of mankind.¹⁷⁰ The Poet also refers to the creature as shy and lonely in the final movement, the "Twelfth Madrigal."¹⁷¹ He only bites and inadvertently kills humans by mistake. Menotti described the creature as lost "in cabalistic dreams he often bites the hand he really meant to kiss."¹⁷² He further stated that the Manticore "often as if in jest inadvertently" kills "the people he loves best."¹⁷³ The Manticore also suffers from feelings of betrayal and not being loved.¹⁷⁴ He is in fact "afraid of love and hides in secret lairs and feeds on herbs more bitter than the aloe."¹⁷⁵ As a lover of mankind, the only creature Menotti's Manticore intentionally battles is the Sphinx, late at night.¹⁷⁶

As with the Gorgon, the townspeople are similarly horrified (if not more so) when they first see the Manticore with the Poet. They ask the Poet if he is "Methuselah or Beelzebub"¹⁷⁷ and also refer to him as a "horrible beast."¹⁷⁸ In the "Tenth Madrigal," the Count expounds on the reactions of the townspeople when the Countess suggests that he buy her a manticore because gorgons have become too commonplace and hers has died. He retorts that he will never have

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 100-101.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 99.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 105.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 99-100.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 154.

¹⁷² Ibid., 98.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 101.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 98.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 103-104.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 105-106.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 113.

such a beast in his house, likening the manticore to a ghost, a golem, and a ghoul.¹⁷⁹ Menotti's colorful, detailed description of the creature and the evocative (however brief) mentions of him within the dialogue conclude Menotti's sophisticated and imaginative treatment of a trio of mythical beasts in his madrigal fable.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 123.

CHAPTER 2

SYMBOLISM

The symbolic, mythological, and historical associations of the Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore explain Menotti's selection of the three creatures from the sizeable menagerie of beasts described in *A Book of Beasts* to represent the three different stages of the Poet's life. The Unicorn symbolizes youth, the Gorgon middle age or manhood, and the Manticore old age.¹⁸⁰ Clues to the allegorical associations of the creatures are not revealed until the Poet is discovered on his deathbed surrounded by all three of his pets at the end of the work in the "Twelfth Madrigal." The Poet calls to his "youthful foolish Unicorn," asking him to come closer rather than hide.¹⁸¹ The Poet then remarks that he hid the doubts of his midday behind the Gorgon's splendor.¹⁸² Finally, he states that his Manticore will gracefully lead him to his grave.¹⁸³

Unicorn

Cresias of Greece first described the unicorn in 389 B.C.E.¹⁸⁴ He claimed to have encountered the creature either in Persia or in the Far East.¹⁸⁵ He asserted that the dust from its horn had healing properties; this power soon became fabled in many other lands, as well.¹⁸⁶ Medieval literature recommended powdered unicorn horn be used as an aphrodisiac and to

¹⁸⁰ Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 111.

¹⁸¹ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 152.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁸⁴ Cassandra Eason, *Fabulous Creatures, Mythical Monsters, and Animal Power Symbols—A Handbook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), 85.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

reverse the effects of poison.¹⁸⁷ Linda Godfrey notes that in fourteenth century China, the appearance of a unicorn signified that a great person would soon be born.¹⁸⁸ This premonition likely originated from the legend that speaks of how the *ki-lin* (Chinese version of the unicorn) appeared to the mother of the Chinese sage Confucius before his birth.¹⁸⁹ Thus, unicorns have been associated with positive qualities including good fortune, gentleness, beauty, and power.¹⁹⁰ Godfrey notes the legendary belief that unicorns were too high-spirited to gain entry on Noah's ark and thus became extinct in the Great Flood.¹⁹¹ This myth is referenced in "The Unicorn," a 1967 song by the Irish Rovers with lyrics by Shel Silverstein. The lyrics insist that the unicorns were too busy playing to make it onto the ark.¹⁹² The unicorns' high energy and fondness for play liken them to children.

Other historical and mythological associations of the unicorn also reveal links between the creature and youth. Cassandra Eason provides a historical description of the unicorn closely resembling that in T. H. White's translation of *A Book of Beasts*, adding that the unicorn could "run faster than light" and had the ability to "walk across grass without disturbing it."¹⁹³ This description could also apply to children who typically have great speed, energy, and who are small and light. Eason also notes the Chinese belief in the unicorn's ability to see the evil in human hearts and to smite the wicked with a single thrust of its horn.¹⁹⁴ In like manner, throughout culture and history, children have shown themselves to be good judges of character. The descriptions of the unicorn as swift seem reminiscent of the seemingly endless energy,

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 85-86.

¹⁸⁸ Linda S. Godfrey, *Mysteries, Legends, and Unexplained Phenomena—Mythical Creatures*, ed. Rosemary Ellen Guiley (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009), 26.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Eason, *Fabulous Creatures, Mythical Monsters, and Animal Power Symbols—A Handbook*, 86.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

speed, and vitality children exhibit during play. Anne Payne notes that the unicorn is typically very small, “like a kid.”¹⁹⁵ Payne’s characterization of the unicorn as resembling a baby goat provides more reason for Menotti’s use of the Unicorn to represent youth.

Literary references to the unicorn also lend credence to Menotti’s selection of the creature as an allegory for youth and childhood. John Cherry notes that the unicorn appears in the thirty-ninth chapter of the book of Job, which suggests that the unicorn should abide by the crib of an infant.¹⁹⁶ He also asserts that the unicorn represents the unattainable and the elusive—qualities evident in W. H. Auden’s poem “New Year Letter,” in which he described childhood among the cedars. Here, the unicorn is portrayed “as an animal which no magic charm can reveal to the reader, and past childhood is as elusive as the innocent beast.”¹⁹⁷ In Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*, when Alice meets the Unicorn (who has always thought of children as fabulous monsters), each is convinced of the existence of the other only after seeing and conversing with one another.¹⁹⁸ Carroll believed that “the possibility that the unicorn might have existed, together with the fact that it never did,” places it in the realm of childhood dreams and fantasies.¹⁹⁹

The unicorn’s horn was once believed to possess powers that would prolong youth,²⁰⁰ and Malcolm South notes that the creature appears frequently in children’s literature.²⁰¹ In Peter Beagle’s *The Last Unicorn*, the creature represents imaginative and creative forces. The heroine of the story is a female unicorn who believes she is the last of her kind. She discovers that all

¹⁹⁵ Anne Payne, *Medieval Beasts* (London: The British Library, 1990), 27.

¹⁹⁶ John Cherry, “Unicorns,” in *Mythical Beasts*, ed. John Cherry (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 47.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Malcolm South, “The Unicorn,” in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures—A Source Book and Research Guide*, ed. Malcolm South (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1987), 18.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

other unicorns are being held as prisoners in the sea for the viewing pleasure of King Haggard.²⁰² The female unicorn subsequently rescues the other unicorns from the sea, and their liberation symbolizes “the freeing of the imagination from blight, decay, and death.”²⁰³ The imaginations and creative impulses of children are perhaps more powerful and uninhibited than at any other point in life, as society has not yet influenced the creative processes such that the free expression of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors can occur in a congruent manner. For these reasons, the unicorn is an outstanding choice to represent this early stage of human life.

Allegorical depictions of the unicorn have compared the creature to Christ and the story of the hunt for the unicorn to Christ’s descent to the Virgin’s womb, incarnation, and subsequent seizure by the Jews.²⁰⁴ Some versions of the story describe how the captive animal was led off to be displayed before a king, just as Christ was brought before Pontius Pilate for judgment and sentencing.²⁰⁵ Cherry asserts that this elaborate allegory likening the unicorn’s capture to the Annunciation of the forthcoming birth of Christ to Mary originated in the thirteenth century.²⁰⁶ Because of the unicorn’s association with the Virgin Mary and the Immaculate Conception and subsequent birth of Christ, the unicorn was also associated with purity,²⁰⁷ chastity, and humility of heart.²⁰⁸

This symbolic correlation with Christ and the Virgin Mary directly relates to the legend that states that the unicorn can be captured only by a virgin; thus, the unicorn never was shown beside a sexually experienced woman in any illustration or work of art.²⁰⁹ The symbolic association with Christ is likely why the unicorn is one of the few imaginary creatures to survive

²⁰² Ibid., 23-24.

²⁰³ Ibid., 24.

²⁰⁴ Payne, *Medieval Beasts*, 27.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Cherry, “Unicorns,” 51-52.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 50-51.

²⁰⁸ Lise Gotfredsen, *The Unicorn*, trans. by Anne Born (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1999), 131.

²⁰⁹ Cherry, “Unicorns,” 55.

the Renaissance and remain credible in later centuries.²¹⁰ Godfrey asserts that the unicorn's survival through the centuries rests upon the creature's mention in the King James Version of the Bible, giving it both a prominent place and permanent existence in Western literature.²¹¹ The unicorn's Christ-like attributes connect with the purity and chastity of childhood, providing another possible reason for Menotti's selection of the Unicorn to represent youth.

Gorgon

Two different stories of origin and physical description exist for the gorgon in ancient literature and mythology. Menotti likely used symbolic elements of both origin stories in his choice of the creature to represent middle age or manhood in *The Unicorn*. The description of the creature with wings and dragon-like scales in White's translation of *A Book of Beasts*²¹² is one of the two mythological accounts. The phrase that describes the gorgon as "in stature betwixt a Bull and a Calfe"²¹³ is of particular interest when attempting to determine the symbolic associations of the creature with middle age. Menotti likely considered this phrase in particular when selecting the gorgon for this stage of life simply because the stature and age of a male bovine at the midpoint of his life would be directly between that of a calf and a fully grown bull.

The other mythological version of the creature known as a gorgon revolves around Medusa, the classical Greek and Roman version more familiar in Western culture.²¹⁴ Judith D. Suther asserts that the earliest known use of the word was from *Gorgoneion*, an emblem the Greeks placed on their buildings, clothing, and other personal belongings long before the time of

²¹⁰ Payne, *Medieval Beasts*, 27.

²¹¹ Godfrey, *Mysteries, Legends, and Unexplained Phenomena—Mythical Creatures*, 27.

²¹² White, ed., *The Bestiary—A Book of Beasts*, 266.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Judith D. Suther, "The Gorgon Medusa," in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures—A Source Book and Research Guide*, ed. Malcolm South (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1987), 163.

Homer.²¹⁵ The concept of the gorgon had become so ingrained in Greek culture by the time of Homer that he mentions her without recounting the details of her history because the audience would already be familiar with the story.²¹⁶ The general (gorgon) and the specific (Medusa) eventually became fused into a single entity and became virtually interchangeable in literary and popular usage.²¹⁷

The most detailed and influential account of the gorgon Medusa within Greek or Roman literature comes from books four and five of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.²¹⁸ The gorgons are a set of three sisters, daughters of Phorcys, the son of sea and earth, and Ceto.²¹⁹ Interestingly, Medusa is the only one of the three sisters who is mortal and has the power to fascinate.²²⁰ Perseus wrote that Medusa was once a beautiful maiden whose hair was her most glorious feature.²²¹ She was captured by Poseidon who then raped her in Athena's temple. Athena, reacting from shock and anger over the desecration of her temple or from jealousy of Medusa's beauty, turned her beautiful hair into snakes and then banished her to the ends of the earth. From thence forward, Athena bore Medusa's head on her shield, which she would use to stun her enemy.²²² The combination of Medusa's surviving facial beauty contrasted with the hideousness of her snake hair enabled her to fascinate her victims.²²³ Various cultures described the end result of Medusa's power differently. Upon looking at her, the victim would become enraptured, spellbound, immobilized, rendered senseless, castrated, petrified, or destroyed, depending on the

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 164.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 165.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid., 165-166.

²²³ Ibid., 163.

cultural variation of the story.²²⁴ The victim occasionally was able to capture the gorgon's power and use it to achieve the same results on others.²²⁵

Another dimension was added to the Medusa lore by Euripides in the play *Ion*, in which Creusa speaks of two hollow amulets inherited from her grandfather Erichthonius, who received the amulets directly from Athena. One amulet contains a drop of blood taken from Medusa's lower body; this drop contains healing powers. The other amulet contains a drop of blood from one of the snakes on her head mixed with the snake's venom, making it extremely poisonous.²²⁶ This dichotomy relates to the contrast of the beauty of her face and the hideousness of her reptilian tresses.²²⁷ This combination of such startling contrasts is similar to the juxtaposition of the calf and the bull in White's translation of the description of the other gorgon's stature. Middle age, the median between youth and old age, can be viewed as the symbolic rectification of the two representations of the gorgon in the literature, which provides a possible reason for Menotti's selection of the creature to represent middle age and manhood. Menotti perhaps acknowledged this alternate version of the gorgon when the Count refers to his wife as "Medusa" in the "Tenth Madrigal" when she attempts to convince him to replace her gorgon, which she secretly has stabbed and wishes to replace with a manticore.²²⁸

Many allegories relating to the gorgon Medusa developed in art and literature throughout the centuries. In the *Inferno*, Dante portrays her as a Christian allegory of petrification and as an analogy for sexual vulnerability in *Stony Rhymes*, both of which create a source of spiritual paralysis.²²⁹ Writers and artists in the Romantic era interpreted Medusa as the embodiment of the

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid., 164-165.

²²⁷ Ibid., 165.

²²⁸ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 124.

²²⁹ Suther, "The Gorgon Medusa," 168.

dark lady, “the contaminated and irresistible beauty whose real name was Death.”²³⁰ The fascination with the ambiguity she embodied elevated her to the status of Muse in art and literature.²³¹ Suther asserts that Medusa “is both adversary and partner to all who seek self-knowledge and the power to create—to create life and to create art.”²³² Furthermore, she states that “the paradigm represented by the Medusa signifies not only chaos and order within an individual, but extends to analyses of self and society, freedom and determinism, and of course, life and art.”²³³ Stephen Wilk presents a paradigm of Medusa, noting that she was hailed as the symbol of empowered female rage but also served as the guardian of female secrets.²³⁴ Suther concludes that all of the allegorical representations of the creature combine to represent vitality,²³⁵ certainly embodied in Menotti’s “stately and proud”²³⁶ Gorgon who represents middle age—the symbolic reckoning of all of the dichotomies portrayed in the myths associated with it.

Manticore

The manticore, like the unicorn and the gorgon, has become entangled within many allegorical and symbolic associations in art and literature throughout the centuries. David Cheney asserts that the manticore is perhaps the “most fearsome and ferocious monster ever imagined.”²³⁷ The earliest description of the manticore appears to have been written by Ctesias, a Greek physician at the Persian court in the fifth century B.C.²³⁸ The creature would appear in writings, drawings, and paintings for many centuries, but no symbolic meaning was associated

²³⁰ Ibid., 171.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., 176.

²³³ Ibid., 177.

²³⁴ Stephen R. Wilk, *Medusa—Solving the Mystery of the Gorgon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 219-220.

²³⁵ Ibid., 172.

²³⁶ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 62.

²³⁷ David R. Cheney, “The Manticora,” in *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures—A Source Book and Research Guide*, ed. Malcolm South (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1987), 125.

²³⁸ Ibid.

with the beast until it passed into folklore.²³⁹ Upon entering folklore, it became the symbol of tyranny, disparagement, and envy, according to D. Filippo Picinello in *Mundus Symbolicus*.²⁴⁰ The symbolic association of the manticore as the emblem of the prophet Jeremiah in the Middle Ages²⁴¹ is the one that most likely influenced Menotti to select the creature to represent old age. The manticore was believed to live in the depths of the earth and was therefore associated with Jeremiah, who was thrown into a dung pit.²⁴² Old age ultimately leads to death, after which human remains are usually placed in the ground. The description of the manticore living in the earth's depths represents a possible reason for Menotti's choice of this creature to represent old age and lead the Poet gracefully to his grave.²⁴³ One description of the manticore in bestiaries describes the beast as having the face of a man with gray eyes.²⁴⁴ Aged human eyes, clouded with cataracts, indeed have a grayish hue, providing another reason why Menotti may have chosen the Manticore to symbolize old age.

²³⁹ Ibid., 127.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 154.

²⁴⁴ Eason, *Fabulous Creatures, Mythical Monsters, and Animal Power Symbols—A Handbook*, 84.

CHAPTER 3

SUBTEXT

Independent Artist

The first of two layers of subtext in *The Unicorn* represents Menotti's response to the considerable criticism his music received throughout the years preceding the premiere of his madrigal fable. The Poet represents Menotti as a composer, while the Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore represent his compositions most scorned by the critics. While numerous sources refer to this layer of subtext in *The Unicorn*, they fail to provide specific examples of the many harsh reviews Menotti's works received.

Although Menotti was successful as a composer, especially in the world of American opera, he faced brutal criticism from detractors in the press, and he was not greatly respected by his colleagues in the field of composition either in the United States or abroad. Menotti once stated in the *New York Times* that he could not think of another artist who had "been more consistently damned by the critics" than he.²⁴⁵ Menotti felt he had been attacked violently and with vehemence, noting to Ardoin that the *New York Times* had published an article saying that he was completely devoid of talent.²⁴⁶ According to Ardoin, Menotti commented that articles with titles such as "The Menotti Problem" or "The Menotti Puzzle" portrayed him as a sickness in need of a cure.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 15.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

When Ardoin asked him about the dichotomy between the generally warm reception he received from audiences and the often cold responses from the press, Menotti remarked that he believed he did not fit into critics' preconceived notions concerning the historical development of music. Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen represented the direction in which critics felt music should be going, and he simply did not fit into that mold.²⁴⁸ Many of Menotti's critics viewed his music as too traditional because he did not use the avant-garde techniques for which his contemporaries were receiving rave reviews and high praise.²⁴⁹ According to Ken Wlaschin, Menotti's "musical style was not dissonant enough for the atonalists, not complex enough for the academics, too melodic for the modernists and too popular for the elitists."²⁵⁰ He was often deemed derivative and called "The Puccini of the Poor," to which Menotti sardonically retorted, "better that than 'The Boulez of the Rich.'"²⁵¹ He stated to Ardoin that he felt it unjust of critics to call him derivative of Puccini and Mussorgsky when those same critics never seemed bothered by the influences of past composers on his contemporaries and for some reason chose to attack only him in this manner.²⁵² He asserted that Puccini only influenced his fondness for writing beautiful melodies and claimed that his melodies actually owed more to Schubert.²⁵³ He stated to Ardoin, "If some stupid critic insists in linking my music to Puccini, God bless him."²⁵⁴ Menotti further commented that he felt critics too quick to judge and criticize a work without carefully analyzing or understanding the music.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Wlaschin, *Gian Carlo Menotti on Screen—Opera, Dance and Choral Works on Film, Television and Video*, 5.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 12.

²⁵² Ibid., 37.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

Menotti unabashedly pursued his own destiny and personal compositional style, showing little regard for the current fads in composition.²⁵⁶ Gruen notes that because Menotti was not overly experimental or an atonalist, the innovators of his time did not accept him.²⁵⁷ Thus, Menotti never gained the adoration of the world's musical elite, who dismissed his work as far too accessible and superficial.²⁵⁸ Even his American colleagues, including Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Roy Harris, Roger Sessions, and others, felt he was "something of a European intruder in the guise of an American composer."²⁵⁹ To counter the dismissive views of his works, Menotti once stated to Gruen that "art should be an act of love and not a form of masturbation."²⁶⁰ He further expressed these feelings in an emotional program note to the first recording of *The Old Maid and the Thief*, in which he wrote of his longing to reclaim the sense of freedom in his early compositions that he felt was stifled later in his career by the pressure from critics and his colleagues.²⁶¹

Even Menotti's most successful operas were subject to extremely harsh reviews that attacked Menotti's abilities as a composer and librettist. In 1952, Douglas Watt dismissed *The Old Maid and the Thief* (premiered in 1939) as "a sort of interminable joke set to music," adding that the opera was "mildly entertaining in the telling but without much punch."²⁶² Both the composition and subsequent failure of Menotti's next opera, *The Island God* (premiered in 1942), demonstrated how deeply he was affected by his critics. Many of his detractors wrote that he was not capable of writing an opera with a serious or tragic plot, so he composed *The Island*

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 10.

²⁵⁷ Gruen, *Menotti—A Biography*, 116-117.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 116.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 117.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 118.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 42-43.

²⁶² Douglas Watt, "Large and Small," Musical Events, *The New Yorker*, April 19, 1952, 91.

God to prove them wrong.²⁶³ Although he agreed with the press' opinion of the opera as not good, its failure still proved a personal and professional setback for Menotti. The poor reception of *The Island God* caused Menotti to be dropped from social invitations and to lose interview requests; he also had trouble finding work and struggled financially for a time.²⁶⁴

The Consul (premiered in 1950), arguably Menotti's greatest triumph, also received negative reviews. Douglas Watt described both the music and the libretto as not "of a very high order," adding that both elements were "coarse in texture."²⁶⁵ He further noted that the opera seemed "trashy at times, in its unblushing appeal to the emotions and in its use of theatrical tricks" and that the "macabre touches, however fascinating, cheapen[ed] the nobility of his characters."²⁶⁶ A British critic was similarly dismissive of the music in *The Consul*, stating that it had "little more intrinsic value than a length of used binding tape."²⁶⁷ After the vocal score of the *The Consul* was published, Cecil Smith once again had disparaging remarks for Menotti, describing the opera as "a seriously flawed work" and as "a pastiche rather than a unified organism."²⁶⁸ He also described the overall effect of the work as "helter-skelter and opportunistic."²⁶⁹ Smith criticized Menotti for not writing specific tunes for each character that would differentiate them from one another.²⁷⁰

The Saint of Bleecker Street (premiered in 1954) was also not immune to harsh criticism in the press. Menotti's abilities as a librettist were attacked in a *Newsweek* review describing him

²⁶³ Gruen, *Menotti—A Biography*, 44-45.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

²⁶⁵ Douglas Watt, "'The Consul,'" Musical Events, *The New Yorker*, March 25, 1950, 54.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁶⁷ "Sadler's Wells Opera," *Musical Opinion*, January 1955, 203.

²⁶⁸ Cecil Smith, "Menotti's 'The Consul' Issued in Vocal Score," New Music Reviews, *Musical America*, December 15, 1950, 34.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

as “a man of many pedestrian words and very little genuine poetry.”²⁷¹ In his review of a performance of the opera at La Scala in Milan, Riccardo Malipiero described all of Menotti’s operas as “artistically worthless.”²⁷² He described the score as “ugly” and added that the work lacked inspiration, characterization, and fine singing parts.²⁷³ He hypothesized that the opera would never again be performed in Italy, following in the pattern of failure experienced by Menotti’s other operas that had been performed in the country of his birth.²⁷⁴

Joseph Kerman was perhaps the most violently outspoken of Menotti’s detractors. He wrote disparagingly of many of Menotti’s most famous works in his book *Opera As Drama*, originally published in 1956 (the same year in which *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore* premiered). Kerman described Menotti as “an entirely trivial artist” and stated that he was only interesting because of his “highly successful exploitation of the bad old ways.”²⁷⁵ Sharing the sentiment of other critics, he stated that Menotti’s compositional style belonged to another era.²⁷⁶ He remarked that Menotti was “a sensationalist in the old style, and in fact a weak one, diluting the faults of Strauss and Puccini with none of their fugitive virtues.”²⁷⁷ Because of this passage in *Opera As Drama*, Menotti was perhaps referring to Kerman when he spoke of stupid critics comparing him to Puccini. Kerman further described all of Menotti’s compositions as existing on “his own special level of banality” and commented that Puccini’s lyricism and Strauss’s technical skill were entirely beyond Menotti’s abilities.²⁷⁸ Kerman reserved his harshest criticism for *The Saint of Bleeker Street*, describing it as the crudest of all of Menotti’s operas in

²⁷¹ “The New Plays: The Saint of Bleeker Street,” *The Arts–Theatre, Newsweek*, January 10, 1955, 62.

²⁷² Riccardo Malipiero, “Milan,” *Opera*, July 1955, 451.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Joseph Kerman, *Opera As Drama* (New York: Knopf, 1956; reprint, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 264 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 265.

terms of dramaturgy and symbolism, as “the feeblest in purely musical invention, and the most slovenly in dramatic effect,” and finally as “sheer pretension.”²⁷⁹ Kerman expressed the opinion that television opera deserved “a better little cornerstone than Menotti’s *Amahl and the Night Visitors*,”²⁸⁰ which ironically remains one of the composer’s most oft-performed works.

Menotti wrote *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore* partially in response to the many harsh critiques his works received in the years preceding the premiere of his madrigal fable, showing once more how affected he was by scathing reviews of his compositions. Menotti boldly responded to his detractors with a subtext in the libretto proclaiming himself an independent artist refusing to follow mainstream expectations. He stressed the importance of being true to oneself and valuing one’s own work, despite the lack of appreciation by others. Menotti used the Poet to represent all true artists and creators as being “always ahead of the crowd and [their] critics.”²⁸¹ He also wished to express through *The Unicorn* the idea that artists who follow rather than lead simply mimic what they hear, adopting the latest trends, while the true artist moves on to new dreams and creative endeavors.²⁸²

The Poet represents Menotti, and his pets—the Unicorn, the Gorgon, and the Manticore—are allegories for his compositions. Like his many operas, the creatures are scorned and derided by the townspeople because they do not fit the fictional society’s preconceived notions concerning normal pets. Like Menotti, who stood steadfastly by his more traditional, neoclassical style of composition, the Poet similarly parades his unorthodox and antique pets through the town with no shame, despite the horrified looks and statements directed at him by the townspeople. The Poet proclaims his unconditional love for all three creatures in the

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 265-266.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 266.

²⁸¹ Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 111.

²⁸² Ibid.

“Twelfth Madrigal,” rhetorically asking how he could “destroy the pain wrought children of [his] fancy” and wondering what his life would “have been without their faithful and harmonious company.”²⁸³

Menotti noted to Ardoin that an artist has to be judged by their entire body of work, rather than merely their most popular or well-received works.²⁸⁴ He believed that truly passionate artists view their pieces of work as equal in quality, even the works deemed failures. To that end, he said to Ardoin that a true artist’s “quest for beauty and aesthetic truth is represented by everything he does, not only by the works which succeed.”²⁸⁵ Ardoin notes that Menotti refused to allow the success of any particular work to “bind him to a predictable formula.”²⁸⁶ Through the Poet and his pets, Menotti proclaimed his pride in his compositions and revealed his deep, personal connection to his body of work, despite the often harsh treatment of his music in the press.

The townspeople serve two successive purposes within the layer of subtext describing Menotti as an independent artist. First, in their initial rejection of and snobbish reactions to the Poet’s three creatures, the townspeople represent Menotti’s harshest critics, such as Cecil Smith and Joseph Kerman. Like the critics’ responses to his works, the townspeople pass judgment on the animals without attempting to understand their purposes. Second, when the townspeople, including the Count and Countess, suddenly alter their opinions and imitate the Poet on three different occasions by obtaining the same type of pet, they represent those critics whom Menotti judges to have less conviction than he does, perhaps even his contemporaries in the compositional world who followed national and international trends deemed cutting edge and

²⁸³ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 150-151.

²⁸⁴ Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 111.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

worthy of attention by the critics in the press. Ardoin asserts that *The Unicorn* thus seeks to draw attention to those who lack the courage to feel and thus only mimic true emotions, rendering them unable to make their own judgments.²⁸⁷ The Poet, on his deathbed in the “Twelfth Madrigal,” finally reveals the moral of the story, chastising the town’s residents as “foolish people who feign to feel what other men have suffered.”²⁸⁸ He declares that they, not he, “are the indifferent killers of the poet’s dreams.”²⁸⁹ Here, Menotti offers the opinion that artists who conform to mainstream expectations are disingenuous and ultimately the destroyers of true creativity and independent thought.

Ironically, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore* met with enthusiastic reception from the same critics whom the work aimed to satirize. Menotti spoke to biographer John Gruen about how the critics and New York’s musical intelligentsia found the madrigal fable “entirely enchanting.”²⁹⁰ *Time* magazine raved over the premiere, calling *The Unicorn* “a singular and engaging combination of ancient contrapuntal harmonies and tart, modern, dramatic values.”²⁹¹ The review fondly recalled the ending of the work, stating that “as the last notes died away, the tough audience of musical pros leaped to its feet and called for one curtain call after another.”²⁹² Menotti was not surprised by the warm reception of *The Unicorn*. He said to Gruen that when he wrote it, he fully expected people who generally disliked his music to appreciate the piece.²⁹³ He added that the work “had too many of the snobbish ingredients that attract the fastidious listener

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 111

²⁸⁸ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 149.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 149-150.

²⁹⁰ Gruen, *Menotti—A Biography*, 124.

²⁹¹ “Madrigal & Mime,” *Time*, November 5, 1956, 63.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Gruen, *Menotti—A Biography*, 124.

to fail with critics and musicologists.”²⁹⁴ Menotti noted that even Igor Stravinsky, who had never really liked his music, personally shared with him how much he enjoyed *The Unicorn*.²⁹⁵

Societal Views of Homosexuals in the 1950s

In addition to expressing his independence as an artist in *The Unicorn*, Menotti also carefully crafted the libretto to describe the difficulties faced by homosexuals during the extremely conservative decade of the 1950s. In this layer of subtext, the Poet represents Menotti as a homosexual man living in 1950s America, while his pets simultaneously represent his partner Samuel Barber²⁹⁶ and his sexual orientation and lifestyle, as well as the isolation and condemnation they faced. Like homosexual relationships in 1950s America, the Poet’s pets horrified and offended the townspeople in *The Unicorn*. Menotti’s homosexuality was not a topic frequently mentioned in the press, but it was common knowledge among his peers.²⁹⁷ Menotti’s relationship with Barber was not described in detailed terms during his lifetime because he refused to make a public statement about his personal life to the press.²⁹⁸ Menotti told Gruen that “My life is an open book; however, I don’t like to leave it around.”²⁹⁹

The composition of *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore* was not the first occasion Menotti contemplated making a statement about homosexuality in his work, nor would it be the last. Around 1946 (ten years before *The Unicorn*), Menotti told his student Ned Rorem, also a gay American composer, that he wished to write a homosexual opera based on a text by the homosexual French novelist, essayist, and critic Marcel Proust of the late nineteenth and

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 125.

²⁹⁶ Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America’s Sound—Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 110.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 155.

²⁹⁸ Gruen, *Menotti—A Biography*, 199.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 200.

early twentieth centuries.³⁰⁰ In 1970 (fourteen years after *The Unicorn*), Menotti wrote and produced a stage play entitled *The Leper*, a drama in two acts, which premiered at the Fine Arts Theater of Florida State University's Department of Theater in Tallahassee on April 24.³⁰¹ The play is set in a small, thirteenth century kingdom near the Byzantine Empire.³⁰² A king has just died, and his son is not allowed to succeed him on the throne because he has contracted leprosy.³⁰³ He is exiled in a leprosarium outside the city, and his mother rules in his stead.³⁰⁴ Bitter about not ascending to the throne, he claims the gold bequeathed to him by his father and uses it to corrupt the people in the kingdom.³⁰⁵ His mother orders that he be killed in order to save the kingdom, and in a vibrant speech at the end of the second act, she declares that minorities (specifically lepers) must accept their status and earn society's acceptance by making themselves useful.³⁰⁶

John Gruen asserts that *The Leper* is Menotti's most self-revealing work.³⁰⁷ Menotti was making the point that "in order to function, the society must tolerate the deviant minority, but only if the minority recognizes its position as such and doesn't defy ethical and moral laws."³⁰⁸ Gruen claims the minority to which Menotti is referring is "the homosexual."³⁰⁹ Gruen further states that this subtext in *The Leper* is the most open statement Menotti ever made about his private life.³¹⁰

³⁰⁰ Lawrence D. Mass, "A Conversation with Ned Rorem," in *Queering the Pitch—The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, edited by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 99.

³⁰¹ Ardoin, *The Stages of Menotti*, 187.

³⁰² Gruen, *Menotti—A Biography*, 200.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 199.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 200.

By 1940, homosexuality was officially condemned in the United States; it was scrutinized, pathologized, and policed.³¹¹ The male homosexual was viewed as a predatory, hypersexual loner with few friends and no connection to a “civilizing” heterosexual family.³¹² In *The Unicorn*, the Poet is also a solitary figure whom the townspeople describe in the “Introduction” as “strange.”³¹³ This description offers the first clue that the Poet represents the marginalized homosexual man of 1950s America and more specifically, Menotti. The Poet also lacks a “civilizing heterosexual family” and shows disregard for social and civil functions: as when he shuns the Countess’ parties and yawns at town meetings, for example.³¹⁴ The hyperheterosexuality of 1950s American culture resulted in a deep distrust of the single man,³¹⁵ which perhaps explains why the townspeople are so curious about the Poet and distrustful of his peculiar behavior.

By the 1950s, the country was in a period of cultural panic, and citizens turned to psychologists for solutions to the “problem” of homosexuality.³¹⁶ The social and sexual freedoms claimed by both women and homosexuals were seen as fundamentally threatening to the way in which society was organized.³¹⁷ Psychoanalyst Edmund Berger declared that homosexuality was a neurotic condition and placed it in a special psychiatric category.³¹⁸ Medically, homosexuality was classified as a perversion, and homosexuals were deemed mentally and morally unstable.³¹⁹ Leading psychoanalysts believed that, like most other diseases,

³¹¹ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 129.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 187.

³¹³ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 5.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

³¹⁵ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 190.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

³¹⁹ Vicki L. Eaklor, *Queer America—A People’s GLBT History of the United States* (New York: The New Press, 2011), 87-88.

homosexuality could be cured.³²⁰ This belief reinforced both legal codes and everyday social biases, which resulted in discrimination against homosexuals.³²¹ Menotti invoked the prevalent view of homosexuality as a diagnosable disease by having the townspeople remark that the Poet will not allow any doctor to take his pulse.³²²

In post-World War II America, homosexuals commonly sought therapy to convert themselves to a heterosexual lifestyle.³²³ In Menotti's subtext, the Poet likely fears an official diagnosis as a homosexual and the encouraged reparative therapy that naturally would follow. Within the subtext, his refusal to allow a doctor to take his pulse perhaps demonstrates his rejection of homosexuality as a curable medical condition and his general distrust of the medical profession for this reason. The townspeople also note that the Poet does not attend church on Sundays,³²⁴ Menotti's not-so-subtle reference to the largely held view of many religious fundamentalists that regards homosexuality as sinful; this view still predominates among many religious fundamentalists in the United States today. This negative view of homosexuality in many conservative religious sects draws at least some of its justification from Old Testament levitical law referring to homosexual behavior as an "abomination"³²⁵ as well as exhortations from the Pauline epistles concerning "shameful acts."³²⁶

The postwar era in the United States produced "what was likely the most intense homophobia of the century."³²⁷ Television became a powerful and influential medium reinforcing the idea of the "normal" American family ("two heterosexual, legally married parents

³²⁰ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 186.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 6.

³²³ Eaklor, *Queer America—A People's GLBT History of the United States*, 77.

³²⁴ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 6.

³²⁵ Lev. 18:22 KJV

³²⁶ Rom. 1:26-27 NIV

³²⁷ Eaklor, *Queer America—A People's GLBT History of the United States*, 78.

and two or more children, a male breadwinner, and a stay-at-home wife and mother”³²⁸) and the idea of conformity. Menotti’s townspeople are examples of “normal” members of society; in the “First Madrigal,” Menotti describes them as “respectable folk” who walk along the promenade every Sunday afternoon.³²⁹ Specifically, Menotti describes “proud husbands velvety plump, with embroider’d silk-pale ladies,”³³⁰ certainly a description of stereotypical heterosexual couples in 1950s America.

This depiction of “normal,” “respectable” couples starkly contrasts with the appearance of the Poet with his Unicorn. In the “Second Madrigal,” the townsfolk stop “to stare at the ill-assorted pair.”³³¹ Specifically, this appearance is likely an allegory for Menotti and his partner, Samuel Barber; generally, it could represent any homosexual couple struggling to live and gain acceptance in 1950s America. Practicing homosexuals, especially in the arts and entertainment industries, were forced to live an extremely closeted lifestyle, including another prominent homosexual couple in the musical world at the time, British composer Benjamin Britten and tenor Peter Pears. Homophobia, for example, was rampant in Hollywood. Studios and agents enforced a code of silence preventing actors from losing work and preventing studios from having to fire prominent stars who generated notable incomes.³³² Many actors and personalities such as Rock Hudson, Anthony Perkins, and Liberace were known to be gay by those closest to them, but “news or rumors of their homosexuality were quickly squelched.”³³³ Menotti contrasted this portrayal of practicing homosexuals with an allegorical view of the Manticore, used in the “Eighth Madrigal” to represent a gay person who chooses to remain celibate. Menotti

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 14.

³³⁰ Ibid., 15.

³³¹ Ibid., 27.

³³² Eaklor, *Queer America—A People’s GLBT History of the United States*, 88.

³³³ Ibid., 89.

described the Manticore as “lonely” and “afraid of love”; thus, “he hides in secret lairs and feeds on herbs more bitter than the aloe.”³³⁴ Upon seeing the Poet and the Unicorn together, the townspeople think that he is “insane,” and some of them “laughed with pity,” while others “laughed with scorn.”³³⁵ Their classification of the Poet as “insane” likely refers to the 1950s psychological classification of homosexuality as a mental illness, while the mixed reactions to this insanity mirror those reactions associated with the stigma of mental illness even to this day.

The townspeople further discuss the pair, stating, “What a scandalous sight to see a grownup man promenade a unicorn in plain daylight!”³³⁶ The subtext here is likely twofold. Given the social climate of 1950s America, homosexual couples, for which the Poet and the Unicorn are almost certainly an allegory, were surely considered scandalous. A closer examination of the text, specifically Menotti’s use of the adjective “grownup” to describe the Poet, reveals another layer of subtext. The text explicitly implies the pairing as even more scandalous because the Poet is a grown man. Menotti likely intended to reference society’s view of gay men as “perverts,” which made them prime targets for the pedophilia scare so prevalent in the country at the time.³³⁷ At the end of the “Second Madrigal,” the townspeople wonder “why would a man both rich and wellborn raise a unicorn?”³³⁸ Here, the townspeople’s views are likely an allegorical representation of society’s views of homosexuality as a choice, as they wonder why an otherwise upstanding man with every advantage in life during his upbringing would “choose” to raise a unicorn.

In the “Third Madrigal,” subtitled “Dance of the Man in the Castle and the Unicorn,” Menotti may have used the medieval description of the unicorn in *A Book of Beasts* to serve as a

³³⁴ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 103-104.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

³³⁷ Eaklor, *Queer America—A People’s GLBT History of the United States*, 88.

³³⁸ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 41.

clever allegory for a certain aspect of homosexual life in the 1950s. The Poet warns the Unicorn to avoid the virgin sleeping under the lemon tree, because if he falls under her spell, the hidden hunter will then be able to kill him. The Unicorn likely represents a vulnerable, self-loathing gay man, while the pure virgin represents the religious establishment which sought (and still seeks) to convince homosexuals to undergo therapy and successfully convert to a heterosexual lifestyle. Menotti, as the Poet, warns the unicorn not to fall prey to this trick, because just as the Unicorn can be killed by the hunter, so too can a gay person's spirit and psyche be destroyed by reparative therapy, which attempts to convince him of a reality other than his own.

Akin to the Red Scare of the 1950s, which sought to halt any communist activity in the country, a Lavender (or Pink) Scare led to the elimination of suspected homosexuals from government service.³³⁹ Menotti may have made subtle reference to this movement when he described the promenade by the sea as "pink" in the "First Madrigal."³⁴⁰ Pink eventually became associated with male homosexuality. Many people in the country believed that homosexuals posed a greater threat to national security than did Communists.³⁴¹ Nearly six hundred civil servants were dismissed by November 1950.³⁴² State Department officials boasted the firing of one homosexual per day, more than double the firing rate for those persons suspected of political disloyalty or communist associations.³⁴³ The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 banned homosexual immigrants, while President Eisenhower's Executive Order 10450 of 1953 made homosexuality grounds for dismissal from federal employment; this law remained in effect until the 1970s.³⁴⁴

³³⁹ Eaklor, *Queer America—A People's GLBT History of the United States*, 86-87.

³⁴⁰ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 14-15.

³⁴¹ Eaklor, *Queer America—A People's GLBT History of the United States*, 87.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

This aspect of struggle in the lives of homosexuals in the 1950s is allegorically represented in the “Eleventh Madrigal,” in which the townspeople, outraged at the thought that the Poet has killed his Manticore, declare that they “must form a committee to stop all these crimes.”³⁴⁵ They continue by stating that the Poet (again, an allegory for a gay person) should be arrested and perhaps they “should splice his tongue and triturate his bones.”³⁴⁶ They also consider torturing him with water, fire, pulleys, and stones, as well as putting him “on the rack, on the wheel, on the stake,” and even in “molten lead” and “in the Iron Maiden.”³⁴⁷ These various possibilities for punishing the Poet for his indiscretions could also refer to the juvenile delinquent, strongly connected to the homosexual in the 1950s, which society also sought to tame and punish.³⁴⁸

In addition to the social anxiety homosexuality caused during this time period, it also generated confusion regarding gender.³⁴⁹ Menotti represents society’s view of homosexuality as gender confusion throughout *The Unicorn* by consistently having the men of the chorus sing the text of the Countess, the women of the chorus sing the text of the Count, and the entire chorus, not only the tenors and/or basses, sing the words of the Poet throughout the work. In the penultimate movement of the work, “The March to the Castle,” Menotti makes the least subtle and most powerful of all of his statements regarding society’s view of homosexuality in the 1950s:

We, the few elect, must take things in our hands. We must judge those who live and condemn those who love. All passion is uncivil. All candor is suspect. We detest all, except, what by fashion is blest. And forever and ever, whether or evil or good, we shall respect what seems clever.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁵ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 136.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

³⁴⁸ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 190.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁵⁰ Menotti, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*, 144-148.

Menotti's poignant, personal, and astute statement describes the difficulty of living in 1950s America and leads directly into the closing madrigal of *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore*. This insightful and heartfelt observation of society's view and treatment of homosexuals still resonates in our country today.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Careful analysis reveals Gian Carlo Menotti's madrigal fable *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore or The Three Sundays of a Poet* to be a complex work, ingeniously conceived and composed in a manner demonstrating the influence of many ancient musical and theatrical forms. The work can be considered neoclassical in nature due to the numerous influences of well-established art forms and techniques from previous centuries and style periods. Clear connections exist between the madrigal fable and ancient Greek theatre, specifically in the use of a chorus to provide commentary and advance the plot, in the combination of music and movement, and the use of the Greek concept of hero. The influences of Scalero are evident in the Renaissance and Baroque compositional elements permeating the work, including a prominent use of counterpoint (consisting of fugal, imitative, and canonic devices), a primarily *a cappella* texture, the occasional use of a supporting accompaniment similar to a realized basso continuo, the brief use of solo voices juxtaposed against the chorus, and a Monteverdian treatment of harmonic dissonances.

The work grew out of the late-Renaissance genre of the madrigal comedy due to its use of a series of madrigals connected by an overarching plot. Specifically, the work was inspired by Vecchi's *L'Amfiparnaso*, with which it shares many similarities in terms of form, text painting, and the use of onomatopoeia. Menotti's original characters also embody personality traits resembling those of the stock characters of the *commedia dell'arte*, from which Vecchi drew his characters for *L'Amfiparnaso*. Elements from mythology and the supernatural realm

were strong influences in many of Menotti's works throughout his entire career. *The Unicorn* provides an excellent example of Menotti's interest in mythological and supernatural subjects through his use of the mythological creatures the unicorn, the gorgon, and the manticore, which he drew from *A Book of Beasts* (a translation of a medieval bestiary).

Menotti incorporated complex symbolic devices in *The Unicorn*, specifically concerning the use of the Unicorn to represent youth, the Gorgon middle age, and the Manticore old age. A closer look at the mythological, symbolic, and historical associations of the three creatures provides great insight regarding possible reasons for Menotti's selection of each of the creatures to represent a specific stage of life. Menotti also masterfully included two layers of subtext in his libretto. The first layer reveals how deeply affected he was by the harsh critiques of his best works and also by the pressure of contemporary trends in composition to alter his traditional, neoclassical style of composition. The second layer divulges Menotti's struggle with homosexuality in the extremely conservative decade of the 1950s when the piece was composed and premiered. Overall, *The Unicorn, the Gorgon and the Manticore* is a profoundly personal statement by Menotti that pays tribute to the most important musical, theatrical, and literary influences of his life and demonstrates his strong feelings regarding the negative reception of his works by the press and the manner in which society attempted to devalue and suppress his personal lifestyle.

The work is more than merely a representation or compositional vehicle for the strongest influences and most personal conflicts of Menotti's life. *The Unicorn* actually represents Menotti himself as it incorporates significant aspects of his life up until the work was composed. Therefore, the enthusiastic response the work received from both audiences and critics validates the moral of *The Unicorn's* story: resisting pressures to conform to societal expectations and

remaining true to oneself with courage of conviction will result in a more meaningful existence and a life well lived.

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