Divine Harmony, Demonic Afflictions, and Bodily Humours: Two Tales of Musical Healing in Early Modern England

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Two stories acted as the touchstones for discussions of musical healing in early modern England. The first was the Biblical story of David's playing harp relieving Saul of his evil spirit (1 Samuel 16: 14–23). The second was a contemporary anecdote from Apulia in Italy, in which the bite of the region's tarantula was said to be curable only by music. Frequently cited together, these stories seemingly demonstrated two different kinds of musical healing—one with a spiritual or demonic cause, the other with a physical and bodily one. Accordingly, they relied on different properties of music to affect their cure. Music's efficacy against demons depended on the spiritual and metaphysical harmonic properties of music, whereas its influence over the passions of the soul and the humours of the body—including the invasion of a foreign, venomous humour through a bite—was explained via physical and natural causes.

In practice, however, neither story could be so neatly categorised. The interrelation of religion and medicine, the physical and supernatural causes and cures of disease, and the mutual influence of the health of body and soul were all taken for granted in early modern England. The most common medical explanation for disease was an imbalance of the four humours, but illness might also be attributed to witchcraft, demons, God's punishment for sins, or a test of faith. Even illnesses recognised as natural were ultimately believed to be part of God's providence, while belief in demons was the norm, and to deny the devil was regarded as akin to atheism.[1] The health of the body and the soul were also seen as closely linked. Imbalances in the bodily humours could cause extremes in passions of the soul, while extreme passions could distemper the humours resulting in sickness. The state of one's soul was reflected in one's state of health, while looking after one's body—the temple of the soul—was considered a religious duty.[2] Within this fluid understanding of bodily and spiritual health, explanations of Saul's affliction ranged from demonic possession to a natural imbalance of bodily humours—

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* The original spellings from early modern sources have been maintained except for modernizing the use of u/v and i/j and the expanding of contractions.

[1] Sands (2004), 9–10. On physicians Richard Napier's treatment of various patients who feared they were possessed see MacDonald (1981), 208–216.

[2] Lindemann (2010), 13–15; Wear (2000), 29–32, 37–9; Harley (1993), 101–117; Wear (1996), 145–169.

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typically melancholy—and frequently settled on a combination of the two. While the tarantula bite had a clear physical cause, it too was poised between the language of medicine and demonology as many authors slipped into the language of possession to describe the invasive effects of the venom or the victim's loss of self-control.[3] Furthermore, it became a popular sermon exemplar in which the tarantula bite represented either the pains of sin and conscience, or the afflictions and temptations of the devil.

As a consequence of this fluidity, interpretations of the musical cures for both afflictions might evoke either the harmonic or the affective properties of music, though they did so in different ways as the status of such explanations underwent significant changes. Music's anti-demonic powers traditionally relied on parallels between harmony and the divine order. By the seventeenth century, the metaphysical powers of harmony were beginning to lose their explanatory force, but music did not lose its reputation for driving away demons so quickly. Rather accounts of music's anti-demonic influence were increasingly framed in natural terms, necessitating a shift in explanation from its harmonic to its affective powers. The case of the tarantula only became widely known in England at the end of the sixteenth century, so the musical cure was always explained in physical and affective terms. Yet the story's role as a sermon exemplar illustrates that the language of music's harmonic powers remained a potent metaphor of spiritual healing and God's triumph over the devil.

Analysing how these two stories were used and interpreted in English musical, medical, and religious literature across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveals the shifting understanding of how music affected the human body and soul. Music was increasingly seen as a natural phenomenon able to act on the world only via natural, physical means, rather than via some mystical relationship with heavenly concord. Its harmonious properties were becoming merely a metaphor for, rather than an extension of, divine powers.

A Harmonious Remedy Against the Devil? David's Harp and the Expulsion of Saul's Evil Spirit

David's musical remedy for Saul's possession by an evil spirit had a long exegetical history, but it became an immediate and topical issue during the sixteenth century due to an upsurge in incidents of demonic possession—which reached its peak only in the mid-seventeenth century—, and a series of high profile cases around 1600 that were the focus of accusations of fraud or natural illness.[4] The

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[3] See also the dancing plague known as St Vitus's dance which also attracted both natural and supernatural explanations as either disease of divine punishment, see Miller (2017), 149–64.

[4] For cases see Walker (1981); Sands (2004).

Biblical story had been the subject of both medical and theological discussion since at least the thirteenth century, but though the interpretation of Saul's affliction as melancholy began as early as Josephus (37/8–100), only isolated voices had cast doubts on Saul's demonic possession.[5] The majority of sixteenth-century English writers took the Biblical account literally as a case of demonic possession, and the central matter for debate was instead the means of the cure. Was it really David's harp-playing that had driven out Saul's evil spirit? Counterarguments attributed the cure to divine power alone. One theory inherited from medieval authors was that the strings and wooden frame formed a cross shape which invoked the power of Christ's passion.[6] Such mystical explanations were becoming less typical in the sixteenth century, abandoned in favour of simply attributing the cure to God's providence. In *The Devil Conjured* (1596), moral and philosophical writer Thomas Lodge was typical in arguing that Satan's expulsion »is to be ascribed not to the harmonie of the Harpe, but Gods power and Davids praier«.[7]

For those who did accept the curative powers of David's harp-playing, this story was proof that music was »a present remedie against evil spirits«, as the anonymous *The Praise of Musicke* (1586) put it.[8] Few English writers delved into the mechanisms of precisely how music was able to achieve this; however, physician John Case attempted an explanation in his *Apologia Musices* (1588). Taking the Platonic notion of the existence of both good and bad demons, Case regarded the good ones as »a kind of spiritual harmony« while the bad ones were »like horrid discords of nature«. Therefore, »since by their nature evil demons deviate the most from the First Cause (which is the principle of all harmony), it needs must be that they are the most greatly wounded by sweet music (which takes its influence from the First Cause), and flee from it as far as they can«.[9] The underpinning idea here was the association of audible music with God, the creator of all divine and earthly harmony. Lutenist Thomas Robinson argued that music's »diuinitie is seene in the perfectnesse of his proportions« and offered a mystical interpretation that relied on number symbolism: the third representing the Holy Trinity, the fifth the atonement between God and Man, and the octave the *alpha* and *omega*.[10] Musical harmony therefore opposed the devil's forces of sin, disorder and death. This contrast was depicted in an anonymous early seventeenth-century poem, »A Songe in Praise of Musique«, where the story of Saul's evil spirit makes an appearance to prove how the devil cannot abide »the pleasant noyse of musiques«.[11] The poem aimed to discredit the Puritans and their attacks on music—which, it argues, had left singing men impoverished—by associating them with the music-hating devil. There follows a comparison between heaven—where »the blessed saintes doe singe/before the Throne continually«—and hell—where instead there is »weepinge, wailinge, and gnashinge teeth« and »All pleasant noyse they doe detest«.[12]

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[5] The best survey of the history of these interpretations is Kümmel (1969), 189–209. See also Hoffmann-Axthelm (2011), 326–337; Murray Jones (2000), 120–144.

[6] Kümmel (1969), 190; Hoffmann-Axthelm (2011), 330; Jones (2000) 123, 127. Compare also the kabbalistic explanation, which also assigned David's power to the construction of his lyre as discussed in Harrán (2011), 257–295.

[7] Lodge, *The Divel Conjured*, sig. E4v.

[8] Anon., *The Praise of Musicke*, 62.

[9] Case, *Apologia musices*, 67. Translations by Dana F. Sutton (2003): www.philological.bham.ac.uk/music/ trans.html. Accessed 20/08/2014.

[10] Robinson, *Schoole of Musicke*, sig. B1r.

Such explanations for music's powers against the devil and his demons were becoming problematic in the context of the Protestant theology that was slowly embedding itself in English culture. The idea that music might somehow be imbued with something of God's divine authority ran counter to the Protestant rejection of the notion that spiritual powers might be contained within the physical objects or be conjured by human actions. As such they rejected the sacred powers of relics, candles, and holy water, and of sacramental rites such as exorcism during baptism or transubstantiation during the Mass. They also challenged the use of prayer as a kind of charm in which the mere pronouncement of words was regarded as bringing about some protection or benefit: prayers had no power in themselves, but rather God must choose to heed them.[13] This theological stance also led some Protestants to be sceptical about demonic possession, which might similarly be regarded as a case of the physical being imbued with the spiritual.[14] This was also encouraged by the Protestant tendency towards a more spiritual understanding of the devil. The late-medieval view of the devil—and one that continued to persist in popular culture throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in witchcraft narratives—was of a corporeal being who appeared in physical form to trick or tempt men to lose their souls, or else to exercise God's judgements against sinners. Among more zealous Protestants, however, increasing emphasis was given to the devil's powers of internal temptation, troubling the minds of Christians and planting thoughts in the mind unseen.[15]

These theological beliefs lay behind John Deacon and John Walker's denial of music's anti-demonic powers. These ministers wrote their *Dialogicall Discourses of Spirits and Divels* (1601) in response to the scandal surrounding the radical Protestant preacher John Darrell. Darrell had gained a reputation as an exorcist after a series of successful dispossessions during the 1580s and 1590s through prayer and fasting.[16] While treating the demoniac William Sommers at Nottingham in 1597 accusations of witchcraft caused Deacon to fall out with the local aldermen and brought him to the attention of church authorities. This led to a trial by the High Commission in which Sommers was denounced as a fraud and Darrell deposed from the ministry. The campaign against Darrell was led by Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, and his chaplain Samuel Harsnett, the latter writing at length to discredit Darrell in print after the trial. They were concerned that Darrell's exorcisms accorded him increasing authority, gave credence to the Puritan styles of worship—particularly its emphasis on fasting—, undermined the centrality of the Church, and challenged religious conformity. The theatricality of exorcisms drew large crowds and through the accompanying sermons and the ministers' verbal duels with the demons, they were an opportunity to educate and convert—as indeed the Jesuits also recognised.[17] Indeed for some Puritans the ability to perform exorcisms was seen as a sign of the true church, hence the need to respond to the Jesuits' success.[18]

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[11] Anon., »A Songe in Praise of Musique«, 142–146.

[12] Anon., »A Songe in Praise of Musique«, 142–146.

[13] Thomas (1971), 51–77; Oldridge (2000), 30, 113; Johnstone (2006), 2, 62–6, 82–3, 91–3; Sands (2004), 92–102.

[14] Roper (1994), 172–80, espec. 173; Oldridge (2000), 113.

[15] Oldridge (2000), 25–6, 30, 41–50; Johnstone (2006), 2, 7–8.

[16] Gibson (2006); Almond (2004), 240–286; Freeman (2000), 34–63; Collinson (2013), 149–165.

John Walker and John Deacon, however, were among Darrell's fellow Puritans—less is known about Walker, but Deacon was a prominent preacher in Bawtry and Scrooby.[19] Whereas Bancroft and Harsnett focussed their attentions on demonstrating that Darrell was a fraud who had coached his supposed patients to fake the symptoms of possession, Walker and Deacon merely saw Darrell as misguided—even deceived by the devil—and feared that he was bringing their beliefs into disrepute.[20] Walker and Deacon therefore wrote a more theologically grounded challenge to Darrell, arguing that the age of possession and exorcism was past, and that the devil only worked through the lesser means of obsession, working from outside the body to produce his physical and mental afflictions, or else by temptation.[21] Staging a debate between two characters, Physiologus—the naturalist—and Exorcistes—the exorcist, they questioned the supposed means of performing exorcisms, asking whether any created or natural means could have an effect on devils. The question of David's harp-playing for Saul became a central example as, by challenging the effects of sound, they could also challenge Darrell's emphasis on exorcism through prayer, arguing that this too was mere voice, sound, and words with no inherent power. Regarding music, Physiologus argues that:

> [I]f spirits and divels, had their peculier bodies naturally united unto them […] there would be no inconvenience at all, to hold that spirits and divels (by a melodious sound, or some other such sensible meanes) might be altered in their actions, and expelled from men […] Howbeit, because the sacred scriptures, and catholike faith doe

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[17] Freeman (2000), 37–43; Oldridge (2000), 114, 122, 129–31. On Jesuit exorcism see Sands (2004), 91–108.

[18] Thomas (1971), 483f; Schmidt (2007), 75.

[19] Collinson (2013), 164f; Freeman (2000), 51f.

[20] Freeman (2000), 52.

[21] Freeman (2000), 53.; Schmidt (2007), 75f; Deacon/Walker, *Dialogicall Discourses*, 226; Almond (2004), 8–10. This became the official Anglican position in 1604 when ministers were prohibited from undertaking exorcisms without a license from their bishop (none of which were ever issued).

> jointly avouch that spirits and divels are of an Angelical nature […] we may consequently conclude, that therefore, no sensible matter, or corporall vertue is able of it selfe, directly, or indirectly to effect in them, any such action, they beeing properly of a spirituall substance.[22]

This was a matter not only of theology but also natural philosophy. What was the mechanism by which music might have an effect on a spiritual being such as a demon? For Walker and Deacon there was none. Music was a physical phenomenon that could only have its effects on physical, not spiritual, beings. The metaphysical idea that musical harmony was as anathema to demons as God the author of divine harmony was no longer sufficient explanation. It was to natural and physical means through which music might combat demonic torments that the primary debate now turned in the seventeenth century.

Music, Melancholy, and the Devil

While explanations for music's efficacy started to lose their supernatural and metaphysical qualities, they did not shake off their spiritual dimension as quickly. As the devil was believed to operate only via natural causes to create his torments—only God could break his own natural laws, so music might still offer some comfort to the afflicted.[23] Walker and Deacon's character of Physiologus argued that musical harmony »draweth unto it the minds attention and therwithall retracteth the same from the offered affliction«.[24] Furthermore music was still viewed as a preventative against the devil via its ability to cure the humoral diseases by which he gained their influence over the human body, particularly melancholy.[25]

Physician Timothy Bright described the disease of melancholy as a »fearefull disposition of the mind altered from reason«.[26] It was understood as a disease of the passions and the brain, but also in bodily terms as caused by either an increase in black bile or the putrefying or burning of it through excessive heat, which in both cases caused an imbalance of the humours. The late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries saw a heightened interest in melancholy both culturally and intellectually, with an increasing number of publications and university dispositions concerning the disease. According to historian Angus Gowland this was due to the expanding domains within which the concept of melancholy was applied.[27] While in 1586 Timothy Bright's *Treatise of Melancholie* had limited melancholy to physical causes and cures, by 1621 Richard Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*

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[22] Deacon/Walker, *Dialogicall Discourses*, 248f.

[23] Clark (1997), 161–172; Deacon/Walker, *Dialogicall Discourses*, 208.

[24] Deacon/Walker, *Dialogicall Discourses*, 252.

[25] Gouk (2000), 173–194; Gibson (2009), 41–66.

[26] Bright, *Treatise*, 1.

[27] Gowland (2006), 83f.

(1621) provided an extensive list of causes encompassing the physiological, psychological, demonic, divine, cosmological and hereditary, as well as immediate distressing circumstance.[28] As such the disease was becoming not only a medical concern, but also a spiritual, moral, and medical one, while its peculiar characteristics and sometimes violent symptoms saw it enter demonological debate.[29]

Initially music's position as a cure for melancholy might seem to work against its position as a remedy against demons as the efficacy of a musical cure could be an argument for rejecting a diagnosis of possession. Thomas Wright's treatise *The Passions of the Minde* (1604) includes a lengthy discussion of Saul's affliction and cure in the section on how music moves the passions. Wright was a Catholic priest, but he nevertheless concurred with Deacon and Walker that, as the devil was a spirit, he could not be expelled by music. Instead he presented the debate as one between theologians and physicians over the cause of the malady. According to Wright, theologians continued the argument that Saul was possessed by a demon which was expelled only with the assistance of God; meanwhile, physicians argued that Saul was not possessed but only molested by a melancholic humour.[30] Music could rouse mirth, joy, and delight that would expel or destroy the corrupted or excessive melancholic humour.

As early as the late-sixteenth century there had been a few voices which interpreted Saul's disease in purely medical terms, typically as a case of melancholy. Physician John Jones (1579) argued that Saul listened to David's playing »to represse the furie of that melancholie spirit« making no mention of devils or demons.[31] John Case too had used Saul's cure as an example of its ability to restrain mad passions in physical terms—despite his belief in harmony's power to drive away demons:

> air is set in motion by voices singing in accordance with numbers, and, gently received at the threshold of sensation, moves both the vital and the animal spirits of the heart and the mind, which are the vehicles of the mind, and sways, strikes and inspires the mind itself with various affections in keeping with its modulation.[32]

Even when authors evoked the notion of sympathy to explain music's powers—a concept drawn from natural magic—music's operations were not seen as supernatural.[33] Sympathy posited a special affinity between harmony and the proportions of the soul, but if the method of operation was occult—implying merely hidden or unseen—, it was nevertheless believed to work via exclusively natural means.[34] Solely medical interpretations of Saul's illness were an emerging undercurrent, but one that would not gain wide acceptance until the later seventeenth century.[35] While focus on the role of melancholy and the passions increased, the evil spirit was rarely so fully expunged from the Biblical story.

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[28] Bright, *Treatise*, 193; Burton, *Anatomy*, first partition, second section; Lund (2010), 118f.

[29] Gowland (2006), 83f. On the influence of Burton and his position within a longer tradition, see Lund (2010), 123–125.

[30] Wright, *Passions*, 159–162.

[31] Jones, *Arte and Science*, 12.

[32] Case, *Apologia musices*, 20.

[33] For example, the explanation of sympathy between music and the soul is included in: Bright, *Treatise*, 248; Wright, *Passions*, 168f; Burton, *Anatomy*, 372–374; Reading, *Davids Soliloquie*, 11–13, (in many cases alongside the alternative physical theory of music's effects).

These examples suggest some credence for Wright's characterisation of the debate as between physicians and theologians, but it was also a particularly topical issue in the light of two recent and widely published possession cases. The first was the French case of Marthe Brossier in 1599, whom physician Michel Marescot declared to be a melancholic who had exaggerated her condition in order to feign possession for fraudulent purposes. Marescot's published account was promptly translated into English and printed with a dedication to Bancroft.[36] The second was the English case of Mary Glover, the daughter of a London merchant, in 1602.[37] Whereas Bancroft had attempted to discredit Darrell's cases with accusations of fraud, this time—perhaps inspired by the Brossier case—he enlisted two physicians—Edward Jorden and John Argent—to attempt to classify Mary's condition as a medical one. Although he failed to prove this at the trial of the supposed witch, Bancroft nevertheless encouraged Jorden to publish a treatise on an illness known as »suffocation of the mother« (or womb) which the title-page claimed had »beene of late taken thereby, to suspect possession of an evill spirit«.[38] While not denying that demonic possession might occur, Jorden argued that it was being diagnosed too frequently due to a lack of understanding of the strange symptoms that could be caused by natural diseases.[39]

These real-life cases brought a new vigour and immediacy to the debate surrounding the diagnosis of supposed demoniacs. The clash of medical versus demonological diagnoses—though there were in fact clergymen behind both sides—may well have been an influence on Wright's decision both to give so much space to an example that was not a straightforward case of music's influence on the passions and to present the debate in this form. Wright himself leaned towards the theological position arguing that scripture should be understood in its proper sense and he even challenged physicians to prove that musicians could indeed cure—rather than merely relieve—melancholic diseases such as *lycanthropia*

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[34] During the seventeenth century, the concept of sympathy was increasingly absorbed into natural philosophy and lost its magical resonances as greater understanding of the properties of sound and the anatomy of the body developed. Gouk (2004), 87–105, especially 88–90, 104; Gouk (2000), 173f, 188–90.

[35] Kümmel (1969), 193, 205–7.

[36] Collinson (2013),161f; Freeman (2000), 47; Walker (1981), 33–42.

[37] Almond (2004), 287–330; Sands (2004), 175–189.

[38] Collinson (2013), 166–170; Freeman (2000), 56–58; Jorden, *Briefe Discourse*.

[39] Jorden, *Briefe Discourse*, sig. A3r-A4r.

(»woolfish madnesse«) or *epilepsia*—both diseases which could be confused with demonic possession.[40]

Yet for early modern thinkers, demonology and medicine were not the distinct opposites they are regarded as today.[41] Even Wright's physicians do not deny the participation of the devil, believing him to be using the melancholic humour to molest Saul, even if he is not wholly possessed. Melancholy had long been regarded as »the devil's bath«, being attracted by the black bile, and it was commonly believed that the devil used melancholy to tempt people to suicide, blasphemy, and sinful despair of their salvation.[42] Richard Burton, whose *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) became the standard seventeenth-century text on the disease, regarded melancholy as a »compound mixt malady« that always required both spiritual and medical intervention to treat its effects on both body and soul. A theologian with a strong interest in physic, Burton even identified a specific category of »religious melancholy«.[43] He recognised demons as one of the many causes of melancholy and described how the devil could mingle himself among the melancholic humour and use it as a means to drive his victims to despair or fury.[44] He even raised the possibility that the devil could cause the disease of his own accord without such natural means.

Wright, too, ultimately conflated the medical and theological positions, concluding that music expelled the melancholy and God, either miraculously via David's music or rather coincidentally at the occurrence of his playing, delivered Saul from the devil.[45] This kind of »double remedy« theory became the prevalent in seventeenth-century thought.[46] Music was widely regarded as able to remove the devil's means of afflicting torments, but there was more limited belief that it could actually drive him out. Possession, however, was only the most extreme manifestation of the demonic afflictions and temptations the godly expected to suffer on a regular basis. Amid a Protestant theology that emphasized the individual's lifelong battle with Satan, the relationship between melancholy and the devil became all the more significant. The late-medieval church had presented Satan as a figure banished by the baptismal exorcism and whose return would be a rarity combatted through further rites of exorcism. By contrast, the post-Reformation baptism service marked the beginning of the individual's conflict with Satan, whose traditional role as a tempter now became his primary and most devastating one.[47] Satan was believed to be able to plant his thoughts in the mind, to delude with false or heretical thoughts, to gain access to the soul through senses lulled by sinful pleasures and to use each individual's predominant humour to cause afflictions.[48] Melancholy was a weakness through which the devil could find a means of attack. Restricting music's efficacy to cases of demonic obsession rather than possession limited its anti-demonic powers, but at the same time they gained a potentially more widespread use as both preventative and remedy.

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[40] Wright, *Passions*, 160f.

[41] For a recent extended discussion of early modern belief in both natural and demonic causes of melancholy see Oldridge (2019), Section I.

[42] The phrase was used by St Jerome in the fourth century. Schmidt (2007), 49. See also Burton, *Anatomy*, 69, 773.

[43] Burton, *Anatomy*, 12–13 and section four, third partition; Lund (2010), 113–119.

[44] Burton, *Anatomy*, 68f, 773. For other examples of this widespread belief in the devil's exploitation of melancholy see: Weemes, *Foure Degenerate Sonnes*, 132; Mather, *An Essay*, 262; Newte, *Mr. Newte's Sermon*, 2.

[45] Wright, *Passions*, 161f.

[46] Phrase from Weemes, *Foure Degenerate Sonnes*, 133. On the prevalence of this approach in European thought see Kümmel (1969), 199–205.

The transition from belief in the anti-demonic powers of harmony to interpretations based on the affective properties of music and its ability to temper melancholic passions was a gradual one. Indeed, music's harmonic powers survive particularly strongly in musical treatises and defences of music such as those by Charles Butler, John Playford, and Thomas Mace.[49] Authors championing music's wondrous effects importance to society clung on longest to what were arguable music's most exceptional powers. Others gave a composite account, blending the distinction between music's effects against melancholy and demons. Thomas Powell's *Humane Industry, or, a History of Most Manual Arts* (1661) drew parallels between how music »expelleth the evil spirit of melancholy« and how David drove the evil spirit out of Saul »without any other exorcism then that of Musick«. Using music's natural effects to justify its more supernatural ones, he argues that »since Musick is an enemy to Melancholy, we may conclude that it is an enemy to the Divel: Musick hath too much of heaven to give him any delight«.[50] Metaphysical and the physical explanations were blended to account for music's anti-demonic effects.

Nevertheless, it was music's ability to influence the passions and humours that came to form the typical understanding of music's efficacy against devils in the seventeenth century. In his *Treatise of the Passions* (1640) the moderate Presbyterian church minster Edward Reynolds explained that Saul had turned to music as »most forcible for the producing of other Passions of a lighter nature«.[51] As co-existing passions naturally weakened each other, the forces of melancholy passion would be distracted by the forces of the new passion. Music retained vestiges of its anti-demonic powers through its ability to remove the means by which the devil could operate. As the scholar and theologian Henry Dodwell put it: »David's playing on the Harp cured Saul of the evil Spirit, by curing that Melancholy which disposed him to receive the Influences of the evil Spirit.«[52]

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[47] Oldridge (2000), 20–25; Johnstone (2006), 2, 60–66.

[48] Oldridge (2000), 25f, 41, 45–49, 122–123; Johnstone (2006), 72, 76–80, 102f.

[49] Butler, *Principles of Musik*; Playford, *Skill of Musick*, sig. A4r; Mace, *Musick's Monument*, 12.

[50] Powell, *Humane Industry*, 120.

[51] Reynolds, *Treatise*, 53.

[52] Dodwell, *A Treatise*, 30.

By the latter decades of the seventeenth century, however, there are signs that belief in music's efficacy over demons was beginning to weaken in some intellectual circles. In 1676 musician Thomas Mace lamented that music's anti-demonic effects were little »taken notice of, believed, or regarded by most«.[53] A respondent to John Newte's 1696 sermon on church organs—which had suggested that music had cured Saul of his affliction—questioned whether music's ability to allay troubled bodily spirits was really greater than Satan's ability to agitate them when given leave to exert his power.[54] Furthermore, music's anti-demonic powers now depended on the continued association of melancholy and the devil, and by the late-seventeenth century, Satan was much less frequently evoked in discussions of its cure.[55] In addition many scholars have identified an emerging current of scepticism towards demonic possession and the devil's powers, at least in the discourse of the elite.[56] Simultaneous attempts to incorporate demonology into natural philosophy suggest that it was not simply caused by growing ›scientific‹ rationalism and deepening understanding of mental diseases and the brain.[57] The devil's prominence in religious experience was diminishing, perhaps partly as a reduction in persecution, which made the forces of evil less immediately felt.[58] Among zealous Protestants, there was reduced emphasis on the idea of a sudden release from demonic temptation in favour of a steady cultivation of faith. The distinction between demonic temptation and normal sinful desire weakened, and there was a sense that one should take responsibility for one's thoughts and to challenge sinful desire through reason rather than blame an external force.[59] As melancholy lost its prominence in religious discourse, such afflictions increasingly found expression in a newly fashionable medical language of hypochondria and hysteria instead.[60] These changes in the conceptualisation of both melancholy and the devil ultimately removed the last vestiges of music's protective and curative powers in the preternatural realm of spirits and demons, and its spiritual efficacy against the machinations of the devil. By the time apothecary Richard Browne wrote his 1727 essay on the effects of music on the body, he could confidently argue that Saul's affliction was hypochondria, because the Bible only evoked an evil spirit due to the insufficient knowledge of nervous disorders in those ancient times, while music had never been shown to have an effect on any modern demoniac.[61]

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[53] Mace, *Musick's Monument*, 12.

[54] Anon., *A Letter to a Friend*, 5.

[55] Schmidt (2007), 131–133.

[56] For example: Thomas (1971), 570–583; Oldridge (2000), 163f; MacDonald (1981), 9–11, 207–209.

[57] Clark (1997), 294–311; Schmidt (2007), 133–135.

[58] Oldridge (2000), 164.

[59] Schmidt (2007), 136–138.

[60] Schmidt (2007), 150–162.

[61] Browne, *Mechanical Essay on Singing*, 29–33.

According to Penelope Gouk, during the seventeenth century the powers of music were gradually losing their magical connotations and sense of wonder and instead becoming regarded as normal, everyday effects.[62] In the case of interpretations of Saul's affliction this had a series of stages: first, music was stripped of supernatural functions in favour of natural explanations of its wondrous effects. Second, a shift in focus from possession to obsession made demonic affliction a more ordinary occurrence and the musical cure became less of a rarity—as common now as the cure of natural melancholy. Finally, the evil spirit itself gained a natural explanation removing altogether music's operations within the preternatural world of spirits.[63] Yet as the literal sense of the power of harmony was being lost, its potency as a metaphor for divine power and spiritual purity in a sinful world remained strong. Indeed, the spiritual and physical dimensions of both disease and music's operations were so closely intertwined in the early modern mind-set, that even seemingly clear-cut cases of musical healing of physical ailments could gain a spiritual interpretation. This is best illustrated via the case of the musical cure for the bite of the Apulian tarantula.

Harmony as Metaphor: The Musical Cure for Tarantula Bites as Spiritual Exemplar

Italians in the region of Apulia, so the stories went, suffered from bites or stings from a type of large spider called a tarantula. The tarantula's poison might cause various effects in the victim—including laughing, weeping, silence, sleeping, raving, and calling out, delusions, melancholy, fearfulness, and numbness—according to the temperament of either the patient or the spider. Music was the only cure. Musicians had to find the correct tune to match the temperament or the patient and/or the spider and once this was identified the patient would begin to dance until the poison was expelled. The patient would be cured, but the illness would recur each year, requiring the same musical cure until, so some accounts asserted, the tarantula died.[64]

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[62] Gouk (2004), 104.

[63] The preternatural was poised between the natural and the supernatural or miraculous. It encompassed strange phenomena whose explanation was unknown but believed to operate within the laws of nature, and included both natural rarities and the demonic or spiritual.

[64] For a summary of tarantism see Sigerist (1948), 96–116. Baldwin (1997), 163–191. Genilcore (2000), 255–272. Tomlinson (1993), 157–170. The phenomenon still exists today and the classic anthropological study is De Martino (2005). Martino defines tarantism as neither a disease caused by a spider bite, nor a mental disorder, but rather as a »culturally conditioned symbolic order [...] in which a neurotic crisis [...] found its solution« (31–32). Penelope Gouk, too, discusses the phenomenon of tarantism in her contribution to this volume.

The story became widely known in England from the last decades of the sixteenth century. In English accounts of tarantism, medical explanations were at the forefront of understanding the phenomenon. Typical was Edward Topsell's description of music causing the patient to dance so that by continued sweating the poison is dispersed into the pores of the skin and evaporated, or else exhaled in the breath.[65] Topsell's interest was a zoological fascination with venomous creatures, but physician Walter Charleton described in more detail how the harmonious movement of air caused by the music was received by the ears, moved the spirits of the brain and was diffused by them throughout the body until it met and agitated the »thin, acrimonious and pricking Humor« that was the vehicle of the venom. This agitated humour caused an itch in the body forcing it to dance and become hot so that the venom was sweated out.[66] Alternative explanations evoked concepts of sympathy and occult forces from the realms of natural magic. Physician Christopher Irvine, for example, explained music's powers as like a kind of magnetism—following Athanasius Kircher's *Magnes siue de arte magnetica*, 1641—in which musicians play a »magnetick tune« that »sympathiseth with the nature of the infection«.[67]

Yet the early modern understanding of tarantism was poised between medical and spiritual explanations. As musicologist Gary Tomlinson explains, the symptoms of tarantism resemble a case of possession, though it was only rarely explained in these terms in Italian Renaissance accounts. He argues that this was due to the problem of conceptualizing the disease: »Possession for Christian believers was by definition demonic, and thus satanic; either tarantism was possession and was demonic, or it was natural magic or medicine and was not possession.«[68] If writers characterized it as possession they ceded control of it to the church. English authors received a medical representation of the disease from Italian authorities, but as the disease had no practical relevance in England they were not constrained by the same need to avoid the language of possession.[69] While not subscribing to the notion of possession himself, natural philosopher and Royal Society member Thomas Willis noted that some explained the musical cure by supposing »a musick-loving nature in the spider, and the same to be communicated to man, by a *matastasis* [displacement], or as it were a certain *metempsychosis*, or transmigration of soul, both which are taken upon trust, and little satisfactory«.[70] Members of the Royal Society were also interested to find out whether the way in which the spider moved—which was said to be a skipping motion—was mimicked in the way the victim danced suggesting some notion of possession, while Royal Society Fellow John Evelyn compared the behaviour of tarantula victims to »demonaicks« in his *Elysium Britannicum*.[71] Willis may have been speaking metaphorically when he wrote of »the spirit of music as it were inchanting the outragious spirit«, but nevertheless these examples suggest that aspects of the discourse of possession and the traditional powers of harmony could influence the rhetoric surrounding tarantism, even if they were not the typical means of its explanation.[72] As with interpretations of Saul's affliction in the seventeenth century, explanations of the tarantula bite focused on the affective properties of music and its physical effects on the venomous humour, even if parallels were drawn with the notion of possession.

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[65] Topsell, *Historie of Serpents*, 251.

[66] Charleton, *Physiologia*, 368f.

[67] Irvine, *Medicina magnetica*, 108f. The sympathy might also be between the tune and the spirits of the patient: Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphoses Englished*, 356. On explanations for the musical cure across Europe see Baldwin (1997), 177–183.

[68] Tomlinson (1993), 157, 162f, 168.

[69] Key sources on the tarantula myth included those of Athanasius Kircher—a Jesuit priest who had collected observations from his fellow priests working in the vicinity of Apulia—and Epifanio Ferdinando—a physician who had lived and practised medicine there. Kircher, *Arte magnetica*, 865–891; Ferdinandus, *Centum historiae*, 248–268.

Theologians were equally fascinated by the phenomenon. In sermons and religious essays, ministers often turned to medical metaphors as a means to convey theological concepts in a manner accessible to their congregations, regarding God or Christ as the good physician and equating sin and ill health on the one hand, and health and godliness on the other.[73] As health was frequently regarded as »but a harmony of temperament and sicknesse a dissonancie«, musical healing was another aspect to this medical rhetoric, as well as evoking music's own connotations of divine concord and the harmony of body and soul.[74]

In many treatments of the tarantula myth in religious literature the phenomenon became an analogy for the devil, sin, or the troubled conscience. A relatively early example from a sermon preached by William Loe—King's chaplain and briefly pastor of the English company of Merchant Adventurers at Hamburg—blended the tarantula myth and David's harp-playing in one analogy. Arguing that as the devil »seekes to gaine you in every case of your conscience« so at such times one must turn to God, he counsels: »A contrite, & broken hart may find a David Israells sweete finger who with his devine harpe will cure him of the venemous biting of the beast TARANTULA, which is his sinne«.[75] The tarantula's bite is like the sting of one's sinful conscience, and just as the tarantula's bite can be cured by music, so the repentant sinner finds consolation in the godly music of David's harp. David and his music become allegories for the Word of God and the great »company of the preachers« which are able to assist the Christian.

Such analogies were encouraged by the fact that the tarantula was often described as a serpent. While in the seventeenth century the word could refer to any venomous beast, it offered obvious comparisons with the serpent of the Garden of Eden and, by extension, with Satan. For Simon Patrick, a royal chaplain and prebend at Westminster, the tarantula was an »emblem« of how »the old Serpent having envenomed mens Souls, poisoned their principles, perverted their affections, and depraved their lives« could only be cured by the »six stringed Instrument« of faith provided by God. These were Patrick's six testimonies to Jesus and the Resurrection—the Father, the Word, the Holy Ghost, Water, Blood, and Spirit—out of whose harmony arises faith to expel all venom.[76] The testimonies are the instrument and the resulting faith is the harmony that expels the devil. Similarly the »University Pen«, who wrote *The Spiritual Bee* (1662), employed the tarantula story in a meditation on worldly delights. The tarantula is again the serpent tempting humankind to sinful pleasure, while the symptoms of laughing and dancing are viewed as emblematic of earthly frivolities and excesses that will lead to death and eternal wrath. This time, however, the only remedy is »that wise charmer«, God himself. The word »charmer« evokes the magical associations of the tarantula bite, and the art of the snake charmer, and the musicians who wrest control of the tarantula's victim by finding the tune to make him dance out the poison. God is the musician capable driving out the tempting serpent and tempering »the exorbitances and profusenesse of our spirits in worldly delights«.[77]

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[70] Willis, *Pathology of the Brain*, 47.

[71] Lister, »Some Additions of Mr. Lyster«, 3002; Evelyn, *Elysium Britannicum*, 303.

[72] Willis, *Pathology of the Brain*, 48. On the Royal Society's interest in the tarantula see Butler (2015), 53–6.

[73] Harley (1993), 396–435.

[74] Malvezzi, *Il Davide perseguitato*, 48.

[75] Loe, *The Merchant Reall*, 52f.

Unlike the physical explanations for the cure of the tarantula's bite with their emphasis on music's affective properties, these spiritual analogies return to metaphysical connection between God the author of all heavenly and natural harmony. They demonstrate that, despite the turn towards rational and natural theories for music's immediate effects seen in interpretations of Saul's illness by theologians, conceptions of musical harmony as an audible extension of divine harmony persisted in Christian thought, though now as analogy rather than explanation.

Conclusion

The series of changes in understanding music's effects and operations that took place across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is often portrayed as a process of disenchantment or naturalisation. Descriptions of the nature of musical harmony shifted from the realms of number mysticism and abstract mathematics towards theories grounded in the physical reality of the natural world and the acoustical properties of sound.[78] Similarly, explanations for music's effects shifted from the conceptual realm of natural magic to that of empirical and experimental philosophy—though many concepts from natural magic were absorbed into the new philosophy too.[79] The examples here also illustrate a process of naturalisation, but one that for a considerable time remained more theoretical than conceptual. The divinity of harmony failed as an explanation for music's effects, but not as a conceptual metaphor for God versus Satan or virtue versus sin. Moreover, music retained its traditional anti-demonic powers even as the explanations for these shifted to its natural, affective properties.

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[76] Patrick, *Jesus and the Resurrection*, 644f.

[77] University Pen, *The Spiritual Bee,* 28, 92f.

[78] Cohen (1984), xii, 3–11; Gozza (2000), xi–xii, 58–63; Chua (2001), 17–29.

Furthermore, while this process of naturalisation fits neatly into the narrative of the scientific revolution and the rising influence of empirical and experimental philosophy, the factors that produced this change were more complex. As the health of body and soul were seen as inextricably linked and music's curative powers were considered in relation to diseases with both natural and demonic causes, theological debate and religious politics could be equally influential. It was not just the physicians and the natural philosopher who sought to separate the truly supernatural and miraculous interventions of God from the natural—whether the everyday or the rare preternatural wonder—that could be investigated, explained, or remedied. The mystical and divine powers of harmony were as problematic to the Protestant theologian who challenged that any spiritual power could be imbued in a natural action or object, or denied the possibility of demonic possession in the current age. Yet it was also theologians who contributed to ensuring the continued resonance of the powers of harmony in English culture as they sought accessible and memorable analogies through which to communicate notions of faith, sin, and temptation.

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[79] Gouk (2004), 88–90, 104; Gouk (2000), 173f, 188–90.

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