Since Karl Vossler's broad survey of the German madrigal published in 1898¹ little has been written on the development of this Italian transplant in seventeenth century Germany, either in terms of its musical connections with the German Lied or its place in the oeuvre of individual poets after Opitz. Even though the madrigal never enjoyed a popularity in Germany comparable to that of Elizabethan England it did nonetheless occupy the attention of numerous German poets and musicians, including Philipp von Zesen, Heinrich Schütz, and the otherwise obscure amateur poet Caspar Ziegler, who authored a treatise on the subject. Students of early seventeenth century German poetry inevitably encounter two distinct but related problems involving the madrigal: first, its role as a structural and thematic influence on the development of the new Kunstdichtung before and after Opitz; and second, its broader significance as a site of confrontation between two sets of very different cultural norms and values. Owing perhaps to the fact that complex musical and well as literary questions are involved, neither of these aspects of the madrigal has been adequately addressed, either by literary historians or musicologists.² What is being offered


² The influence of Italian music on German poetry before Opitz was treated from the points of view of meter and thematics by Rudolf Velten in his monograph Das ältere deutsche Gesellschaftslied unter dem Einfluß der italienischen Musik. Heidelberg 1914 (= Beiträge zur neueren Literaturgeschichte. N. F. 5). Both Velten and W. Brauer (Jakob Regnart,
here, a modest contribution to these more encompassing desiderata, is an assessment of the madrigal from the standpoint of both music and poetry in the work of a single German author of the mid-seventeenth century, Philipp von Zesen. In the case of Zesen, whose connections with music were quite extensive, this chapter of the madrigal’s history provides us not only a glimpse into a fascinating corner of the poet’s work, but a fresh perspective from which to understand the complicated German stance toward non-native (“welsche”) cultural influences generally. Since the madrigal involves us in musical as well as literary problems, I shall begin with some remarks on the importance of music to Zesen’s work as a whole.

Zesen’s interest in music as poetry’s “sister art” is manifest from the outset of his literary career in both theory and practice. In contrast to the poetics of Opitz and Buchner, in which music is given rather perfunctory mention, the composer’s art figures prominently even in Zesen’s first Helikon of 1640. Building on Opitz’s codification of agreement between metrical and natural word stress, Zesen goes on to emphasize the necessity for a correspondence between the “accentus metricus” and the “accentus melicus”. He scolds Lied composers for frequently ignoring this basic and essential principle.

Johann Hermann Schein und die Anfänge der deutschen Barocklyrik. In: Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte 17 (1939), pp. 371-404) tend to see Opitz’ reform as isolated from significant Italian influence. Connections are drawn, however inconclusively, in both G. Müller’s Geschichte des deutschen Liedes vom Zeitalter des Barock bis zur Gegenwart (München 1925) and H. Cysarz’ Deutsche Barockliteratur (Leipzig 1924), particularly in relation to the poetry of Regnart and Schein. The development of the seventeenth century madrigal from the point of view of music has been addressed by musicologist E. Schmitz in his Geschichte der weltlichen Solokantate (Leipzig 1955), pp. 236 ff. Recent literary scholarship, focused on more general problems of the Lied, includes John H. Baron’s unpublished dissertation, Foreign Influences on the German Secular Solo Continuo Lied of the Mid-Seventeenth Century (Diss. Brandeis 1967) and the collection of essays edited by Dieter Lohmeier, Weltliches und Geistliches Lied des Barock. Studien zur Liedkultur in Deutschland und Skandinavien. Amsterdam 1979 (= Daphnis 8 [1979], H. 1).