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## The Role of Metastasio'S Libretti in the Eighteenth Century: Opera as Propaganda

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THE ROLE OF METASTASIO'S *LIBRETTI* IN THE EIGHTEENTH

CENTURY:

OPERA AS PROPAGANDA

By

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A treatise submitted to the  
School of Music  
In partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Music

Degree Awarded:  
Spring Semester, 2005

The members of the committee approve the treatise of David Adam Kirkpatrick defended on January 25, 2005.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to investigate the influence of eighteenth-century political life on Pietro Metastasio and his writing. This treatise will address questions like: What were the reforms Metastasio made in the structure of opera *libretti*? How did Metastasio's philosophical bent affect his writing? To what extent are Metastasio's *libretti* veiled propaganda written to aid Charles VI in his political endeavors? This paper will explore possible answers to these questions through a close investigation of Metastasio's libretto, *La clemenza di Tito*.

The opening chapter gives a short biographical overview of Metastasio's life. Chapter II deals with the various influences on Metastasio's literary philosophy. In Chapter III the plot of *La clemenza di Tito* is analyzed in the context of contemporary issues and events surrounding the composition of the original libretto in 1734. An attempt is made to understand the drama from the perspective of its intended audience, Charles VI and the Viennese social elite.

By examining the work in this way, subtle and perhaps hidden meanings are revealed that would not otherwise be apparent to a modern audience. An understanding of this libretto, and its meaning in the context of contemporary politics, informs our understanding of Metastasio's role in Viennese court life, and in a broader sense, his role in eighteenth-century European culture.

## CHAPTER I

### METASTASIO'S LIFE

Antonio Domenico Bonaventura [Trapassi] Metastasio wrote twenty-seven *opera seria libretti*, a comic intermezzo, about forty occasional pieces, eight oratorios, thirty-seven cantatas, eight solo *complimenti*, seven *canzonette*, thirty-three *strofe per musica*, and other lyrical stanzas, all intended to be set to music. More than four hundred composers set Metastasio's texts between 1720 and 1835, making his work known across Europe, Britain, Scandinavia, imperial Russia, and even in America.<sup>1</sup>

Born in Rome in 1698 and given the name Pietro Trapassi, Metastasio was the second son to Felice and Francesca Trapassi. His godfather, Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, was a devotee of music and theater, a generous patron, and a librettist. Ottoboni was involved in Metastasio's early education and many years later, in 1727, commissioned him to write his first oratorio libretto, *Per la festività del santo natale*, which was performed in Rome at Ottoboni's residence. Metastasio's father, supporting his family on the small salary of a soldier, took a second job as an amanuensis in order to better provide for his children. Via extreme industry and economy, he was able to save enough money to enter into a partnership with a shop-keeper in Rome selling oil, flower, pastries, and other culinary materials. After some prosperity in his entrepreneurial ventures, Felice Trapassi was able to send his two eldest sons, Leopoldo and Pietro, to grammar-school.

Before Pietro was ten years old, it was already apparent that he had a gift and intense passion for literature. One of his more peculiar talents was his ability to invent verses, *ex tempore*, on any given subject. After school each day, the young Pietro would stand outside his father's shop and improvise songs with poetry created in the moment. Large crowds would

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<sup>1</sup>Don Neville, "Metastasio," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), 510.

gather to hear the young boy, who in addition to having a gift for verse, also had a lovely voice. Though the idea of such a spectacle may seem foreign to most people in this century, this type of improvised street performance still exists today in American inner cities, but the verses are often “rapped” rather than sung. During one of these street performances, the learned jurist, literary critic, and one of the founders of the Roman Arcadian Academy Gian Vincenzo Gravina passed by and was stunned by the beauty of the child’s voice, and still more by his profound poetry, which to Gravina’s surprise was completely improvised. Gravina was so impressed with the boy’s poetic prowess that he immediately conceived a wish to adopt him, so he could educate him and cultivate his raw talents. In 1708, Felice Trapassi, knowing that Gravina’s patronage would greatly improve his son’s chances for a life of honor and success, allowed the young Pietro to be adopted by Gravina, who promised to oversee his education. Gravina, who loved Greek literature, began the boy’s classical education, trying to impress upon the young Roman a respect and reverence for ancient lore. In 1717, Gravina had Pietro’s last name changed from Trapassi to the Greek equivalent, Metastasio.<sup>2</sup>

After changing Pietro’s name, Gravina went about the task of changing, or at least broadening, Metastasio’s faculties. He taught Metastasio the sciences and academic languages. Gravina sought to educate him in oration rather than poetry and determined that Metastasio should study law as a profession. Gravina taught the boy that law and Divinity were the only two roads by which a man of learning could arrive at honors in Rome. As Burney describes it: “Poets, indeed, were rewarded with barren praise and acclamation, but wealth and affluence were strangers to their doors.”<sup>3</sup> Following his affectionate master’s advice, Metastasio went on to study law and assumed the clerical habit, taking the minor ordinances of the priesthood.<sup>4</sup> Gravina allowed Metastasio to continue reading his favorite poets, Ariosto and Homer, but insisted that the boy read his mentor’s favorite Greek dramas as well. Gravina had a profound impact on the

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<sup>2</sup>Charles Burney, *Memoirs of the Abate Metastasio*, vol. I, (New York: Da Capo, 1971), 1-4.

<sup>3</sup>Burney, 5.

<sup>4</sup>Burney, 11.

young Metastasio, influencing his studies, career, and his literary philosophy (the particulars of his philosophical impact will be discussed in detail in the following chapter). Under Gravina's influence, in 1712, Metastasio wrote his only spoken tragedy, *Giustino*, which conformed to all the rules and rigors of the ancient Greek dramatic writers.<sup>5</sup> Gravina died in 1718 and left his estate to Metastasio.<sup>6</sup> Gravina's death, though heartbreaking to the twenty-year-old Metastasio, was probably beneficial to the young poet's emerging literary career. Burney relates:

The advantage to his talents and to the lovers of poetry, which is supposed to have been derived from this early loss of his learned tutor, was the opportunity it afforded his genius, to free itself from the trammels of Grecian rules and servile imitation. But though in his dramas he has more pathos, poetry, nature, and facility, than we are now able to find in the ancient Greek tragedians, yet his early study of them certainly elevated his ideas and style, and taught him how to shun the vulgarity and absurdities with which the early [eighteenth-century] popular dramatists of most countries abound.<sup>7</sup>

After Gravina's death, Metastasio completely quit his study of law and concentrated on writing poetry; as the steward of a considerable fortune, he was free to do what he pleased. In 1719, only one year after Gravina's death, Metastasio had spent most of his inheritance entertaining admirers and friends. All that remained of his fortune were two small properties in Rome, some Neapolitan properties, and his library.<sup>8</sup>

Soon after the dissipation of his inheritance, he went to Naples with a firm resolution to resume the study of law. In 1720 he placed himself under the guidance of an advocate named Paglietti, one of the most eminent lawyers at the time in Naples. Paglietti abhorred superfluous knowledge and literature and strictly forbade Metastasio's study of poetry. Despite constant solicitations from those learned and cultured persons who remembered him as Gravina's *Wunderkind*, Metastasio successfully abstained from writing verses or improvising them until 1721,

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<sup>5</sup>Burney, 6.

<sup>6</sup>Neville, 511.

<sup>7</sup>Burney, 12

<sup>8</sup>Burney, 18.



when he accepted a commission to write *Endymion* (his first opera libretto) for the nuptials of Marquis Pignatelli. Later, the Viceroy of Naples commissioned Metastasio to write a drama for music, to be performed on the birthday of Empress Elizabeth, wife of Emperor Charles VI of the Hapsburg Empire, who was then in possession of the kingdom of Naples.<sup>9</sup> More commissioned operas followed, such as *Angelica*, another libretto written for the birthday of the Empress in 1722. The music was composed by Porpora and the leading role was sung by Farinelli on this occasion; it was said to be Metastasio's first encounter with the famous *castrato* with whom he would continue an epistolary relationship for many years to come.<sup>10</sup>

Naples was a good place for Metastasio to establish himself as a poet, as it was one of the major opera centers of Italy at the time. Here Metastasio carefully nurtured relationships with Charles VI and his family. For them, he wrote *libretti* for occasional pieces and flowery dedications that were designed to flatter the Austrian court. Apostolo Zeno, who held the coveted position of court poet in Vienna, announced his intention of returning to Venice in 1729. Zeno, along with the aristocrats whom Metastasio had charmed, strongly recommended that Metastasio take his place as court poet. In 1730 Metastasio was appointed by invitation, not application, and with a salary in excess of the sum earned by *Kapellmeister* J.J. Fux.<sup>11</sup> He attained this position, not only via his talent as a poet, but by way of skillful networking as well.

Between 1724 and 1734 Metastasio wrote thirteen *drammi per musica* (musical dramas). Though Metastasio typically referred to the genre by this name, other commonly encountered terms that apply to this genre are *opera seria* (serious work), *melodramma* (melodrama), and *dramma musicale* (musical drama). During this period, Metastasio refined and perfected a standardized form of libretto composition, building upon the accomplishments of his predecessor Apostolo Zeno. *La clemenza di Tito*, written in 1734, was among the opera *libretti* written during this decade and is representative of Metastasio's mature literary style.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Burney, 22.

<sup>10</sup>Burney, 26.

<sup>11</sup>Neville., 511.

<sup>12</sup>William J. Weichlein, *A Comparative Study of Five Musical Settings of La clemenza di*

It was a tumultuous time in the Viennese court. Bradley relates that in 1734 “Austria was involved in the War of the Polish Succession. Charles VI, Maria Theresa’s father, had become involved in the conflict during his maneuverings in the attempt to obtain guarantees for the succession of his daughter to his throne.”<sup>13</sup> Securing his daughter’s succession was Charles VI’s foremost concern during this time and that issue dominated his foreign and domestic policies until his death. In 1740 Charles VI died and Maria Theresa did take the throne. Cultural changes in Vienna after her rise to power impeded Metastasio’s success. Theresa was married to Duke Francis of Lorraine. This marriage served to align France and Austria. Her sister married Francis’s brother in 1744, further strengthening the relationship between the two countries.

In 1752 French theater began to replace Italian opera in the Habsburg court as the preferred diversion. By 1765 productions of Metastasian opera in Vienna were reduced to nothing.<sup>14</sup> Metastasio’s latter years in Vienna were anticlimactic. “Vienna had changed by 1772. Maria Theresa’s reforms had improved the status of the middle class, who now had an important part in the musical life of Vienna. The city had become a center for the operatic reform of Gluck

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*Tito*, (Dissertation University of Michigan: 1956), 26.

<sup>13</sup>David C. Bradley, *Judith, Maria Theresa, and Metastasio: A Cultural Study Based on Two Oratorios* (Ph. D. diss.: Florida State University, 1985), 181.

<sup>14</sup>Neville, 512.

and comic opera, and concert life for the benefit of the bourgeois public was on the rise.”<sup>15</sup>

Though his *drammi per musica* were not always in demand, “For fifty years, not a birthday, not a wedding occurred at the Court of Vienna, unless it were duly celebrated in an *Occasional Ode*, supplied upon request by Metastasio.”<sup>16</sup> Metastasio never retired to his homeland. He died in Vienna in 1782 at eighty-four years of age.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Bradley, 182.

<sup>16</sup>Stendhal, *Haydn, Mozart and Metastasio*, edited by Richard N. Coe (New York: Grossman, 1972), 234.

<sup>17</sup>Guido Nicastro, *Metastasio e il teatro del primo Settecento*, (Rome: Laterza & Figli Spa, 1979), 69.

## CHAPTER II

### INFLUENCES ON METASTASIO'S LITERARY PHILOSOPHY

Metastasio's dramas represent the synthesis of many reformist and ideological currents of the eighteenth century. He developed his own style, which is a hybrid of Arcadian, Cartesian, and Aristotelian ideals. During the formative years when the young Pietro was under the tutelage of his adoptive father Gravina, Metastasio was quite naturally influenced by the literary and philosophical prejudices of his tutor. Gravina was a professor of law at *L'università della Sapienza*, but he was also and a devotee of ancient Greek literature, a philosopher, and one of the literary critics who founded the Arcadian Academy.<sup>18</sup> The Arcadian Academy originated from the activities of a group of intellectuals who had gathered in Rome after the death of Queen Christina of Sweden in 1689.<sup>19</sup> The poets and intellectuals who were members of the Academy reacted against what they considered to be the decadent state of the seventeenth-century theater (*dramma per musica*, French *tragédie lyrique*, and spoken drama) and called for a return to the ideals of the Florentine *Camerata*, which one century earlier was responsible for the birth of European opera.

#### The Arcadian Academy

In order to appreciate the reforms of the Arcadian Academy, one must first understand the state of seventeenth-century theater which provoked the Academy's scrutiny. Theatrical devices that might seem ridiculous to the twenty-first-century spectator such as the *Deus ex machina* and its French counterpart, the *merveilleur*, became staples of the theater in the seventeenth century. Supernatural spectacles were common. Some examples of seventeenth-century operas are

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<sup>18</sup>Burney, 11, 13.

<sup>19</sup>Neville, 512.

Monteverdi's *Orfeo* in Italy, and Lully's *Armide* in France; both of which contain gods or sorcerers as characters. Another common characteristic of dramas from this era was the mixing of comic and tragic elements. "As the [seventeenth] century wore on, more and more comic elements made their way into the plots, eventually threatening to obfuscate almost totally the seriousness of the musical tragedy."<sup>20</sup> The genre also suffered from the abuses of singers preoccupied with the display of their exquisite voices, copious unnecessary scene changes, and plots abounding in continuous misadventures and misunderstandings. These were among the problems that had reduced the genre to a visual and aural spectacle.

Il melodramma alla fine del Seicento si presentava agli occhi polemici dei contemporanei, non diversamente dalla tragedia e dalla commedia, come un genere decaduto dalla forma originaria e dal significato poetico e culturale che gli erano stati attribuiti dalla fiorentina Camerata dei Bardi.<sup>21</sup>

The *melodramma* at the end of the seventeenth century presented itself to the polemical eyes of contemporaries, as a decadent genre, having fallen from its original form and cultural meaning which had been attributed to it by the Florentine Camerata of Bardi.

Luigi Antonio Muratori (scholar of ancient drama, literary critic, Priest, and an older contemporary of Metastasio), like the Arcadians, called for the restoration of the "ancient dignity" of tragedy. In criticism of seventeenth-century musical tragedy, he said: ". . . io sto per dire, essersi la poesia vilmente posta in catene; e laddove la musica una volta era serva, e ministra di lei ora la poesia è serva della musica."<sup>22</sup> (I am here to say that poetry itself is contemptibly put in chains; whereas the music at one time served and ministered to the poetry, now the poetry is a servant to the music.) These were among the problems that the Arcadians intended to resolve.

Like the members of the Florentine *Camerata*, the Arcadians looked to the ancient Greeks and Romans for answers. Gravina, who loved Greek tragedies, undoubtedly studied Aristotle's *Poetics*, a discourse on ancient Greek tragedy that lays out rules by which poets should abide

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<sup>20</sup>Weichlein, 14.

<sup>21</sup>Nicastro, 63.

<sup>22</sup>Nicastro, 63.

when writing tragedies. According to Aristotle, the tragedy is a lofty genre, wherein mythical and heroic characters are represented. While Gravina wrote spoken tragedies in imitation of the ancient Greek dramas, almost every other poet of his time of any acumen was writing musical dramas.

É un'osservazione più che ovvia: L'Italia non aveva una «tragedia» degna di questo nome e il disinteresse degli scrittori era pari a quello del pubblico. La causa di questo stato di cose veniva attribuita alla letteratura barocca che aveva dato onore ad un nuovo genere di teatro, il melodramma, e aveva rovinato il «buon gusto» del pubblico, che preferiva deliziarsi con questo nuovo tipo di spettacolo, un ibrido di musica e di poesia.<sup>23</sup>

It is a more than obvious observation that Italy did not have a [spoken] “tragedy” worthy of this name, and the disinterest of the writers was equal to that of the public. The cause of this state of affairs came to be attributed to the baroque literature that gave praise to a new genre of theater, the *melodramma*, and ruined the “good taste” of the public that preferred to delight itself with this new type of spectacle, a hybrid of music and poetry.

Gravina viewed the *melodramma* as a failed attempt at tragedy, a premise which Metastasio vehemently refuted in later years. Metastasio wrote only one spoken tragedy at age fourteen (under Gravina's influence) and focused his literary talents, instead, on the *melodramma*.<sup>24</sup> Nicastro relates that the end or purpose of tragedy should be, “*suscitare il terrore e la compassione, invece del diletto*” (to arouse terror and compassion instead of delight).<sup>25</sup> Librettists were not always able to accomplish this end because of the demands of singers, set designers, composers, impresarios, etc. The Arcadians and other critics of the time realized that there was little chance of changing the tastes of the public which delighted in spectacle, but they nevertheless set about the task of reforming opera.

The Arcadians promoted a simpler form of musical tragedy. “The single most important word in the Academicians' canon was ‘*semplicità*’ (‘simplicity’), which in their minds was typified

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<sup>23</sup>Nicastro, 11.

<sup>24</sup>Burney, 6.

<sup>25</sup>Nicastro, 63.

by the Arcadian pastorals.”<sup>26</sup> They valued economy of words over verbosity. They expressly forbid the presence of comic elements in serious opera, the mixing of aristocratic and peasant characters (except for a private servant), and miracles. Only the grandest themes and noblest passions were treated and the drama had to lead logically to a *lieto fine* (happy ending).<sup>27</sup> The Arcadian aesthetic included such ideals as: “external beauties” of poetry, exemplified in choice of words, versification, figures of speech, and eloquence of style; and “internal beauties” of poetry, shown in profundity, hidden mysteries, philosophy, and theology.<sup>28</sup>

Metastasio was immersed and flourished in the Arcadian movement. Neville says:

Both Pietro Ottoboni [Metastasio’s godfather] and Gravina [his adoptive father] were Arcadians, as was Michael Friedrich d’Althan and the whole line of court poets in Vienna from Donato Cupeda (who followed Nicolò Minato) to Pietro Bernadoni, Silvio Stampiglia, Pietro Pariati, Apostolo Zeno, and Giovanni Pasquini. Poets such as Marco Coltellini and Ranieri de’ Calzabigi, later to have associations with Vienna, were also Arcadians.<sup>29</sup>

The principal goal of the Arcadian Academy was to portray virtue as appealing and vice as distasteful. This, according to the poet and critic Calepio (a contemporary of Metastasio), made Italian literature superior to that of the French, whose only goal was pleasure.<sup>30</sup> Gravina instilled in the young Metastasio the validity and importance of these reformist values and literary aesthetics. Metastasio, as the adoptive son and student of one of the founder of the Arcadian Academy and a member of it himself, naturally assimilated these Arcadian values as his own.

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<sup>26</sup>Patrick J. Smith, *The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 66.

<sup>27</sup>Smith, 67.

<sup>28</sup>Neville, 513.

<sup>29</sup>Neville, 513.

<sup>30</sup>Nicastro, 13.

## Cartesian Rationalism

Gravina's interest in Cartesian Rationalism was influential on Metastasio's work.<sup>31</sup> The term Cartesian refers to the famous French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes, who lived from 1596-1650. Descartes believed that the human senses were flawed and could mislead man to draw incorrect conclusions. He, therefore, tried to reexamine the world from a purely rational vantage, abandoning any precepts or truths commonly held as self-evident. He is perhaps best known for having written and immortalized the maxim, "I think, therefore I am" in his *Discourse on Method*. This is a truth that he claimed could not be refuted, and it is the first premise of his philosophy. Morality and rationality are central to his philosophical system.<sup>32</sup>

The Cartesian principles that are most pertinent to Metastasian drama are outlined in his *Les passions de l'âme* (1649). Descartes asserts in this treatise that passions arouse desire and that desire terminates in some sort of bodily action. Morality is necessary to regulate our passions and, therefore, our actions. Neville explains Descartes' philosophy on regulating the passions:

Although the passions cannot be prevented, their duration or strength can be controlled indirectly, through reasonings that can produce counter-passions and consequently restrain bodily actions . . . Descartes names "devotion" and "generosity" as the foremost attitudes of mind which, if steadfastly maintained, will provide the strength of will to withstand the onslaughts of destructive desires.<sup>33</sup>

In Cartesian terms, "devotion" is more than love or friendship, it is the act of regarding and esteeming something or someone above oneself. Neville explains that generosity in Descartes' system ". . . is composed of several qualities: the determination to act according to the highest principles; the belief that others are capable of doing the same; the willingness to excuse the weak;

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<sup>31</sup>Neville, 512.

<sup>32</sup>[http://www.publicbookshelf.com/public\\_html/Outline\\_of\\_Great\\_Books\\_Volume\\_I/ithink\\_th\\_bga.html](http://www.publicbookshelf.com/public_html/Outline_of_Great_Books_Volume_I/ithink_th_bga.html), (Accessed 8 November, 2004).

<sup>33</sup>Don Neville, "Cartesian Principles in Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*," *Studies in the History of Music*, vol. 2, (New York: Broude Brothers, 1988), 101.



the ability to subjugate anger; and a concern for the welfare of others.”<sup>34</sup>

Just as Descartes outlines attitudes of mind that predispose a man toward virtuous behavior, he discusses attitudes that tend to lead to wrongdoing and shame, remorse and despair. Descartes warns against coveting things that we cannot attain by our own power. Coveting and ambition are desires that, if unfulfilled, lead to anger, hatred, and vengeance. Envy detracts from the happiness of men and those tainted with it distress not only themselves, but also try to disturb the pleasure of others. “Failure to control the passions may lead people to commit acts that they know to be morally reprehensible. For such people, the problem is not that they actively pursue vice but that they are insufficiently resolute in avoiding vice and pursuing virtue . . .”<sup>35</sup>

It is evident that Metastasio’s knowledge of Cartesian philosophy affected his dramas. The characters of his operas are engaged in moral action. Each character’s varying degrees of success depend on his/her ability to subjugate passion and then reason through the probable outcome of their choices. Though there is no way to know for certain if Metastasio read *Les passions de l’âme*, it is known that in 1712 the young Metastasio went with Gravina to Scalèa to study philosophy with Gravina’s cousin Gregorio Caloprese, who was a specialist in Cartesian philosophy. In his old age, Metastasio recalled with nostalgia that special time in his life in a letter from 1766 saying:

. . . ho sentita di nuovo la venerata voce dell’insigne filosofo Gregorio Caloprese, che adattandosi per istruirmi alla mia debole età, mi conducea quasi per mano fra i vortici dell’allora regnante ingegnoso Renato, di cui era egli acerrimo assertore, ed allettava la fanciulesca mia curiosità or dimostrandomi con la cera quasi per giuoco come si formino fra i globetti le particelle striate, or trattenendomi in ammirazione con le incantatrici esperienze della diottrica.<sup>36</sup>

. . . I heard for the first time the venerable voice of the renowned philosopher Gregorio Caloprese, who adapting himself to teach me in my weak age [youth], led me as if by the hand among the whirlwinds of the then reigning genius Renato [René Descartes], of whom Caloprese was an implacable supporter. He enticed

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<sup>34</sup>Neville, “Cartesian Principles in Mozart’s *La clemenza di Tito*,” 102.

<sup>35</sup>Neville, “Cartesian Principles in Mozart’s *La clemenza di Tito*,” 103.

<sup>36</sup>Nicastro, 69,70.

my childish curiosity, now demonstrating to me with wax, almost jokingly, how it formed itself around little spheres and striped particles, now captivating me in admiration with the enchanting experiences of dioptrics [a subject in which Descartes made important discoveries].

Metastasio remembered Caloprese and his teaching with fondness. Metastasio's early exposure to Cartesian philosophy proved to be important in the development of his mature dramas.

### Aristotle

Gravina's reverence for Aristotelian models also influenced the young Metastasio. Gravina and the Arcadians promoted the observance of the unities of place, time, and action, as set forth in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Unity of place means that the setting of the drama should be in one location. Unity of time requires that the action of the drama should represent the passage of no more than one day. Unity of action means that all dramatic events should contribute to the plot with no diversions.<sup>37</sup> "For Metastasio, with his first-hand knowledge of ancient tragedy and his capacity to blend Arcadian ideals with the observations of Aristotle and Horace, these moral dramas took on a highly developed literary quality."<sup>38</sup> In his *drammi per musica* and his oratorios, Metastasio attempted to follow the three Aristotelian unities, although with some liberty.

Metastasio's work was bound by his interpretation of Aristotle, which was based on his examination of the ancient writers of Greece and Rome, and his discovery that they very rarely adhered to the rules of Aristotle in an extremely rigid manner if the situation of the plot demanded a free treatment. According to Metastasio, unity of place could be extended to include a relatively large geographical area (as large as a country) if the plot involved such an area, unity of time could be stretched to include a twenty-four-hour day (which allowed for numerous stage effects), and unity of action could be broken to include subplots if they were of

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<sup>37</sup><http://web.uvic.ca/shakespear/Library/SLTnoframes/drama/unities.html#fn1> (Accessed 25 November, 2003).

<sup>38</sup>Neville, "Metastasio," 513.

interest.<sup>39</sup>

Metastasio's observance of the unities is not the only evidence of Aristotle's influence. The characters of Metastasio's *libretti* are already in action and the specifics of events preceding the action are revealed throughout the work. People are depicted with qualities that may not be historically accurate. Characters were better than average people, morally and in social status, and were made more appealing than in real life.<sup>40</sup> All these qualities reflect the influence of Aristotle.

### Seventeenth-Century French Theater

The Arcadian's interest in Aristotle may have been inspired first by the French rather than the Greeks. The Arcadians were influenced by the influx of seventeenth-century French theater into Italy at the end of the seventeenth century; the works of Corneille, Racine, Quinault, and Crebillon in particular. Their works were more spoken than sung, but often included ballets and musical intermezzos. The French, unlike the Italians, had already substantially modified Classical tragedy. They replaced the Greek style stable chorus with a chorus that participates more directly in the action and abolished supernatural and mythological elements, while reaffirming the rigorous observance of the Aristotelian unities.<sup>41</sup> "The success of the French classical theater and its ideals of purity and nobility had made a lasting impression upon the founders of the Arcadian Academy, and they too sought to purify their works."<sup>42</sup> Thus, many of the Arcadian reforms mentioned earlier were borrowed from the French.

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<sup>39</sup>Bradley, 76.

<sup>40</sup>Neville, "Metastasio," 513.

<sup>41</sup>Nicastro, 11,12.

<sup>42</sup>Smith, 67.

## Morality and the Catholic Church

Because of the vulgarity of seventeenth-century French and Italian theater, morality became an important issue at the turn of the century. The Catholic Church was at least partly responsible for bringing this issue to the forefront of the reformist movement. Muratori criticized the *melodramma* of this period because he believed it vulgarized the good taste of the public and corrupted their morality. This was a point of view that was no doubt colored by the fact that he was a priest. He believed the theater could become a delightful venue in which to teach good behavior and moral lessons if the poet knew how to inspire the love of virtue and the abhorrence of vice.<sup>43</sup> This was a concept that the Arcadians embraced as well. The fact that the Arcadians were stationed in Rome, the home of the Vatican, was no doubt influential on its moralistic agenda. Metastasio, who had himself worked toward becoming a priest, shared this interest as well. The moral philosophy of Descartes was, perhaps, a convenient intellectual way to achieve this otherwise religious goal.

## Apostolo Zeno

Apostolo Zeno was another important influence on Metastasio's mature style. Zeno, like Metastasio, was affected by the culture of the Catholic Church, as is evidenced in his name Apostolo (Apostle) and his moralization of the love interests in his dramas. He was a fellow Arcadian and Metastasio's predecessor at the Viennese court. Zeno was born in Venice in 1668, making him thirty years older than Metastasio. Zeno was greatly influenced by the Venetian culture of his youth. In Venice, reformist sentiments that were spurred on by the political culture of the Catholic Church percolated. Zeno, who is famous for his reforms in musical tragedy, promoted a *melodramma* based on a more standardized and regulated structure and abolished the

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<sup>43</sup>Nicastro, 12.

previously lamented inconveniences and absurdities of the genre.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, Metastasio established a standardized, almost schematic, structure for his *libretti*, building upon the work of his predecessor.<sup>45</sup> Zeno made several reforms to opera; he adhered to the Aristotelian unities of time and action, moralized the amorous elements of plot, limited the use of chorus, and eliminated comic characters. Metastasio followed these same reforms.

The majority of Zeno's thirty-six *opera seria libretti* are set in ancient times. Metastasio's dramas are also set in ancient times. Zeno promoted a three act structure and his texts showed a clear division between recitatives and arias. By looking at the rhyme schemes and number of syllables used in each line, a composer can plainly see which texts are intended for treatment as arias and which are meant to be recitatives. The recitatives were a composite of eleven and seven syllable lines with a loose rhyme scheme, while aria texts were set apart with clear rhyme schemes and regular meter. Metastasio continued in this tradition.

Metastasio, in his mature dramas, synthesized all these elements. The following outline enumerates those qualities that belong to each category. Some qualities appear under more than one heading, demonstrating the overlap and interplay of various artistic influences.

### **Arcadian qualities**

1. External "beauties" of poetry are exemplified in choice of words, versification, figures of speech, and eloquence of style.
2. Internal "beauties" of poetry are shown in profundity, hidden mysteries, philosophy, and theology.
3. Comic elements and miracles are abolished in his dramas.
4. Economy of words is valued over verbosity.
5. With the exception of a personal servant and his master, aristocratic and peasant characters do not interact.
6. Virtue is portrayed as appealing and vice as abhorrent.
7. Dramas must end with a *lieto fine* (happy ending).

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<sup>44</sup>Nicastro, 65.

<sup>45</sup>Weichlein, 26.

**Cartesian qualities**

1. Characters are engaged in moral action.
2. Each character's varying degrees of success depend on his/her ability to subjugate passion and then reason through the probable outcome of their choices.
3. The heroes embody virtuous qualities like devotion and generosity, while the villains are mired by their envy and ambitions which lead them into immoral acts and misery.

**Aristotelian qualities**

1. Characters are already in action and the specifics of events preceding the action are revealed throughout the work.
2. People are depicted as they might be and engendered with qualities that may not be historically accurate.
3. Characters were better than average people (morally and in social status) and made more appealing than in real life.
4. The three Aristotelian unities are observed.

**Seventeenth-century French theater qualities**

1. The three Aristotelian unities are observed.
2. The Greek style stable chorus is abolished and replaced with a chorus that participates more directly in the action.
3. Supernatural and mythological elements are abolished.

**Moral and Catholic qualities**

1. The dramas are a venue in which to teach good behavior and moral lessons.
2. Virtue is portrayed as appealing and vice as abhorrent.
3. Love elements are moralized.

**Zenoian qualities**

1. Dramas are set in ancient times.
2. Love elements are moralized.
3. Dramas are structured in a standardized form consisting of three acts and a series of recitatives and arias.
4. Chorus is employed sparingly.

***La clemenza di Tito* as Representation of the Synthesis of these Influences**

Metastasio's dramas represent the synthesis of many reformist and ideological currents of the time. He took qualities he liked from all those he encountered and assimilated them in his own distinct style. From Gravina, he learned about ancient Greek tragedy, Aristotle, and Descartes. From the Arcadians and from the Catholic Church, he learned to portray virtue as appealing and vice as abhorrent. From the French, he learned to abolish the Greek style static chorus. Building

on Zeno's work, Metastasio created a standardized structure for his dramas consisting of three acts, each composed of a series of arias and recitatives. All of these influences led Metastasio to his mature style, as is exemplified in *La clemenza di Tito*.

Stendhal describes Metastasio's writing thus:

He draws a veil over the anguish of the heart, whenever it threatens to become too painful; his endings are never unhappy; his world knows none of the dreary realities of life; he reveals nothing of those chilly suspicions which instill their venom into the tenderest of human passions. He excludes everything that might recall the dismal and realistic side of life, driving it far hence into outer darkness. From the welter of the passions he has selected only so much as he needs to awaken sympathy; nothing bestial, nothing that leaves a bitter taste in the mouth; upon the rough violence of physical desire, he bestows a patent of nobility.<sup>46</sup>

Another striking characteristic of Metastasio's dramas is the exaggerated portrayal of antagonists and protagonists. His heroes are entirely virtuous and unwavering, while his villains are so corrupted by vice that they can scarcely dent the heroes' proverbial armor. This archetype is indicative of Metastasio's desire to portray vice as horrible and virtue as appealing and also reflects the influence of Cartesian philosophy.

The villains of *La clemenza di Tito*, Vitellia and Sesto, are both flawed with characteristics and attitudes that Descartes claimed lead to wrongdoing, shame, remorse, and despair. Descartes warns against envy. Covetousness and ambition are desires that, if unfulfilled, lead to anger, hatred, and vengeance. Vitellia exemplifies all these qualities. She has a burning ambition to take the throne that causes her to act immorally and reprehensibly. She is brought to the depths of sorrow as she squanders her chance to share the throne with Tito because her treasonous acts and designs are uncovered. Sesto is completely unable or unwilling to overcome his desire to please the woman he loves, Vitellia. In his efforts to win her affection, he commits acts that he knows are wrong and deplorable. He is brought to shame and repentance in the end. Sesto is an example of one who is not pursuing vice, but rather is insufficiently resolute at controlling his desires and pursuing virtue. Thus, Sesto and Vitellia are led by their bad desires into immoral acts which terminate in misery and failure.

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<sup>46</sup>Stendhal, 209, 211.

While the actions of Vitellia and Sesto are dominated by their base desires, the Roman Caesar Tito shows great restraint in exercising his power and embodies the qualities of generosity and devotion, which Descartes claimed were so vital for regulating the passions and living virtuously. As was stated earlier, generosity in Descartes' system “. . . is composed of several qualities: the determination to act according to the highest principles; the belief that others are capable of doing the same; the willingness to excuse the weak; the ability to subjugate anger; and a concern for the welfare of others.”<sup>47</sup> Tito, in Metastasio's *La clemenza di Tito*, embodies most, if not all, of these qualities. He exhibits devotion to his country when he breaks off an engagement with the woman he loves, Queen Bernice of Judea, because he believes that the Romans would prefer one of their own women as empress. In Act I scene 4, Tito shows generosity when he redirects riches and funds that were to be used to build a temple in his honor to support the victims of an eruption of the volcano Vesuvius. In Act II, his generosity is put to an extreme test when he is faced with Sesto's evident betrayal. He reacts first with anger, but exercises control over his passions and delays acting until he has interviewed Sesto. Tito shows clemency and pardons all those who conspired against him in the end, further demonstrating his generosity.

*La clemenza di Tito* also adheres to Aristotelian models and aesthetics. The unity of place is more or less adhered to. All of the action takes place in Rome, with several different locations within Rome represented in various scenes, allowing for a variety of scenery. The action takes place during one day in observance of the unity of time and, though there are subplots, Metastasio loosely complies with the unity of action by making them relevant to the primary plot of the drama. The characters of *La clemenza di Tito* are already in action and the specifics of events preceding the action are revealed throughout the work. In the first recitative of the opera it is revealed that Sesto has already begun plans of insurrection and that Tito is betrothed to Queen Bernice. Historical characters are depicted as they might be rather than as they truly were. For example, there is no historical evidence that the daughter of Emperor Vitellius, Vitellia, conspired

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<sup>47</sup>Neville, “Cartesian Principles in Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*,” 102.



against Titus Vespasianus to take the throne, as is the case in *La clemenza di Tito*. In compliance with Aristotelian aesthetics, Metastasio portrays characters that are better than average, morally and in social status. Of all the characters of this drama, Tito best exemplifies this quality. He is an emperor and is godlike in his morality.

Like Zeno, Metastasio employs the chorus sparingly. It appears only three times in *La clemenza di Tito*. The chorus represents the Roman populace, showing the influence of seventeenth-century French tragedy, in which the chorus tended to be more directly involved in the action. Modeling his dramas after the structure of Zeno's, Metastasio divides the libretto into three acts consisting primarily of a series of recitatives and arias. There are no miracles, no comic elements, and no mixing of aristocratic and peasant characters, showing the influence of Arcadian aesthetics. In relatively few words, Metastasio is able to tell a complex story, indicative of the Arcadian preference for simplicity and economy of words. Virtue is portrayed as appealing and vice as horrible, reflecting the moral agenda of the Catholic Church. Metastasio's works are worthy of esteem not because they were particularly innovative, but rather because they represent the culmination and distillation of artistic thought and criticism of the day.

### CHAPTER III

#### ***LA CLEMENZA DI TITO AS VEILED POLITICAL PROPAGANDA***

Metastasian opera, which glorifies kings and embellishes history, is in some ways veiled propaganda.

Propaganda can be defined as the transmission of ideas and values from one person, or groups of persons, to another, with the specific intention of influencing the recipients' attitudes in such a way that the interests of its authors will be enhanced. Although it may be veiled, seeking to influence thoughts, beliefs and actions by suggestion, it must be conscious and deliberate.<sup>48</sup>

As court poet in Vienna, Metastasio worked under royal patronage for the Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI of the Hapsburg Empire. As an employee of the court, he was expected to produce works that were flattering-or at the very least benign-to the Emperor. It is an easily observable tendency in human history that those in power tend to promote a vision and understanding of the world, especially the part they have dominion over, that is optimistic and appealing. The powerful generally tell the people they rule how wonderful things are (via public speeches, the education system, the media, the arts, etc.) and gloss over, or ignore completely, the domestic problems affecting the people upon whose backs their empires are built. While rulers often stir up fears about imminent dangers from foreign forces, it is never at the expense of their own popularity.

The famed Renaissance intellectual Machiavelli explained that a prince “should try above all things to win over the populace . . .”.<sup>49</sup> Governmental leaders have often used the theater to their advantage in their efforts to influence public opinion. One historical example is the British Empire which between 1850-1950 used available media outlets, public exhibitions, and their influence on the theater (via censorship and licensing) to promote an imperial core ideology.

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<sup>48</sup>MacKenzie, 3.

<sup>49</sup>Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Robert M. Adams, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 30.

Mackenzie relates how the British Empire utilized the music halls for political gain: “The ballad too was used in a propagandist manner, to disseminate moral tales, to propagate temperance ideas, and to convince the poor that conditions were not so bad.”<sup>50</sup> Rosselli makes a similar observation about the content of French Baroque opera saying, “Lully’s operas for Paris and Versailles, the work of a court official, were vehicles of monarchical propaganda.”<sup>51</sup> The very presence of Italian opera in Vienna, where German is spoken, was but an imperial display; opera was one of the wares brought back from foreign conquests, Naples and Milan in particular. It is not surprising that art is used for political purposes. Art can be a powerful means of expression and influence. Through art one can elicit feelings from those who experience it; powerful sentiments can be called forth without provoking rational thought by stirring up the most basic of human emotions.

In seventeenth-century Italy, operas commissioned by public theaters were produced purely as entertainment. Operas like Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea* (1643) did not always portray the noble class as particularly noble. Operas for public theater often treated fantastic subjects involving gods, sorcery, incest, usurpation, slaughters, and spectacular stage effects.<sup>52</sup> The operas that resulted from Metastasian *libretti* are markedly dry by comparison; kings replace gods as central characters—*Artaserse*, *Alessandro nell’Indie*, *Siroe Re di Persia*, and *La clemenza di Tito* for example—and happy endings with moral lessons abound. The Arcadians openly believed that the theater should take on an educative role, so it would become a venue to teach morality and the love of virtue. The question that one must ask is: What did they really teach?

Metastasian opera, for the most part, extols the virtues of great, enlightened, and moral kings. Of course the rulers depicted are from history and ancient literature, but upon close

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<sup>50</sup>John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1984), 42.

<sup>51</sup>John Rosselli, “Censorship,” *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed 11 October, 2004), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

<sup>52</sup>Joseph Spencer Kennard, *The Italian Theater* (New York: Rudge, 1932), 197.

examination one has no difficulty finding references, however veiled, to Emperor Charles VI. This is certainly true of *La clemenza di Tito*. In *La clemenza di Tito*, Charles VI resembles Tito and he finds his moral nature by defying the claims of power, convenience, and the passions of love and fear.<sup>53</sup> In the face of great temptation to abuse the power they hold, the enlightened kings of Metastasio's *libretti* subjugate their own interests and desires and take the moral high ground for the good of the people they rule.

Though the characters of *La clemenza di Tito* are ostensibly from a distant time and place, there are striking parallels between the issues treated in the libretto and the issues facing Charles VI during the year of its composition; a detailed discussion of these parallels is presented later. In his treatise on the genre of tragedy, Gravina (Metastasio's mentor and adoptive father) addresses the fact that art imitates reality:

Perché l'imitazione si dèe far prima con la favola, ch'è lo spirito della tragedia, conviene che l'invenzione sia simile ai successi reali ed agli affari pubblici che per lo mondo civile trascorrono; altrimenti la favola non imiterebbe, né darebbe insegnamento alcuno: perché non iscoprirebbe la natura de' veri governi, e magistrati e principi, che si debbono sul finto con altri nomi delineate. Onde avviene che gli ottimi poeti, scolpendo il vero sopra i personaggi antichi, fuori della loro intenzione, colpiscono nelle cose presenti . . .

Because the action [*imitazione* refers to action in this case because Gravina viewed dramatic action as an imitation of life] must derive primarily from the plot, which is the spirit of the tragedy, it follows that its creation be similar to real outcomes and to the public affairs that occur throughout all the civilized world;

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<sup>53</sup>“Opera”, *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed 11 October, 2004), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

otherwise the plot would not imitate [real life], nor would it teach any lessons: because it would not uncover the nature of real governments, and magistrates and princes, that should be presented under different names. Therefore, it happens that the best poets, engraving truth upon the ancient characters, outside of their intentions, strike on current events . . .<sup>54</sup>

Gravina treads lightly on the issue of the tragedy imitating real life. He says it logically follows that the plot be similar to real outcomes and to the public affairs that occur throughout all the civilized world. He also states that tragedy should reveal the true nature of governments, magistrates, and princes, but under different names. Then, contradicting himself, he writes that the best poets craft dramas that strike on current issues without intending it. Did poets intend it or not? One important part of the definition of veiled propaganda mentioned above is that the transmission of ideas designed to influence the recipients' attitudes must be conscious and deliberate. Since *La clemenza di Tito* is propaganda of the veiled type, one must attempt to discover the author's probable cause or motive in producing it in order to ascertain if it is indeed a conscious, deliberate, and politically motivated production that serves Metastasio's interests.

Nicastro relates that the genre of tragedy promoted by the Arcadians [from which Metastasian opera evolved] was lacking in real social conflicts and was destined to remain in the closed literary sphere of the aristocracy. It was no accident that the aristocratic theater should be lacking in real social conflicts. With an ever growing middle class, competition among empires for territory, and philosophical currents that questioned and challenged the Divine Right of Kings, the aristocracy was steeped in real social conflict and did not need to heighten the growing political tensions by depicting it on the stage. There is no mix of aristocratic and peasant characters in Metastasian opera as there is in Beaumarchais' play from the latter part of the century, *The Barber of Seville*, primarily because it was politically expedient to avoid such issues. Metastasio would not have crafted a plot that revolved around a man marrying below his

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<sup>54</sup>Nicastro, 18,19.

status as the Count does in *The Barber of Seville*. Such a plot would not be in harmony with Arcadian aesthetics, but more importantly, his patron would not have appreciated it.<sup>55</sup>

The philosophical currents in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were dangerous for the aristocracy. The social contract theory of John Locke (1632-1704) was powerfully influential on the future of politics worldwide; the American and French revolutions most notably. Though the democratic revolutions that created the United States of America and destroyed the French monarchy were several decades later, the great empires of Europe (Spanish, French, English, Russian, and Hapsburg) were surely beginning to sense the changing political currents. Locke's most popular and influential political writings are contained in his *Two Treatises on Government*. The first treatise is dedicated almost exclusively to refuting the argument that political authority is derived from religious authority, an argument made by Robert Filmer in *Patriarcha* and known by the name of the Divine Right of Kings.<sup>56</sup> This issue would surely have been of great importance to Charles VI who held the title of Holy Roman Emperor. The second treatise *An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government* contains Locke's own constructive view of the aims and justification for civil government. Social contract theories like Locke's are designed to explain how man in his pre-political and natural state might form a government. Locke's basic argument is as follows: If there were no laws to obey, men would steal and commit acts of violence freely. Each man would have to fend for his family and himself in a survival-of-the-fittest scenario. The result would likely be continual war and violence. In order to avoid this state of chaos, men would contract with one another and give up their natural rights to defend personal property and self, while creating a representative political body to execute punishments for injustices, declare wars, etc.

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<sup>55</sup>Nicastro, 11.

<sup>56</sup><http://www.iep.utm.edu/s/soc-cont.htm> (Accessed 29 July, 2004).

Property rights are at the heart of Locke's theories on the creation of government. According to Locke, private property is created when a person applies his labor to the raw materials of nature. So, for example, when one cultivates and tills a piece of land and makes it into a piece of farmland that produces food, then one has a claim to own that piece of land and the food produced upon it. Furthermore, there are limits as to how much property one can own; a person should not take more from nature than one can use, because doing so leaves others without enough for themselves. Because nature is given to all of mankind by God, one cannot take more than his own fair share.<sup>57</sup>

The aristocracy had maintained control of property ownership for centuries; it was the key to their power. The idea of egalitarian distribution of natural resources and representative government was radical and unwelcome in the theater of ideas as well as in the opera theater. In this context it is clear that Metastasio's opera had a vital purpose in aristocratic social life, to promote and justify royal authority. "Metastasio's librettos, which dominated serious opera (outside France) for most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in their more refined way endorsed the virtues of rulers as arbiters of conflict, upholders of law and promoters of the public good."<sup>58</sup> The fact that Metastasio's twenty-seven opera *libretti* resulted in around one thousand operas during the eighteenth century is clear evidence of their appeal to the aristocratic patrons. Metastasio's *libretti* tended to promote a core ideology that was on the side of those in power, who happened also to be the same people commissioning his works.

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<sup>57</sup><http://www.iep.utm.edu/s/soc-cont.htm> (Accessed 29 July, 2004).

<sup>58</sup>Rosselli

Faced with radical political ideas that, if implemented, would mean the overthrow of their empires, monarchs began instituting liberal policies and programs in hopes of avoiding revolution. Thus began the age of enlightened despotism. Charles VI was a patron of learning and the arts, particularly music. He also supported mercantilism and encouraged commerce and industry, which contributed to the rise of the middle class. In a letter from the Prince of Savoy to Metastasio in 1729, the prince refers to Charles VI as an “enlightened monarch”.<sup>59</sup> Ironically, the policies he instituted-and his daughter Maria Theresa after him and her son Joseph II after her-eventually led to a powerful middle class that overthrew the monarchy in the revolutions of 1848.

The idea of enlightened despotism was not invented by historians of a later generation to describe the *Zeitgeist* of the eighteenth century, but was propagated among the aristocracy during the Enlightenment as a defense of, and justification for, their own lives of privilege. Metastasio’s *libretti* promoted such sentiments. His interests were directly linked with Charles’ interests; Charles’ patronage, therefore, is an important motivating factor that affected the type of work Metastasio produced. The celebrated Enlightenment poet and dramatist Vittorio Alfieri refused to meet Metastasio while he was in Vienna, because to his generation, Metastasio no longer represented any “reform,” but rather the sycophant of a Divine Right despot.<sup>60</sup> People like Alfieri understood Metastasio’s political role and found it distasteful.

All these political and philosophical currents influenced the aristocracy and the art produced under their patronage. There is, however, a more specific reason why Metastasio would have found it expedient to produce *La clemenza di Tito*-a work that is flattering to the emperor and that promotes his interests-when he did. In a letter to his long-time friend Bulgarella “La Romanina,” the greatest female singer and actress of her time, dating from July 28, 1733 (the year before *La clemenza di Tito* premiered), Metastasio wrote:

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<sup>59</sup>Burney,44.

<sup>60</sup>Smith, 75.



May years unnumbered be added to the life of my most August Patron! who yesterday published in my favour, a truly Caesarean decree, in the supreme council of Spain, by which I am invested with the office of *Treasurer* to the province of Cosenza in the kingdom of Naples: a post for life, of honour, authority, and if I were to perform the business myself in person, of considerable profit; but even after paying a deputy, the clear salary will amount to 1500 florins a year. You see that the appointment is not inconsiderable in point of pecuniary advantage; but be assured, that the honour done me by the solicitude, affection, and condescension, with which the emperor has deigned to confer this benefit upon me, infinitely surpasses all lucrative considerations. It was publicly declared, at the Imperial table, to one of the members of the council, as a reward for my past and present labours; and his Imperial Majesty was pleased to add, that he had, unsolicited, mentioned this appointment in council, as my just due. This public partiality of His Majesty in my favour, has made such an impression, that yesterday, contrary to custom, when the decree was mentioned, there was no one of the counsellors who ventured to utter a syllable against it; but part of them said coldly, that the order should be executed, while the rest applauded the justice and propriety of the appointment. The best part of the story is, that this favour has been granted without the least recommendation of any kind; so that I owe it entirely to the beneficent heart of Caesar, to whom may God grant a long, fortunate and glorious life!<sup>61</sup>

As Metastasio wrote in this letter, referring to the great honor Charles VI had bestowed upon him: “It was publicly declared, at the Imperial table, to one of the members of the council, as a reward for my past and present labours . . .”<sup>62</sup> His past and present labors as Poet Laureate must have made quite an impression on Charles VI for him to give Metastasio political power. This appointment to a position of honor and profit in his adopted home city of Naples clearly gave Metastasio a personal reason to continue writing dramas that were flattering to and politically beneficial for his patron. One is immediately struck by the use of such adjectives as “Caesarean” and “August” in reference to Charles VI (both of these terms refer to the first Roman emperor Augustus, who ruled from 27 B.C.-14 A.D.).

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<sup>61</sup>Burney, 97-98.

<sup>62</sup>Burney, 98.

Even in his private letters Metastasio pays homage to the emperor by invoking images of the great and ancient emperors of Rome. In a letter to the prince of Savoy dating from 1729, Metastasio makes reference to Charles' "Caesarian clemency".<sup>63</sup> The title *La clemenza di Tito*, of course, means the Clemency of Titus (who was a Caesar), which makes this reference particularly striking and illustrative of the point that the character of Tito is a similitude of Charles VI. Also, the title page of the libretto for Caldara's musical setting refers to Charles VI as "Emperor of the Romans, always August."<sup>64</sup> Upon reading Metastasio's own words, even one who is skeptical of the premise that Tito is a reference to the Hapsburg Emperor must concede that these letters dispel any reasonable doubt that the librettist was beyond making such comparisons. More importantly, the content of the letter from 1733 illustrates the probable cause for Metastasio to engage in political propaganda on behalf of the emperor; he was handsomely rewarded for his past labors and would likely earn more favor with *La clemenza di Tito*.

It is important to try to understand the audience to whom propaganda is being disseminated before attempting to analyze its meaning, as it will mean different things to different people, depending on their social, educational, and economic statuses. Parker made the following observation about audiences of opera in the eighteenth century:

Opera-going was an activity reflecting personal interests or taste, as is evident from the polemics about it, but within a framework of social status and convenience. Court opera was attended by court members without payment and in deference to the ruler. Next came the large group of aristocratic or patrician patrons with their friends and guests (rarely their wives), who may have had sponsoring interests or who valued opera for social contact; this group has also left most of the written documentation of the practice. These people went to the opera as many times as possible and, if they traveled, in as many places as possible. Middle-class spectators were rare in court opera, as they could not afford the tickets, although there was the occasional free performance for 'all citizens' at such courts as Vienna or Brunswick. Servants could usually attend, free, in the gallery.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Burney, 51.

<sup>64</sup>Weichlein, 60.

<sup>65</sup>Roger Parker, "Opera," *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (accessed 10/11/04), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

According to Brunelli, the premier of Caldara's opera *La clemenza di Tito* (the first musical setting of the libretto) was performed at the king's court, in the presence of the sovereigns, on 4 November 1734 to celebrate the name day of Emperor Charles VI.<sup>66</sup> It is almost certain that the sovereigns, members of the Court, servants, and aristocrats were present for the premier of *La clemenza di Tito*; it is also possible that it was "free for all citizens" and had an audience of diverse social backgrounds. This opera contains some very loosely veiled references to contemporary key political figures and issues. Some of the people referenced were likely present in the audience. In order to understand the parallels between the issues facing Tito and Charles VI, one must understand the events that took place before and shortly after 1734.

Soon after Charles succeeded his elder brother Joseph I as emperor in 1711, he sought to change the law of succession so that, in the event that he sired no male heir, the Hapsburg lands would be inherited through his daughters rather than through Joseph's daughters, which was the traditional line of succession. The law became known as the Pragmatic Sanction. As the years passed it became apparent that there would be no male heir, so the law took on great importance. The law stated that succession to all Hapsburg dominions was reserved for Charles's daughter Maria Theresa. The purpose of the law was to guarantee the continued integrity of the Hapsburg territories and to prevent a struggle for the throne. Charles labored throughout his reign to obtain guarantees from European sovereigns that the Pragmatic Sanction would be honored. He became involved in the war of Polish succession (1733-1735) for this cause.<sup>67</sup>

During this time *La clemenza di Tito* was written and performed. King Augustus II (The Strong) of Poland, Duke Elector of Saxony, died in 1733. Stanislas Leszczynsky was elected king, but Augustus III (son of Augustus II) sought the throne. A Polish civil war broke out, in

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<sup>66</sup>Bruno Brunelli editor, *Tutte le opere di Pietro Metastasio*, vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1953), 694.

<sup>67</sup>Bradley, 181.

which foreign powers became involved; France supported Stanislas, while Russia and Austria supported Augustus III. This Polish civil war turned into a European conflict. France, Spain, and Sardinia fought for Polish king Stanislas Leszczynsky against Austrian, Russian, Prussian, and Saxon troops, who supported Augustus III. Because of Charles' military support, Augustus III was crowned the King of Poland in 1735. In return for Charles' support, the pre-arranged agreement was that Augustus III would recognize Charles' daughter Maria Theresa as the ruler of the Hapsburg Empire after Charles' death. In the aftermath of the war Duke Francis of Lorraine, soon-to-be husband of Austrian heiress Maria Theresa, ceded his duchy of Lorraine to ousted Polish king Stanislas Leszczynski. In return France recognized the Pragmatic Sanction as well, allowing Maria Theresa to succeed her father in her Hapsburg territories with international support. Thus, between 1733 and 1735 Charles waged war and arranged a politically motivated marriage in order to secure acceptance for Maria Theresa's succession. After Charles' death and Maria Theresa's succession in 1740, Elector Charles Albert of Bavaria, who was married to Maria Amelia (one of the daughters of Joseph I who had been displaced by the Pragmatic Sanction), laid claim to the throne and began the war of Austrian Succession. In spite of Charles VI's political maneuverings to secure a peaceful succession, a civil war ensued over Maria Theresa's right to the throne.

### **Analysis of the Drama as Propaganda**

The knowledge of these historical events illuminates one's understanding of the libretto and renders transparent the veiled meanings and suggestions of Metastasio's libretto. The plot for *La Clemenza di Tito* is built around a fictional event in the life of the Roman Emperor Titus Flavius Sabinus Vespasianus (Tito), who ruled from 79 to 81 A.D. Vitellia, daughter of the Emperor Aulus Vitellius (ruler of Rome in the year 69 A.D. and succeeded by Tito's father, the Emperor Vespasian), is obsessed with regaining the throne, either by marriage, or by assassination and revolution. She feels that the throne was usurped from her family.<sup>68</sup> As the action begins,

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<sup>68</sup>Weichlein, 40.

Tito is the current ruler of Rome and the target of her conspiratorial designs. In the libretto, Vitellia's circumstances are strikingly similar to those of the real-life Maria Amelia who, like Vitellia, was the daughter of a previous emperor, felt the throne had been usurped from her family (via the Pragmatic Sanction), and had designs to retake the empire. Metastasio surely intended that the circumstances of Vitellia and Maria Amelia be almost identical. Metastasio would have understood the importance Charles VI placed on the issue of his daughter's succession to the throne, and also would have known who the major players involved were. Admittedly their situations are not completely identical; Maria Amelia would not have sought to marry her uncle and probably did not seek his life. She had only to wait for him to die before laying claim to the empire. However, understanding that Charles VI anticipated that the succession of his daughter would meet with opposition from the displaced Maria Amelia, and realizing that Metastasio was indebted to Charles VI for his appointment in Naples and his generous patronage, it is difficult to imagine that these similarities were merely coincidental. The conspiracy to take the throne-an invention of the poet not based on the real history of Titus-is the central conflict of the drama and the central concern guiding Charles' politics.

Sesto, Vitellia's lover, is a friend to Tito and is portrayed as a weak and spineless man at the opening of the drama, completely subservient to the will of Vitellia. At the beginning of Act II, he has a highly dramatic scene in which he realizes that he is a traitor to his friend, the emperor. By Act III, Sesto speaks bitterly toward Vitellia, as he realizes how selfish and ambitious she is, that she has caused him to betray so great a ruler, and that he has come under condemnation of death for her actions. Nevertheless, he loves her and is willing to accept the punishment of death for treason and conspiracy in her stead. In a touching exchange with Tito in scene 6, he tearfully repents for his part in the conspiracy and grovels at Tito's feet. He actually wishes for the relief death will provide. If Vitellia represents Maria Amelia, then Sesto would be analogous to Elector Charles Albert of Bavaria. Like Sesto, Elector Charles Albert would have had at least a public relationship with the Emperor, as he was one of the electors who voted to give Charles VI the title of Holy Roman Emperor. Like Sesto, Charles Albert would be the principal player in the struggle for power, working as an agent on behalf of his love, Maria Amelia. Furthermore, like Sesto, Charles Albert would betray his emperor, or at least his

emperor's family, in this pursuit.

The other key figure in the opera is, of course, Tito. The premise that Tito represents Charles VI has already been partially argued. Charles VI, like Tito, was a Roman Emperor (at least by title, the Holy Roman Emperor). Tito is portrayed as an enlightened ruler; Charles VI was referred to in letters of the time as an “enlightened monarch” as well.<sup>69</sup> Brunelli sees Annio's speech in Act I, scene 5, as an attempt on the part of the Poet Laureate to render an allusion to Charles VI. Brunelli says the Emperor is “. . . *quasi impersonato nel nobile carattere di Tito*” (almost personified in the noble character of Tito).<sup>70</sup> In this speech Annio says:

Né padre sol, ma sei	You are not only your country's father,
Suo nume tutelar. Più che mortale	but her guardian God. Since you
Giacché altrui ti dimonstri, a' volti altrui	demonstrate yourself to be beyond
Comincia ad avvezzarti. Eccelso tempio	mortality, begin to accustom yourself to
Ti destina il Senato; e là si vuole	other's vows. The senate has decreed
Che fra divini onori	a stately temple, where your name
Anche il nume di Tito il Tebro adori.	shall stand enrolled among the honored
	divinities, even the Tiber worships Titus,
	the god.

Praise is lavished upon Tito throughout the opera. The chorus appears as the Roman populace who, in Act I, and in the two final scenes of the Act III, show their distinct approbation for the goodness of their Emperor. Tito is portrayed as magnanimous, clement, and patient throughout the drama. According to Suentonius, the real-life Titus once reflected over dinner that he had done nothing for anyone that day and said: “My friends, I have lost a day.”<sup>71</sup> Metastasio alludes to this famous quote in Act I, scene 1, line 62 when Sesto speaks about Tito saying: “Perduto il giorno ei dice, in cui fatto non ha qualcun felice.” (He says the day is lost in which he has not made someone happy.) While the conspirators are portrayed as base and fatally flawed, Tito appears like a god: just, virtuous, moral, and forgiving. Even Sesto, who is plotting against Tito, cannot

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<sup>69</sup>Burney, 44.

<sup>70</sup>Brunelli, vol. 1, 1500.

<sup>71</sup>Suentonius Tranquillus, *De vita Caesarum*, trans. By Alexander Thomson (London: George Bell, 1896), 471.

help but praise the great Caesar. As Tito debates whether or not to sign Sesto's death warrant in Act III, he says “. . . Il tôrre altrui la vita è facoltà comune al più vil della terra: il darla è solo de' numi e de' regnanti.” (To take another's life is a faculty common to the vilest of mankind: to give it is the privilege of Gods and kings alone.) In this way, the Poet Laureate pays homage to Charles VI and promotes a vision of the monarch that is divine and grand

Tito's first entrance is in Act I, scene 5. Unaware of Sesto's conspiratorial designs, Tito tells Sesto that he will give him a position of honor in the kingdom saying: “T'innalzerò, che resterà ben poco dello spazio infinito, che frapperò gli dèi fra Sesto e Tito.” (I will exalt you, that there will remain but little of the infinite space that the gods have place between Sesto and Tito.) Here, Tito mentions as a matter of fact that the gods have placed him in his position of authority. With this verse, Metastasio propagates the idea of the Divine Right of Kings. This situation may have been inspired by the fact that Charles VI had elevated Metastasio in status the previous year, making Metastasio the treasurer of Cosenza in Naples.

Sesto, feeling guilty for his imminent betrayal of the emperor, begs Tito to moderate his kindness. Tito responds with a short recitative and aria that ends the scene saying:

Ma che! se mi negate  
che benefico io sia, che mi  
lasciate?

But what! If you take away my  
ability to be beneficent, what do you  
leave me?

Del più sublime soglio  
L'unico frutto è questo:  
Tutto è tormento il resto,  
E tutto è servitù.

The only fruit of the most exalted  
office (Caesar) is this.  
Everything else is torment and  
servitude.

Che avrei, se ancor perdessi  
Le sole ore felici  
Che ho nel giovar gli oppressi,  
Nel sollevare gli amici,  
Nel dispensar tesori  
Al merto e alla virtù?

Would you have me lose the only  
happy moments I have: cheering up  
the oppressed, lifting up my friends,  
and dispensing riches to the worthy  
and virtuous?

The cliché that power corrupts is nowhere to be found in this libretto. Though, as a Caesar, Tito has great wealth and power and servants to meet his every need, he refers to his imperial office as service and torment. In this aria Metastasio propagates the notion of the enlightened despot, who

is charitable, delighted to help others, concerned with the needs of the poor and oppressed, and reverent toward and humbled by the exalted and divine office he holds.

It is revealed early in Act I that Tito has turned away from the woman he loves, the Judean Queen Bernice, because he believes the Romans would prefer a Roman empress to a foreign one. This act is a sign of his devotion to the people of Rome. He would rather please his subjects than himself. Tito chooses Servilia as his bride and proposes to her. In Act I, scene 9, Tito's marriage proposal is rejected. Servilia confesses that she is in love with Annio and says that she would marry Caesar out of obligation, but that she would always love Annio. One might expect an emperor to respond with anger and disbelief to such a rejection from one who is so much lower than himself in status. Instead, Tito praises her for her forthrightness, encourages her to marry Annio, and even offers to perform the marriage ceremony himself saying, "Io voglio stringer nodo sì degno." (I want to tie such a worthy knot myself.) Tito closes the scene with this aria:

Ah! se fosse in torno al trono  
Ogni cor così sincero,  
Non tormento un vasto impero,  
Ma saria felicità

Ah! If in the path of the throne  
Every heart were so sincere,  
A great empire would not be  
Torment, but would be a joy.

Non dovrebbero i regnanti  
Tollerar sì grave affanno,  
Per distinguer dall'inganno  
L'insidiata verità.

Kings would not have to  
Tolerate such grave worries,  
Discerning hidden truth  
From deceit.

Again, Tito describes being an emperor as torment. In Cartesian fashion, he suppresses any anger or hurt that he feels at being rejected and reasons that life would be much better if all people were so candid. He turns what would otherwise be a painful and awkward moment into a joyous celebration. Metastasio promotes the idea that Tito, and Charles VI by implication, is understanding, forgiving, and concerned primarily with the happiness of others.

Act III, scene 4, is a dramatic solo *scena* for Tito. Tito reflects on Sesto's betrayal and labors over the signing of his death warrant saying:

Che orror! Che tradimento!  
Che nera infedeltà! Fingersi amico,

What horror! What betrayal!  
What black infidelity! To pretend



Essermi sempre al fianco, ogni momento  
 Esiger dal mio core  
 Qualche prova d'amore; e starmi intanto  
 Preparando la morte! Ed io sospendo  
 Ancor la pena? e la sentenza ancora  
 Non segno? . . . Ah! sì, lo scellerato mora.  
 (prende la penna per sottoscrivere,  
 e poi s'arresta)  
 Mora! . . . Ma senza udirlo  
 Mando Sesto a morir? . . . Sì, già l'intese  
 Abbastanza il Senato. E s'egli avesse  
 Qualche arcano a svelarmi? Olà!  
 (depone la penna; intanto esce una guardia)  
 S'ascolti, e poi vada al supplizio.  
 A me si guidi Sesto. (parte la guardia)  
 È pur di chi regna  
 Infelice il destino! (s'alza) A noi si nega  
 Ciò che a' più bassi è dato. In mezzo al bosco  
 Quel villanel mendico, a cui circonda  
 Ruvida lana il rozzo fianco, a cui  
 È mal fido riparo  
 Dall'ingiurie del ciel tugurio informe,  
 Placido i sonni dorme,  
 Passa tranquillo i dì, molto non brama,  
 Sa chi l'odia e chi l'ama, unito o solo  
 Torna sicuro alla foresta, al monte,  
 E vede il core a ciascheduno in fronte.  
 Noi fra tante grandezze  
 Sempre incerti viviam; ché in faccia a noi  
 La speranza o il timore  
 Su la fronte d'ognun trasforma il core.  
 Chi dall'infido amico . . . Olà! . . . chi mai  
 Questo temer dovea?

to be my friend, always at my side,  
 every moment from my heart  
 to draw proofs of my affection; and  
 yet coming unto me to prepare my  
 death! And I still suspend his  
 punishment? . . . Ah! Yes, death to  
 the wicked. (he takes the pen in his  
 hand, then stops) Death! . . . But  
 without hearing him I sentence him  
 to die? . . . Yes, already the Senate  
 has understood his case. What if he  
 has some secret to reveal to me?  
 Who goes there? (lays down the pen,  
 a guard enters) Yes, first let me hear,  
 then send him off to torture. Bring  
 Sesto here. (guard leaves) The fate  
 of kings is too unhappy! (he gets up)  
 We are denied the benefits of life  
 that the lowest of men enjoy.  
 Amidst the woods see the poor  
 cottager, clothed in rough wool, his  
 ill-kept hovel scarcely shelters him  
 from the injuries of heaven, he sleeps  
 undisturbed dreaming, he passes the  
 days in tranquility, he does not want  
 much, he knows who hates him and  
 who loves him, alone or with others,  
 he travels safely through forests,  
 through mountains, and sees the  
 heart of each man he confronts.  
 But we, amidst all our grandeur,  
 always live in uncertainty; before us  
 hope and fear on the face of each  
 person transforms the heart.  
 Who ever had to fear the betrayal of  
 a faithless friend?

Here again, Metastasio depicts Tito as one burdened by the office of Caesar, torn between the demands of justice and mercy. Tito is heartbroken by his friend's betrayal. In this scene, Metastasio empathizes with Charles VI and his heartbreak over the brewing conspiracies against his family. Still, like Charles VI, Tito withholds judgment and punishment until it has been proven

to him beyond a shadow of a doubt that his friend has betrayed him. Tito goes on to insist that the poorest man is better off than a king, because the poor man does not have to fear deception and conspiracy. The wealth and privilege that kings enjoy beguile men and lead them to treachery and deceit. Thus, Metastasio propagates the idea that wealth, power, status, and privilege are not desirable, but cumbersome and miserable, bringing nothing but sorrow to those who possess them. It is far better to be a poor man living in a hovel than to be a king in a palace.

To the person who understands the parallels between the plot of the opera and the issues facing Charles VI, the opera takes on the character of political propaganda. Almost everyone in the audience would have recognized the similarities between the plot of the opera and contemporary politics. Charles VI, who through legislation, war, and marriage sought to change and secure the line of succession for the glory of his own family over that of his brother's, is himself portrayed in the personage of Tito as the victim of conspiracy. Maria Amelia, represented in the character of Vitellia, is presented as ruthless and fatally flawed, destined to fail in her designs because of both the loftiness of the Emperor and the unrighteousness of her cause. Elector Charles Albert in the guise of Sesto is represented as a cowardly, traitorous pawn, who is blinded by his love. Upon examination of this libretto in its historical context, it is abundantly clear that Metastasio learned from his adoptive father Gravina that plots should be “. . . similar to real outcomes and to the public affairs that occur throughout all the civilized world; otherwise the plot would not imitate [real life], nor would it teach any lessons: because it would not uncover the nature of real governments, and magistrates and princes, that should be presented under different names.”<sup>72</sup>

*La clemenza di Tito* is indeed an imitation of real life, and the author clearly sought to uncover the nature of real political events relevant to Charles VI and his family. As was stated earlier, propaganda is the transmission of ideas or values on behalf of a person, or group of people, with the specific intent of influencing the recipients' attitudes, so that the interests of its authors will be enhanced. Via his libretto, Metastasio propagated many ideas on behalf of Charles

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<sup>72</sup>Nicastro, 18, 19.

VI and his family to an opera-going audience that consisted of the aristocrats and nobles who would be necessary in sustaining his daughter as the rightful ruler after Charles VI's death. The intended message for this group of people is that Charles VI is virtuous, divinely commissioned, enlightened, and far beyond the petty contentions of those base and ambitious people who covet his family's status and power. The drama also serves to harm Maria Amelia and Charles Albert politically with these people, portraying them as unfit to rule. The message for Maria Amelia and Charles Albert, who were likely present in the audience as well, is that Charles VI is aware of their plans to take the throne, and they should abandon any conspiratorial designs they are entertaining, as any such designs are destined to fail and would bring shame upon their names. Furthermore, the message to Maria Amelia and Charles Albert is that Charles VI is clement and will overlook their trespasses if they will abandon their conspiracies.

Metastasio's role in Viennese court life was to glorify his patron through the poetry he produced. It was probably not a requirement of his employment as Poet Laureate for his dramas to reflect well on his patron's political endeavors, or to influence audiences to take a position that would be favorable for the monarch on key social issues affecting him, as is the case in *La clemenza di Tito*. More likely, Metastasio went beyond the call of duty in this opera, so as to gain favor and status within the royal court, and to show Charles VI his gratitude for giving him a position of power and wealth in the kingdom of Naples. Thus we see that *La clemenza di Tito* was not written as mere entertainment. For personal gain, and perhaps out of sincere patriotic love for Charles VI, Metastasio intentionally mirrored contemporary issues to make a political statement that would benefit his patron.

The preponderance of Metastasio's *libretti* that were set to music in the eighteenth century and the popularity they enjoyed among patrons, composers, and audiences, are testimonies of not only how beautiful and skillful Metastasio's works were, but also how ideologically palatable they were to the aristocrats who primarily funded and commissioned musical dramas during that time. In a broad philosophical way, the ideas propagated in Metastasio's *libretti* (such as the Divine Right of Kings, the generosity of the king, the notion of kingship as burdensome servitude, and enlightened despotism) not only benefited Charles VI, but all the aristocracy.

**Table 1: HARMONY BETWEEN THE PLOT AND CHARACTERS IN *LA CLEMENZA DI TITO* AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL EVENTS AND PERSONAGES**

<b>DRAMATIC EVENTS AND CHARACTERS</b>	<b>CONTEMPORARY EVENTS AND POLITICAL FIGURES</b>
Tito is the Emperor of Rome.	Charles VI is the Holy Roman Emperor.
Vitellia is the daughter of a previous Caesar and feels the throne was usurped from her family by Tito.	Maria Amelia is the daughter of the previous emperor and knows that the line of succession has been changed by Charles VI's Pragmatic Sanction, robbing her of her birthright as heiress of the Hapsburg empire.
Vitellia is plotting to take the throne, either by revolution and assassination, or marriage.	Maria Amelia cannot marry Charles VI, as he is her uncle, but has plans to fight for the succession of the throne after Charles VI's death.
Sesto is Vitellia's lover.	Elector Charles Albert of Bavaria is Maria Amelia's husband.
Sesto is friends with Tito.	Elector Charles Albert of Bavaria has a political relationship with Charles VI, as he was one of the electors that gave Charles VI the title of Holy Roman Emperor.
Sesto betrays Tito and his country by conspiring against the current emperor to promote the interests of his love, Vitellia	Elector Charles Albert is conspiring against his emperor, or at least his emperor's family, to promote the interests of his love Maria Amelia. He led the War of Austrian Succession after Charles VI's death.
Tito directs funds to support the victims of an eruption of Vesuvius.	Charles VI possesses Naples, which is in close proximity to Vesuvius. Between Christmas of 1732 and January 10 of 1734, there is explosive summit activity with intermittent lava flows onto the flanks of the cone.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Metastasio's dramas represent the synthesis of many reformist and ideological currents of the eighteenth century. He took qualities he liked from all those he encountered and assimilated them in his own distinct style. From Gravina, he learned about ancient Greek tragedy, Aristotle, and Descartes, which were each influential on his work. From the Arcadians and from the Catholic Church, he learned to portray virtue as appealing and vice as horrible. From the French, he learned to abolish the Greek style static chorus. Building on Zeno's work, Metastasio formalized a standardized structure for his dramas consisting of three acts, each composed of a series of arias and recitatives. All of these influences led Metastasio to his mature style, as is exemplified in *La clemenza di Tito*. Metastasio's works are worthy of esteem, not because they were particularly innovative, but rather because they represent the culmination and distillation of artistic thought and criticism of the day.

Metastasio's role in Viennese court life was to glorify his patron through the poetry he produced. Metastasio's patron Charles VI was preoccupied with the issue of securing his daughter's succession. Metastasio was sensitive to this fact and it is reflected in the plot of *La clemenza di Tito*. When viewed from the prospective of contemporary political events, the opera takes on the character of veiled propaganda. Via his libretto, Metastasio propagated many ideas on behalf of Charles VI and his family to an opera-going audience that consisted of the aristocrats and nobles who would be necessary in sustaining his daughter as the rightful ruler after Charles VI's death. The intended message for this group of people is that Charles VI is virtuous, divinely commissioned, enlightened, and far beyond the petty contentions of those base and ambitious people who covet his family's status and power. The libretto serves to harm Charles VI's rivals politically and sends them a clear message that Charles VI is aware of their conspiracies.

The preponderance of Metastasio's *libretti* that were set to music in the eighteenth century and the popularity they enjoyed among patrons, composers, and audiences, are testimonies of not only how beautiful and skillful Metastasio's works were, but also how

ideologically palatable they were to the aristocrats who primarily funded and commissioned musical dramas during that time. In a broad philosophical way, the ideas propagated in Metastasio's *libretti* (such as the Divine Right of Kings, the generosity of the king, the notion of kingship as burdensome servitude, and enlightened despotism) not only benefited Charles VI, but all the aristocracy.

From Metastasio's humble beginnings as the son of a Roman soldier, he rose to the forefront of the elite, aristocratic social culture to become Poet Laureate of the Hapsburg Empire. Metastasio's works were known throughout Europe and even Thomas Jefferson was said to have some of his *libretti* in his own personal library in America.<sup>73</sup> Metastasio could scarcely have realized the impact his work would have on the composition of opera for most of the eighteenth century. However, Metastasio's works, in spite of their merit and beauty, were destined to remain in the closed literary sphere of the aristocracy because of the political ideals they promoted. The rise of democracy and the consequent weakening of the aristocracy's grip on power at the end of the eighteenth century led to the virtual demise of Metastasian opera.

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<sup>73</sup>Neville, "Metastasio," 510.

## APPENDIX

The number of various settings of *La clemenza di Tito* are substantial, but not impressive when compared to the number of composers who set *Alessandro nell'Indie* (ca. 90) and *Artaserse* (ca. 77).<sup>74</sup> Though not his most popular libretto, Metastasio's *La clemenza di Tito* was set by many composers:

- |  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Caldara, 1734                         | 22. V. Ciampi, 1757               |
| 2. Chiocchetti, 1735                     | 23. C. Cristiani, 1757            |
| 3. Hasse, 1735                           | 24. Holzbauer, 1757               |
| 4. Leo, 1735                             | 25. G. Scarlatti, 1757            |
| 5. Peli, 1736                            | 26. Cocchi, 1760                  |
| 6. Marchi, 1737                          | 27. Galuppi, 1760                 |
| 7. Veracini, 1737                        | 28. Franchi, 1766                 |
| 8. Arena, 1738                           | 29. Plantania, 1766               |
| 9. Wagenseil, 1746                       | 30. Bernasconi, 1768              |
| 10. Camerloher, 1747                     | 31. Anfossi, 1769                 |
| 11. Corradini, Courcelle, and Mele, 1747 | 32. Naumann, 1769                 |
| 12. C. Pietragrua, 1748                  | 33. Sarti, 1771                   |
| 13. Pampani, 1748                        | 34. Mysliveček, 1773              |
| 14. Perez, 1749                          | 35. Bachschmidt, 1776             |
| 15. Caputi, ca. 1750                     | 36. Beltrami, 1779                |
| 16. A. Correia, ca. 1750                 | 37. Santos, ca. 1780              |
| 17. Gluck, 1752                          | 38. Apell, 1787                   |
| 18. Adolfati, 1753                       | 39. Mozart, 1791                  |
| 19. Jommelli, 1753                       | 40. Nicolini, 1797                |
| 20. Valentini, 1753                      | 41. Ottani, 1798                  |
| 21. Mazzoni, 1755                        | 42. Del Fante, 1803 <sup>75</sup> |

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<sup>74</sup>Malcolm Boyd, "Metastasio," *Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Stanley Sadie editor, (London: Macmillan Press, 1992), 352.

<sup>75</sup>Neville, "Metastasio," 516.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

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