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21M.013J The Supernatural in Music, Literature and Culture
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Opera seria: “serious opera”; the dominant form of opera from the late 17th century through much of the 18th; the texts are mostly based on history or epic and involve ethical or moral dilemmas affecting political and personal relationships that normally find resolution by the end

Recitative: “recitation”; the dialogue or “spoken” part of the text, set to music that reflects the speed and intonation of speech; normally it is “simple” recitative, accompanied by a simple bass accompaniment; rarely in moments of great tension there can be additional orchestral accompaniments as in the incantation scene for Alcina (such movements are called “accompanied recitative”)

Aria: the arias in *opera seria* are overwhelmingly in one form where two stanzas of text are set in the pattern ABA; that is, the first section is repeated after the second; during this repetition, the singer is expected to ornament the vocal line to create an intensification of emotion

Formal units: individual scenes are normally set up so that a recitative section of dialogue, argument, confrontation, or even monologue leads to an aria in which one of the characters expresses his or her emotional state at that moment in the drama and *then exits*; this marks the end of the scene; scenes are often demarcated at the beginning by the entrance of one or more characters; entrances and exits are arranged so that by the final scene in a “set” (as defined by the scenic backdrop) only a single character is left on stage, and the set ends after his or her exit; the most desirable positions for an aria are the ends of the first and second acts, as these are especially highlighted moments

Today’s excerpts:

“Tornami vagheggiar” sung by Morgana (Alcina’s sister) about “Ricciardo,” the apparently newest knight to arrive on the magic island who is actually Ruggiero’s beloved in male disguise; Morgana’s quick capitulation to “love” and her pursuit and flirtation with Ricciardo provides some indication of the way in which the knights are toyed with before Alcina changes them into trees, rocks or wild beasts; this is the final aria of Act I.

“Ama, sospira” sung by Morgana; in the preceding recitative she has stopped Alcina in the middle of her conjuration to change Ricciardo into a wild beast; in the aria she speaks of Ricciardo to both Ruggiero and Alcina, saying to the one that Ricciardo is no threat (which Ruggiero already knows, as Bradamante has revealed herself) and to the other that he is in love but not with Alcina; this is a moment of semi-comic release after the recognition scene between Bradamante and Ruggiero in Act II.

“Ah, mio cor” sung by Alcina at the moment she recognizes that Ruggiero is breaking free from her; note how the aria includes a strong disjunction between the A and B

sections; the A section depicts her heartache; the B section her attempt to goad herself into action against Ruggiero, which failing, she sinks back into heartache.

“Ombre pallide” sung by Alcina, is preceded by her incantation summoning her evil spirits who fail to respond to her; Alcina’s love for Ruggiero has compromised her supernatural power, and this aria, which ends Act II, demonstrates its loss.