

INTRODUCTION

Palladio was the architect of the Graces, Correggio the painter of the Graces, Metastasio the poet of the Graces, and Bartolozzi was their etcher.¹

Melchior Missirini, Bartolozzi's biographer, may well have been over-rhetorical in his presentation of his biographical subject, but the fact that his grouping could be plausibly suggested sums up Metastasio's position in the pantheon of eighteenth-century artists. In England, nothing reflected Metastasio's position in the London opera goer's imagination more clearly than the allegorical painting on the drop curtain at the Pantheon Theatre:

'Tis the pride of Englishmen to unite the most zealous Patriotism with that impartial Philosophy which teaches to generalize the Sentiments. With us, Stranger and Barbarian are not synonymous. The distinction of Foreigner is lost in the blaze of extraordinary abilities; warmed by this pervading principle, we consecrate our Labour to the *Manes* of a Roman Bard, and name the Curtain THE APOTHEOSIS OF METASTASIO. His portrait is in the centre of the Picture, looking up, and listening with admiration to the MUSIC of the SPHERES: he bears with him that LYRE to which he so pathetically has sung, and whose power he so justly describes.²

Charles Burney observed in the Preface to his edition of selected letters of Metastasio that:

... the lovers of Italian Poetry, as well as vocal music... regard Metastasio as the panting source of their most exquisite delight in the union of those arts. But this poet has still higher claims on our resource and affection, from his innoxious life and moral character, which gives a kind of dignity to innocent pleasures, and to humanity.³

The 'higher claims' on the public's attention were those of virtue in all its forms, as Burney went on to relate:

as a Poet of refined taste and sentiment, and a MAN possessed of every moral and social virtue that embellishes society, and exults human nature, his conduct and opinions deserve display as much as his literary abilities admiration.⁴

Not only that, but he saw the poet as the man responsible for opera in its most highly developed form:

The Opera [in the early eighteenth century] was now in its nonage; the poetry often absurd for Apostolo Zeno and the admirable Metastasio had not then purified and sublimed it; and a rage for the marvellous in machinery and decorations were carried to a puerile success.⁵

Indeed, by the time Burney was writing, Metastasio's virtue and opinions were being widely displayed; Burney was in a position to cite no fewer than nine biographies, and a large part of his dramatic output had been translated into English by John Hoole.⁶ Indeed, by 1840 British

¹ Melchior Missirini, *Bartolozzi* (London, 1840), 42.

² [Anon.], *Description of the Allegory Painted for the Curtain of the King's Theatre, Pantheon* (London, 1791), 8.

³ Charles Burney, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Abate Metastasio in which are Incorporated Translations of his Principal Letters* (London, 1796), Preface, iii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, iv.

⁵ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* (London, 1776–89), ii, 675.

⁶ Rezer (1782), Rubbi (1782), Taruffi (1782), Aluigi (1783), Fabbroni (1784), Zatta (1784), Mattei (1785), Moreschi (1786), and Cristini (by 1786).

publishers had produced no less than ten editions of Metastasio’s collected works as well as many smaller selections.

Throughout the century, Metastasio texts were almost ever-present in the London theatrical seasons and by the end of the century, only five of his texts—*Achille in Sciro*, *Romolo ed Ersilia*, *Ruggerio, Siface re de Numidia*, and *Il trionfo di Clelia*—had not been performed in Britain. Yet things began inauspiciously: after the first Metastasio text—the opera *Siroe*—was performed in 1728, the figures show nothing startling; nine of the seasons between 1728–9 and 1752–3 have no Metastasian work included. But between the 1753–4 and 1799–1800 seasons, only three had no Metastasian work performed; and from the 1800–1 season to the 1840–1 season, there are still only eleven seasons from which a work of his was absent.

These raw figures do not, of course, tell the whole story. As Table 1 shows, in the first years it was Handel who introduced Metastasio to London audiences with *Siroe re di Persia* in the 1727–8 season; he followed this with *Poro* (a version of *Alessandro nell’Indie*) in 1730–1, and then *Ezjo* in 1731–2. *Siroe* was one of Handel’s last operas for the Royal Academy of Music before it was wound up in early 1729, but the almost instant founding of the Second Academy then saw the composition of *Poro* and *Ezjo*. But *Ezjo* was not a success—‘a New Opera, Clothes & all ye Scenes New – but did not draw much Company’ was Colman’s comment⁷—and Handel was in need of successes to keep the enterprise afloat. Indeed, his early offerings—*Lotario* and *Partenope*—were not much liked, and in an effort to produce the required number of operas for the seasons and to give the public music they liked, he arranged a number of operas by other composers. Four had texts by Metastasio: one, *Catone*, had music by Leo, and three, *Semiramide riconosciuta*, *Didone abbandonata*, and *Arbace* (a version of *Artaserse*) were set by Vinci.

TABLE 1: Chronology of first performances

The shaded lines indicate works written in that year, but not performed. Those that cannot be dated accurately are placed at the end of each month, or year.

| Date | Venue | Work | Composer Responsibility |
|------------------|-------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1728 February 17 | KT | <i>Siroe, re di Persia</i> | Handel |
| 1731 February 2 | KT | <i>Poro re dell’Indie</i> | Handel |
| 1732 January 16 | KT | <i>Ezjo</i> | Handel |
| November 4 | KT | <i>Catone</i> | Leo (arr. Handel) |
| 1733 October 30 | KT | <i>Semiramide riconosciuta</i> | Vinci (arr. Handel) |
| 1734 January 5 | KT | <i>Arbace</i> | Vinci (arr. Handel) |
| October 29 | KT | <i>Artaxerxes</i> | Hasse |
| 1735 April 8 | KT | <i>Issipile</i> | Sandoni |
| November 25 | KT | <i>Adriano</i> | Veracini |
| 1736 November 23 | KT | <i>Siroe, re di Persia</i> | Hasse |
| 1737 February 12 | KT | <i>Demetrius</i> | Pescetti |
| March 26 | KT | <i>L’impresario...</i> | Sarro |
| April 12 | KT | <i>La clemenza di Tito</i> | Veracini |
| 13 | CG | <i>Didone abbandonata</i> | Vinci (arr. Handel) |
| 1739 March 10 | CG | <i>Angelica e Medoro</i> | Pescetti |
| April 11 | KT | <i>L’asilio d’amore</i> | Pescetti |
| December 1 | HAY | <i>Diana and Endymion</i> | Pescetti |
| 1740s? | | <i>Artaserse</i> | J. C. Smith |

⁷ Francis Colman, ‘Register of Operas’, *GB-Lbl Add. 11,258*, f. 30^v.

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|------|----------|----|-----|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1741 | April | 16 | HAY | <i>Interlude...</i> | Galliard |
| 1742 | February | 18 | SA | <i>The Death of Abel</i> | Arne |
| | April | 20 | KT | <i>Meraspe Ovvero L'Olimpiade</i> | Pasticcio |
| 1743 | February | 22 | KT | <i>Temistocle</i> | Porpora |
| | | | | <i>Issipile</i> | J. C. Smith |
| 1744 | April | 24 | KT | <i>Alceste</i> | Lampugnani |
| 1745 | January | 17 | DL | <i>The Humours...</i> | Arne |
| | | | | <i>Ciro riconosciuto</i> | J. C. Smith |
| 1746 | April | 15 | KT | <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Lampugnani |
| | May | 13 | KT | <i>Antigono</i> | Galuppi |
| 1748 | March | 26 | KT | <i>Didone</i> | Hasse |
| | May | 7 | KT | <i>La Semiramide riconosciuta</i> | Hasse |
| 1750 | February | 20 | KT | <i>Adriano</i> | Ciampi |
| 1751 | January | 19 | HAY | <i>La forza d'amore</i> | Paradies |
| 1754 | January | 1 | KT | <i>Didone</i> | Ciampi |
| | | 29 | KT | <i>Artaserse</i> | Hasse |
| | April | 23 | KT | <i>Attilio Regolo</i> | Jommelli |
| | November | 9 | KT | <i>Ipermestra</i> | Hasse |
| 1755 | January | 14 | KT | <i>Siroe, re di Persia</i> | Lampugnani |
| | April | 12 | KT | <i>Ezio</i> | Hasse/Perez |
| | June | 5 | KT? | <i>L'isola disabitata</i> | Giardini |
| | December | 9 | KT | <i>Il Demofonte</i> | Jommelli |
| | | | DL | <i>The Death of Abel</i> | Arne |
| | | | | <i>Titus Vespasian</i> | Cleland |
| 1756 | February | 17 | KT | <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | Galuppi |
| | December | 11 | KT | <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Corri |
| 1757 | January | 18 | KT | <i>Il re pastore</i> | Hasse/Mingotti |
| | March | 8 | KT | <i>Antigono</i> | Conforti |
| | November | 8 | KT | <i>Demetrio, re di Siria</i> | Cocchi (arr.) |
| 1758 | January | 10 | KT | <i>Zenobia</i> | Cocchi |
| | March | 6 | SA | <i>Endimione</i> | Sabatino |
| | | 14 | KT | <i>Issipile</i> | Cocchi |
| | | ? | ? | <i>The Triumph of Cupid</i> | Giordani |
| 1759 | January | 16 | KT | <i>Ciro riconosciuto</i> | Cocchi |
| | | 31 | KT | <i>Il trionfo della gloria</i> | Anon. |
| 1760 | January | 15 | KT | <i>La clemenza di Tito</i> | Cocchi |
| | | 24 | DL | <i>The Desert Island</i> | Murphy/Arne |
| | March | 13 | GR | <i>L'isola disabitata</i> | Jommjelli |
| | | | | <i>Antigona</i> | Giardini |
| 1761 | October | 13 | KT | <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Cocchi (pasticcio) |
| | January | 21 | | <i>Isacco</i> | Jommelli |
| | March | 14 | KT | <i>La Didone abbandonata</i> | Perez |
| 1762 | February | 2 | KT | <i>Artaxerxes</i> | Arne |
| | | 26 | DL | <i>Beauty and Virtue Reconciled</i> | Arne |
| | May | 15 | KT | <i>Attilio Regolo</i> | Jommelli |
| 1763 | November | 26 | KT | <i>Cleonice regina di Siria</i> | Giardini |
| | December | 13 | KT | <i>Siroe, re di Persia</i> | Pasticcio |
| 1764 | February | 24 | DL | <i>The Royal Shepherd</i> | Rush |
| | | 29 | GR | <i>La Galatea</i> | J. C. Bach |
| | March | 13 | KT | <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Pasticcio |
| | May | 9 | KT | <i>La passione...</i> | Jommelli |
| | November | 24 | KT | <i>Ezio</i> | Pasticcio |
| 1765 | January | 1 | KT | <i>Berenice</i> | Giardini |
| | | 26 | KT | <i>Adriano</i> | Gluck |
| | March | 2 | KT | <i>Demofonte</i> | Vento |
| | | 7 | KT | <i>Il re pastore</i> | Giardini |
| | April | 27 | KT | <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | Arne |
| | December | 3 | KT | <i>La clemenza di Tito</i> | Cocchi (arr.) |
| 1766 | February | 22 | KT | <i>Artaserse</i> | Hasse |
| | April | 12 | KT | <i>L'eroe Cinese</i> | Galuppi |

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|------|----------|----|-----|-------------------------------------|------------|
| | May | 7 | SA | <i>L'eroe Cinese</i> | Giordani |
| | | | | <i>The Uninhabited Island</i> | Williams |
| 1767 | | | | <i>Isaac, a type of the Messiah</i> | Giordani |
| 1768 | February | 24 | HAY | <i>The Death of Abel</i> | Piccini |
| | | 25 | KT | <i>The Deliverance of Bethulia</i> | Jommelli |
| | July | 28 | MAR | <i>Capoebio and Dorinda</i> | Arne |
| | December | 3 | KT | <i>Cyrus</i> | Hoole |
| 1769 | November | 11 | KT | <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | Guglielmi |
| | December | 15 | CG | <i>Amintas</i> | Rush |
| 1770 | January | 1 | KT | <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | Pasticcio |
| | | 13 | KT | <i>Ezio</i> | Guglielmi |
| | February | 24 | KT | <i>Timanthes</i> | Hoole |
| | March | 22 | KT | <i>Gioas, re di Giuda</i> | Bach |
| | April | 4 | CG | <i>The Death of Abel</i> | Piccini |
| | | 10 | TRE | <i>Capoebio and Dorinda</i> | Taylor |
| 1771 | February | 9 | KT | <i>Semiramide</i> | Cocchi |
| | January | 24 | HAS | <i>Artaserse</i> | Vento |
| 1772 | April | 6 | KT | <i>Endimione</i> | Bach |
| | | 25 | KT | <i>Artaserse</i> | Pasticcio |
| | June | 3 | KT | <i>Demetrio</i> | Guglielmi |
| | | | | <i>La Passione</i> | Anon. |
| 1773 | March | 19 | CG | <i>The Contest of Beauty...</i> | Arne |
| 1774 | February | 18 | SCH | <i>Bethulia Delivered</i> | Corri |
| | March | 8 | KT | <i>Antigono</i> | Giordani |
| | April | 19 | KT | <i>Nitteti</i> | Sacchini |
| | June | 3 | KT | <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | Pasticcio |
| | December | 3 | KT | <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Corri |
| | | | | <i>The Inflexible Captive</i> | More |
| 1775 | May | 6 | KT | <i>La difesa d'amore</i> | Pasticcio |
| | November | 11 | KT | <i>Didone abbandonata</i> | Pasticcio |
| | | | | <i>Arsaces</i> | Hodson |
| 1776 | May | 18 | KT | <i>Antigono</i> | Pasticcio |
| 1778 | June | 30 | KT | <i>Il re pastore</i> | Giordani |
| | November | 28 | KT | <i>Demofonte</i> | Pasticcio |
| 1779 | January | 23 | KT | <i>Artaserse</i> | Bertoni |
| | May | 29 | KT | <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | Gluck |
| | November | 27 | KT | <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Pasticcio |
| | | | | <i>The Death of Abel</i> | Wesley |
| 1781 | November | 17 | KT | <i>Ezio</i> | Pasticcio |
| 1782 | March | 16 | KT | <i>L'eroe Cinese</i> | Rauzzini |
| 1783 | March | 6 | KT | <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | Cimarosa |
| 1784 | February | 23 | HAY | <i>The Patriot</i> | Hamilton |
| | March | 4 | KT | <i>Demofonte</i> | Pasticcio |
| | May | 8 | KT | <i>Issipile</i> | Anfossi |
| 1785 | January | 8 | KT | <i>Il Demetrio</i> | Cherubini |
| | February | 26 | KT | <i>Nitteti</i> | Anfossi |
| | April | 16 | KT | <i>Artaserse</i> | Pasticcio |
| 1786 | February | 14 | KT | <i>Didone abbandonata</i> | Anfossi |
| | December | 23 | KT | <i>Alceste</i> | Gluck |
| 1788 | May | 8 | KT | <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | Cimarosa |
| 1789 | June | 2 | KT | <i>La generosità d'Alessandro</i> | Tarchi |
| 1790 | April | 6 | HAY | <i>L'usurpator innocente</i> | Federici |
| | | | | <i>Joseph and his Brethren</i> | Devonshire |
| | | | | <i>The Death of Abel</i> | Devonshire |
| 1792 | May | 23 | DL | <i>Dido, Queen of Carthage</i> | Storace |
| | November | 15 | DL | <i>The Conspiracy</i> | Jephson |
| 1794 | | | PP | <i>La Passione</i> | Mortellari |
| 1797 | November | 28 | KT | <i>Ipermestra</i> | Sarti |
| 1799 | May | 30 | DL | <i>La Didone</i> | Paisiello |

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|------|-------|----|----|--------------------------------|------------|
| 1800 | May | 22 | KT | <i>Zenobia</i> | Edgcumbe |
| 1806 | March | 27 | KT | <i>La clemenza di Tito</i> | Mozart |
| 1808 | July | 25 | KT | <i>La Didone</i> | Paisiello |
| 1810 | | | | <i>Didon abandonnée</i> | Grignon |
| 1814 | July | 7 | KT | <i>La Didone abbandonata</i> | Paer |
| 1821 | June | 2 | DL | <i>Dirce, or the Fatal Urn</i> | Horn |
| | | | | <i>The Innocent Usurper</i> | J.W.S. |
| 1823 | | | | <i>Amor patrea</i> | Lunn |
| 1827 | July | 5 | KT | <i>Dido, a Serious Opera</i> | Mercadante |
| 1828 | | | | <i>The Clemency of Titus</i> | A lady |
| 1833 | | | | <i>L'isola disabitata</i> | Ouseley |
| 1835 | | | | <i>L'isola disabitata</i> | Windsor |
| 1836 | | | | <i>Titus Vespasian</i> | Ford |
| 1839 | | | | <i>La clemenza di Tito</i> | Anon. |
| 1840 | | | | <i>The Regicide</i> | Lucus |

By the end of the decade, the opera administrations were again in difficulties; the Opera of the Nobility closed in 1737, and Italian opera as a whole seemed to become unpopular with the public. Handel's final works had only a few performances each, and their comparative failure completed the composer's final shift to writing oratorios. Curiously, however, in the 1738–9 and 1739–40 seasons, Pescetti, who had worked at the King's Theatre with Handel, set three of the small *fiesta* as non-staged works:⁸ *Angelica e Medoro*, *L'Asilio d'Amore*, and *Diana and Endymion*. It was said that the first of these (and, presumably, the second and third as well) was staged by Lord Middlesex (Charles Sackville, and after 1765, Second Duke of Dorset) to display the not particularly strong talents of Lucia Panichi called 'The Muscovita'.⁹ Panichi was at this stage Middlesex's mistress, and would remain so until about 1742. She certainly sang in *Angelica* where she took the title role, and in *Diana and Endymion*, where she presumably took the role of Diana; there are no details recorded of the single performance of *L'asilio d'amore*. These works did not—and were never likely to—re-establish a strong Italian opera company.

Even the excellence of Handel's music cannot obscure the fact that for Metastasian drama at least, these years were less significant than those that followed. The total number of performances from the 1727–28 season to the 1752–3 season totals only 254, with a particularly desultory performance record in the 1740s; in contrast, the next two ten-year periods saw 321 and 300 performances respectively. These included the two seasons of 1756–57 and 1764–65, when Metastasio was about all that was on offer. The first of these, under the impresario Regina Mingotti (a self-confessed Metastasio fan),¹⁰ consisted of five operas—*Alessandro nell'Indie*, *Antigono*, *Il re pastore*, *Rosmira* and *Eumenio*—of which the first three were Metastasio's, while the one surviving act of *Rosmira* contains three Metastasio arias texts out of five employed.¹¹ The second season, that of 1764–5, consisted of eight operas, six of which were Metastasio texts: *Ezio*, *Adriano*, *Demofonte*, *Il re pastore*, *Antigono*, *L'Olimpiade*. Of the two remaining operas, *Il Solimano* contained at least two texts from other Metastasio operas. While after the 1772–3 season the performance figures for

⁸ *Angelica and Medoro* was advertised as a 'serenata'. It was of this season that Mrs Pendarves wrote to Lady Throckmorton on 28 November: 'The concerts begin next Saturday at the Haymarket. Caristini sings, Peschetti composes; the house is made up into little boxes, like the playhouses abroad; Lord Middlesex is the chief undertaker, and I believe it will prove to his cost, for concerts will not do'; [Mary Delany], *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, ed. Lady Llanover (London, 1861), ii, 66.

⁹ BDL, xi, 192.

¹⁰ '[Vanneschi] added, that he had another Composition in his Hands, called *Demofonte*, written by my Favourite *Metastasio*, and set to Musick by Jommelli'; Regina Mingotti, *An Appeal to the Public* (London, [1755]).

¹¹ See US-SM La 76.

Metastasian works are generally high, the number of such works included in any one season falls, to reach the nadir of the 1790–91 season which saw the first Metastasio drought since 1766–7. Metastasio’s works had now clearly lost their theatrical public, for the figures for both numbers of Metastasian works performed, and number of performances given, gradually get smaller thereafter.

This period was also characterized by a new, serious competition between *opera seria* and *opera buffa*. An attempt to introduce Italian comic opera to London by a visiting opera troupe in 1748 came to a confused and dramatic climax with the jailing for debt of Francesco Crosa, its director. Comic opera disappeared from the scene, but after the doldrums of the Opera in the 1750s, the new manager of the King’s Theatre, Colomba Mattei, made it part of the repertory, and the two types of opera were thereafter always included in the season.¹² It did not, however, quite overtake it; critics and audience members alike still saw *opera seria* as the more important genre, and a season such as that of 1792, which had only *opera buffa* on the bills, attracted criticism.¹³

In the final stretch of the years covered by this catalogue, 1800–1 to 1840–1, the Metastasian flag was largely kept flying by performances of two unconnected works. The first of these, Mozart’s *La clemenza di Tito*, was introduced by the great Elizabeth Billington, who informed

... the Nobility, Gentry, and the Public that her BENEFIT NIGHT is fixed for Thursday, March 27, when will be performed, a Grand Serious Opera, with Choruses, intitled, LA CLEMENZA DI TITTO, entirely composed by MOZART: the most celebrated Ouvrage of that great Composer, and the only one of his compositions ever produced in this country.¹⁴

The falling performance figures for Metastasio’s works in general suggest that had the *Tito* score not been by Mozart, it is inconceivable that the public would have gone to it; even Mozart and Mrs Billington between them could only achieve 52 performances all told.

The second work was Arne’s *Artaxerxes*, an opera so popular that, had a royalty system been in place, it would have made Arne into one of the richest musicians on the London scene. Exactly what inspired his interest in Metastasio in or about 1760 is unclear, although it does coincide with the arrival in London of G.G. Bottarelli, a house poet of the King’s Theatre, who was to prepare the adaptation of the text *L’Olimpiade* for Arne in 1765. Arne, who had hitherto shown no recorded interest in the poet, had what might be called a ‘Metastasian conversion’. First, he set a group of songs for *The Desert Island*, Arthur Murphy’s translation of *L’isola disabitata*, staged at Drury Lane in January 1760.¹⁵ Two years later, his version of *Artaxerxes* premiered at Covent Garden on 2 February 1762, with a star-studded cast which included Niccolò Peretti as Artaxerxes, John Beard as Artabanes, and Giusto Ferdinando Tenducci as Arbaces. It might well have been ready earlier: Mrs Vernon’s name appears in Miss Thomas’s role of Semira in a libretto published in 1761 that suggests a cast change may have been responsible for some delay.¹⁶ The work, popular for at least 60 years and achieving some 450 performances, was noted by many theatre goers: Jane Austen no less,

¹² For a discussion of the ingenious way Mattei achieved this (weekend *opera seria* and weekday burlettas), see Saskia Willaert, ‘Italian Comic Opera at the King’s Theatre in the 1760s: the Role of the *buffa*’, in David Wyn-Jones ed., *Music in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, 2000), 17–71, esp. 20.

¹³ Petty, 283.

¹⁴ *The Times*, 22 March 1806.

¹⁵ DL 24.i.1760.

¹⁶ Clifford Bartlett suggests that it was because Mrs Vernon withdrew from the stage around this time because of ‘marital irregularities’; Thomas Arne, *Artaxerxes*, ed. Clifford Bartlett (London, 1762; facsimile Cambridge, 1986), Introduction. Bartlett’s hypothesis is borne out by the *dramatis personae* in this copy of the libretto—US-NH Rare ML50.2 A78 A748—in which Mrs Vernon’s name is struck out, and that of Miss Thomas substituted.

thought that the ‘air of “Water parted”, in *Artaxerxes*, winds about the feelings with an earnest and graceful tenderness of regret, worthy in the highest degree of the affecting beauty of the sentiment.’¹⁷ Arne achieved a most remarkable feat: as Burney pointed out, recitative never established itself with the London opera going public, ‘if we except the *Artaxerxes* of the late Dr Arne; whose music, being of a superior kind to what our stage had been accustomed, and better sung, found an English audience that could tolerate even recitative’.¹⁸

Perhaps because of the success of *Artaxerxes*, Arne then returned to two other works, where his choice of Metastasio as a librettist seems to have had more to do with the type of text. The first was a masque called *Beauty and Virtue reconciled*, which was Arne’s offering in February 1762.¹⁹ Then in March,²⁰ Arne revived his oratorio, *The Sacrifice or the Death of Abel*, which he had originally composed for Dublin in 1742²¹ and which had been first performed in London in 1755. His was the first setting of this text in English; there would subsequently be two versions by Piccini, one in 1768 and the other in 1770.²² This is not to suggest that Arne was only interested in Metastasio; he set many other things during this period, including works and adaptations by Murphy, Bickerstaffe, and Vanburgh, but it is notable that within a five year period, Arne returned to Metastasio as a source for at least four new works, one of which was to be his most important opera, and the most important English opera of the century.²³

Covent Garden did not attempt to repeat the success of that opera (they had one gentle success which continued, why risk staging another opera?) but David Garrick at the rival Drury Lane theatre attempted to cash in on Arne’s ideas, staging three operas based on Metastasio’s texts which appeared in the 1763–4 and 1764–5 seasons. The most interesting of the three was *The Royal Shepherd*, a reworking of Metastasio’s *Il re pastore* by Richard Rolt set by one George Rush.²⁴ Its reception on 24 February 1764 was moderately successful, it holding the stage for ten performances, and it was later reworked by Tenducci for the rival house, appearing under the title of *Amintas* on 15 December 1769. As with *Artaxerxes*, the London audience had been familiar with Metastasio’s plot for some time: Hasse’s *Il re pastore* of 1755 had reached the London stage as early as 1757. The remaining two works are not Metastasian texts although the plots are similar, and there is no doubt that the success of *Artaxerxes* inspired both. The first, *Almena*, presented at the King’s Theatre on 2 November 1764 also had a libretto by Rolt, the adapter of *Il re pastore*. Many similarities can be drawn between its plot and that of *Artaxerxes* and it comes as no surprise to find that one of the two composers credited with setting the work is Thomas Arne’s son, Michael. The second opera, *Pharnaces*, premiered on 15 February 1765, was based on Lucchini’s libretto *Farnace*; as with *Il re pastore*, the audience was familiar with the story, having had the opportunity to see Davide Perez’s setting at the King’s Theatre in 1757.²⁵ (See Figures 2 and 3.)

17 Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 5 March 1814; *The Letters of Jane Austen*, ed. Edward, Lord Brabourne (London, 1884), 229–30.

18 Burney, ii, 643.

19 DL 26.ii.1762.

20 DL 5.iii.1762.

21 Dublin, Smock Alley Theatre, 18.ii.1742.

22 HAY 24.ii.1768 and CG 1770 respectively

23 For the most recent discussion of Arne’s *Artaxerxes*, see Michael Burden, ‘Opera in the London Theatres 1730–1830’, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre*, ed. Jane Moody and Daniel O’Quinn (Cambridge, 2007), 207–17.

24 The identity of George Rush remains obscure.

25 The translator was Thomas Hull (1728–1808), singer, actor, manager, playwright and novelist; this appears to have been his only Metastasio translation.

Figures removed for copyright reasons

Fig. 2. A New Opera Call^d Il Re Pastore. A page from the licensing copy of the 1757 version of *Il re pastore*, showing the state of the text less than a week before the opening night; it was to be given on ‘Tuesday Next of 18th January’. That only two cast members are named is typical of the organisation of this disastrous season of 1756–7 managed by Regina Mingotti; she later commented in the press that ‘the Entertainments have been greatly inferior to my attention’. Pietro Metastasio, revised anon., *Il re pastore*, MS, 1756–7. [US-SM La 128, f. 9^v]

Fig. 3. *IL RE PASTORE* DRAMMA PER MUSICA. The same text in the printed version, tidied and re-ordered. Pietro Metastasio, revised anon., *Il re pastore* (London, 1757), p. 16. [GB-Lbl 163.g.60]

Covent Garden may not have tried to repeat the success of *Artaxerxes*, but Arne certainly did. Had he tried to simply to repeat it, all would have been well, but he persuaded the management of the King's Theatre to accept his setting in Italian of Metastasio's *L'Olimpiade*,²⁶ written for the male soprano, Manzuoli.²⁷ Burney, on hearing it, was of the impression that the composer had:

written for vulgar singers and hearers too long to be able to comport himself properly at the Opera-house, in the first circle of taste and fashion... The common play-house and ballad passages, which occurred in almost every air in his opera, made the audience wonder how they got there... a different language, different singers, and a different audience, and style of Music from his own, carried him out of his usual element, where he mangled the Italian poetry, energies, and accents, nearly as much as a native of Italy just arrived in London, would English, in a similar situation.²⁸

It seems probable that Arne felt that to set texts in Italian was one way to be accepted as a serious composer, but whether it was the closed shop among the Italian musicians which caused it to fail, or whether the opera was a considerable musical disaster remains unclear, and the loss of the score makes it impossible to offer any twenty-first-century opinion on the work.²⁹

Artaxerxes stands as Arne's last-ditch effort to establish a school of Italianate opera in English, an attempt which like his earlier efforts was bound to fail.³⁰ It would be wrong, however, to forget that his achievement in that opera was great, and was perceived as such by his contemporaries; it even became the cornerstone of Cradock's published epitaph:

When virtue claims the tributary tear,
Let no mock sorrow e'er profane the bier;
Here rests a pattern to her sex consign'd;
Tho' firm, yet humble; steady, yet resign'd.
In Handel's school her fame to ripeness grew,
A second Handel from that school she drew:
O'er her meek tomb, here mournful heave a sigh,
In Artaxerxes HE can never die.³¹

The extensive nineteenth-century after-life of *Artaxerxes* only serves to emphasise the curious fact that one of the most popular operas in England in the late eighteenth century was not an English opera, nor was it an Italian one, but an adaptation and a translation into English of one of Metastasio's libretti.³²

²⁶ Petty, 30 points out that Arne's setting, together with Metastasio's *Zenobia* by Richard Edgcumbe, were the only two works by Englishmen performed at the Italian Opera in the last 40 years of the century. This supports Roger Fiske's description of an Italian opera 'closed shop'; Fiske, 310–11.

²⁷ Giovanni Manzuoli (c.1720–82) was heard by Metastasio in Hasse's setting of *Alcide al bivio* in 1764. In London, he became acquainted with the Mozart family—either Leopold or Wolfgang wrote a set of ornaments for him for J.C. Bach's setting of Metastasio's *Adriano in Siria*—and he later starred in Hasse's *Ruggiero*, and Mozart's *Ascanio in Alba*. His performance in *L'Olimpiade* was reportedly lacklustre, 'the most charming airs in the opera [appearing] to be totally devoid of spirit'; *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 21 May 1765.

²⁸ Burney, iv, 486.

²⁹ John A. Parkinson, *An Index to the Vocal Works of Thomas Augustine Arne and Michael Arne*, Detroit Studies in Music Bibliography No. 21 (Detroit, 1972), 17.

³⁰ See Michael Burden, 'The English Theatre Masque 1690–1800' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1991), for a discussion of Arne's efforts in this direction.

³¹ Joseph Cradock, *Literary and Miscellaneous Memoirs* (London, 1828), iv, 130.

³² See Michael Burden, 'Metastasio on the London Stage: Adaptations and Permutations', *Studies in Music*, xvi (1997), 111–34, and *idem*, 'Opera on the London Bill', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Theatre*, ed. Jane Moody (Cambridge, 2006) for further discussion of *Artaxerxes* and genre.

One final group of texts should be mentioned, and these are those prepared by G.G. Bottarelli for the King's Theatre. Bottarelli appears to have arrived in London about 1762 with his family; his wife was a singer, and his son undertook translations for the theatre. His activities, concentrated in the 1760s and 1770s, produced some 25 opera texts,³³ among them the adaptations of twelve Metastasian texts: ten operas, a version of a *festa*, *Endimione*, and the text for J.C. Bach's setting of the oratorio *Gioas*. His methods were known for their sensitivity to the original and, of his Metastasian texts, five had translations by his son, which he presumably supervised closely. Bottarelli viewed himself, above all things, as a poet; in response to Casanova's statement, addressed to him in London in 1763, 'I hear you are a poet', he replied: 'Indeed I am, Sir, I have extended the *Didone* and abridged the *Demetrio*.'³⁴ The style of Bottarelli's reply suggests that he considered that successful work on texts by Metastasio made him a poet, a status that would not have been gained by working on texts by nonentities.

A London audience experienced the operas not only in Italian on stage, but in parallel Italian and English texts on paper (see Figure 4); the published word books were available from the booksellers before and after the performances and at the theatre during the run. Visual evidence for the use of libretti in London theatres is almost non-existent; almost the only illustration is that of the Duke of Bolton using a libretto while watching *The Beggar's Opera* in Hogarth's painting of the performance. Quite how much they were used is a matter for debate; the author of *The Prompter* took his book and 'little wax-candle', but the only use he 'made of either was to look when there was a prospect of a song and to wait with impatience till then'; he 'never once turned the leaves over to see the conduct of the piece'.³⁵ But Metastasio's works also began to be widely available in translations not intended for performance. John Hoole's first translation of Metastasio, a two-volume collection of opera texts, was published in 1767 and was a translation that impressed the poet himself, even if he felt that such a task was, in principle, a difficult one. (See Figures 5 and 6.) Hoole went on to enlarge the edition to three volumes in 1800. As well as publishing texts, he wrote two dramas based on Metastasio, *Cyrus* (1768) based on *Il Ciro riconosciuto* and *Timanthes* (1770) modelled on *Demofonte*, the former having a total of 41 performances, and the latter 15 performances, both over a number of seasons. It is hard to quantify precisely what effect Hoole's activities had: the publication of his translations certainly coincided with the period during which Metastasio's works had the greatest number of performances in the theatre. What is clear, though, is that they did allow for a much wider circulation of Metastasio's work in Great Britain, and more importantly, they were presented for the first time, albeit in English, in their original form.

³³ Curtis A. Price, 'Bottarelli', in *GDO*, i, 568.

³⁴ Giovanni Casanova, *History of My Life*, ed. William R. Trask (London, 1967–9), iv, 389.

³⁵ Aaron Hill and William Popple, *The Prompter*, No. 7; 4 December 1734.

Figure removed for copyright reasons

Fig. 4. ‘That one alone might at my choice be sav’d’. Pages from the 1800 London version of *Zenobia*, showing both the parallel Italian and English texts, and Metastasio’s original stage directions re-used.

Pietro Metastasio, revised probably Richard Edgcumbe, *Zenobia* (London, 1800), pp. 50–1. [US-SM La 751]

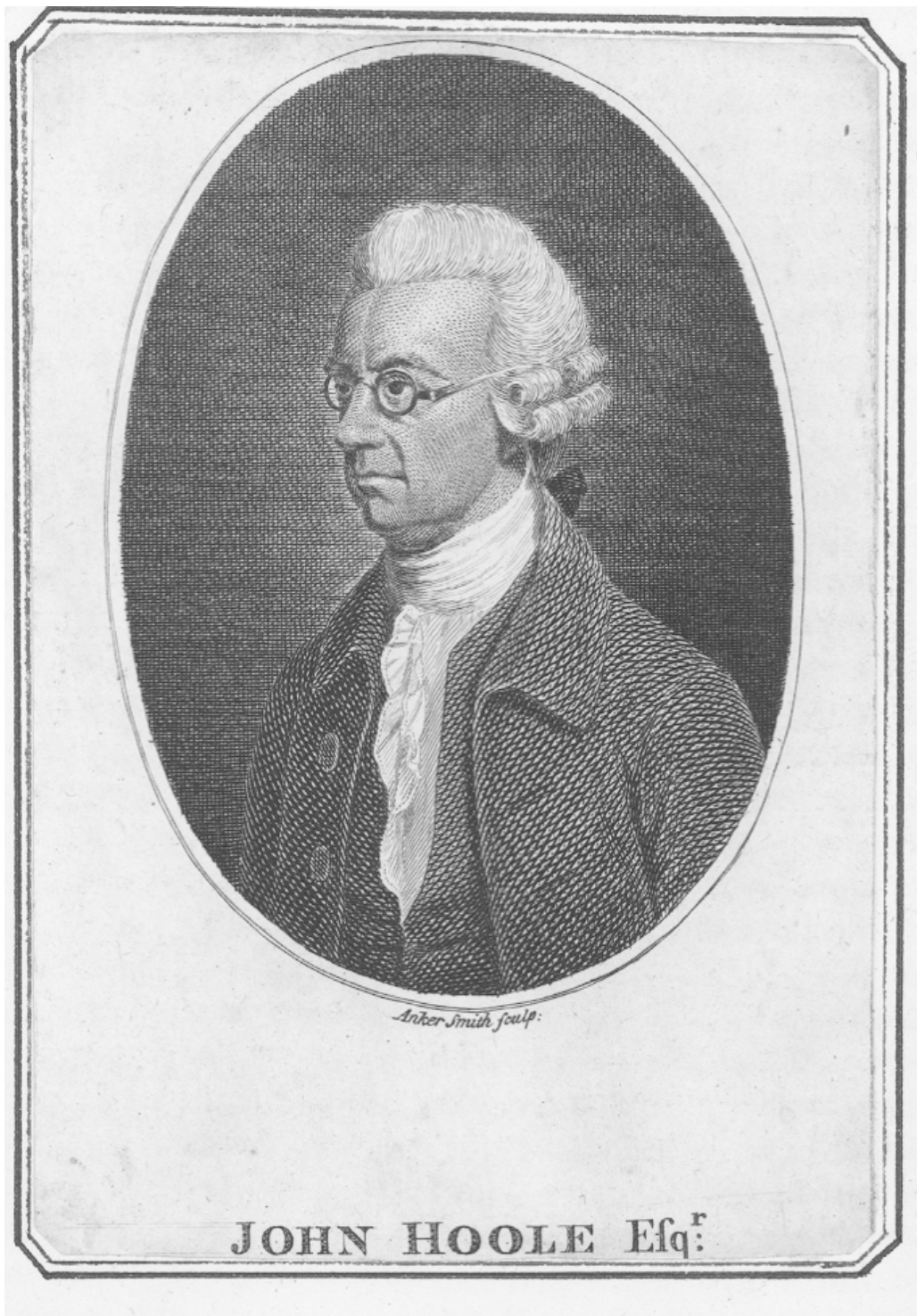


Fig. 5. John Hoole Esq. John Hoole (1727–1803) published his first translations of Metastasio—a two volume collection of opera texts—in 1767, an edition enlarged to three volumes in 1800. As well as publishing Metastasio’s texts, he wrote two Metastasian dramas, *Cyrus* (1768) based on *Il Ciro riconosciuto* and *Timanthes* (1770) modelled on *Demofonte*. Painted by Frances Reynolds (1729–1807), c.1783, engraved by Anker Smith (1759–1819), c.1792. *The European Magazine*, March 1792. [GB-Burden]

Figure removed for copyright reasons

Fig. 6. *The Works of Metastasio.* The title page of John Hoole's 1767 translation, engraved by Isaac Taylor (1730–1807). [GB-Ob 3862, f. 1]

For much of the eighteenth century, Metastasio's reputation in Great Britain rested not so much on his operas, but on what the public *thought* they were at a given moment. It is a somewhat surprising fact, given the veneration in which the master was held, that not one of his opera texts was performed in the British Isles in its original form. There is nothing unusual in this (it can be partly explained by singers introducing their own songs during the rehearsal process, an introduction which Milhous, Hume and Price refer to as 'the choice of book')³⁶ but then, most poets were not themselves used as a draw card to get the public in; 'Antigonus. By Metastasio. The Music by different Masters' was not atypical of the way his opera texts were advertised.³⁷ Discussions of substituted arias—also known as 'suitcase arias'—can be found elsewhere;³⁸ suffice it to say here that the practise was widespread in London, that it continued throughout the century and beyond, and that the audience and critics alike were aware of it.

But listings of the contents of the Metastasian London libretti do make it possible for us to look at some of these alterations a little more closely. In some cases, for example, it is clear that such alterations have been undertaken with great attention to detail. In the 1759 version of *Ciro riconosciuto*, for example, it cannot be a coincidence that the four replacement arias are each from another Metastasio work; there is one each from *La Galatea* and *Alessandro nell'Indie*, and two from *Siroe*. The pattern of replacement in the 1735 *Issipile*, too, suggests a measured approach to the task, for here, although none of the inserted texts are by Metastasio, they appear almost alternately with the originals. But in the case of Porpora's 1743 *Temistocle*, the additional two arias for the character Lisimachus have clearly been provided to make the role more weighty for Caterina Galli, and such care can be discerned in the adaptation of *L'Olimpiade* for Cherubini in 1788 which retains nine out of the 24 original texts, or in Cocchi's 1759 *Artaserse* which retains only one original text, 'Non ti son Padre', in the new libretto. Over the century, the pattern shown by the tables of opera arias is one of a greater propensity to replace more and more texts as time went on, and it becomes clear that the original arias have less and less currency, and, as Appendix IV shows, the number of Metastasio arias appearing in other works declined in parallel over the same period.

Arias were not the only thing to be reused: many of Metastasio's scene descriptions were adapted for new libretti. As such, they tend not to reflect the London staging, but the author's thoughts during composition. His stage directions—provided only at moments when the action is closely tied to the drama—were also carried from one production to the next (see Figure 7), their very precision and integration making them less vulnerable to drastic alteration. Throughout the adaptation process, the printer (for whom one can only have sympathy) tried to keep pace with the flow of alterations; as Figures 2 and 3 show, the state of the manuscript libretto of *Il re pastore* and the form in which it appeared eight days later, suggests that the theatres imposed a tight time frame. There was not always time: there are a number of libretti with pasteovers, pointing to both failure to meet deadlines and subsequent changes of mind by the theatre (see Figure 8).

³⁶ Curtis A. Price, Judith Milhous, and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London. Vol. 1. The King's Theatre, Haymarket 1778–1791* (Oxford, 1995), 27–31.

³⁷ *The Public Advertiser*, Thursday 28 March 1765.

³⁸ See in particular, Curtis Price, 'Pasticcio', in *GDO*, iii, 907–10; Price, Milhous and Hume, *Italian Opera. Vol. 1*; and Michael Burden, 'Metastasio's 'London Pasties': Curate's Egg or Pudding's Proof?' in Hg. von Elisabeth Th. Hilscher and Andrea Sommer-Mathis eds., *Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782), 'uomo universal'* (Vienna, 2000), 293–309.

Figures removed for copyright reasons

Fig. 7. Inserting stage directions. A page from the 1775 version of *Didone Abbandonata*, showing three stage directions added at the bottom of the page of the licensing copy for Act 1, scenes xiv and xv. These directions were not, of course, new, but are variants of Metastasio's original ones which were imported from edition to edition.

Pietro Metastasio, *Didone abbandonata*, revised anon., 1775. [US-SM La 389, f. 9^v]

Fig. 8. Inserting arias. A page from the 1761 *Didone Abbandonata* showing the Act 1 pasteover of 'Dopo un tuo sguardo, o cara' with 'Frena gli affetti, o cara'; a parallel English text is contained on a pasteover on the opposite page. As it happens, neither Italian text is by Metastasio. The copy contains another similar pasteover in Act III, and a substitute duet and its translation is printed at the end of the opera. At exactly what point in the preparation or performance of the opera the arias were substituted is unclear, but some copies of the libretto (such as that at GB-Lbl 117.aa.21.(3)) do not have the pasteovers, suggesting that it may have been during the run.

[GB-Ob Vet. A5 e.2256 (3), p. 21]

Throughout the period there are two aspects of the adaptation which all composers felt the need to address: the lack of choruses and ensembles, and the length of recitatives. As early as 1732, Humphreys, when adapting *Ezio* for Handel, added two numbers, the quartet ‘Stringo al fine il mio contento’, and the chorus ‘È più bella quella sede’; by 1806, when Mozart’s *La clemenza di Tito* appeared in London, Metastasio’s text had gained five duets, a trio, a quartet and chorus, and one further chorus.³⁹ A similar pattern can be detected in the group of *fiesta*, but not, however, in the oratorios, which were left largely unaltered; although J.C. Bach’s 1770 setting of *Gioas re di Giuda* has a total of 13 additions, and Jommelli’s and Corri’s settings of *Betulia liberata*, a total of 12 additions between them, the original form of the libretto is left mostly intact. In each of the three cases, six of those additions are choruses, indicating an attempt to modify the texts to English tastes.

The issue of the length of recitative was simple. The London audience hated it, and complained of it from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries heedless of genre or sense of narrative: they found it tedious and unnatural. Most of Metastasio’s libretti set for London had their recitative cropped in one way or another. Handel, for example, shortened the recitatives of operas by other composers he introduced into his seasons in the early 1730s, while Figures 9a and 9b show that, in the case of the 1797 *Ipermestra*, this was accomplished by merely pasting over the relevant passages.

³⁹ It would be wrong to suggest that Metastasio would have disapproved of this type of change; according to Don Neville, when the second act of *Ezio* was altered to accommodate a quartet for Sacchini’s Naples setting of 1771, Metastasio approved this change, adding that the resultant reduction in the number of arias for the leading singers would have been unthinkable at the time he wrote the original drama. See Don Neville, ‘Ezio’, *GDO*, ii, 98.

Figures removed for copyright reasons

Fig. 9a. Cutting recitatives. Giuseppe Sarti's setting of *Ipermestra* was premiered in Rome in 1766; the manuscript score used for the London performances contains numerous pasteovers in most cases, cutting the length of the recitatives.

Giuseppe Sarti, *Ipermestra*, MS, 1797(?). [GB-Lcm 656, f. 31^r]

Fig. 9b. Cutting recitatives.

Giuseppe Sarti, *Ipermestra*, MS, 1797(?). [GB-Lcm 656, f. 31^v]

Metastasio's texts were not the only ones being revised in the manner described above: everybody else's were as well! But Metastasio's operas also proved to be perfect for plundering for arias for re-use in other operas, both by London authors and by singers arriving from the Continent. Indeed, this last circumstance is the only possible explanation of the extent to which arias re-used in London came from works—such as the *fiesta*, *Alcide al bivio* or the opera *Il trionfo di Clelia*—not staged or published in Britain before the date of the text's employment in a new context, or indeed, if at all. By the end of the century, only one of his texts—*Romolo*, set just twice—had not been plundered for an aria to be used in a London opera.

Such re-use did not, of course, result in dramatic incoherence, for the context of an aria's new situation was all; as long as the sentiment was appropriate, all was well. The only perhaps unexpected fact revealed by the list in Appendix IV is the number of recipient works that were comedies. The 1782 *La contadina in Corte*, for example, gained a version of 'Quel labbro adorato' which, in its new context, is the choice of Dr Stoppino to 'try this efficacious power of harmony' on his beloved Sandrina; it is, predictably enough, beyond his vocal capabilities. A slightly more sensitive use of the texts is found in the 1784 version of Piccini's setting of the comedy *La schiava*. Originally written as an interlude for Naples in 1757, it had subsequently appeared in London in 1767. The 1784 version gained two different arias introduced into it from Metastasio operas, 'Vorrei spiegar l'affanno' from *Semiramide riconosciuta* in Act 1, scene i, and 'Si soffre una tiranna' from *Zenobia*, in Act 2, scene iii. Both situations in *La schiava* are pathetic and sentimental, and both are allotted to the serious character of Fulgenzio, a Genoese gentleman. In the first instance, he is wondering how many of his doubts and jealousies to reveal to his adored Rosalba, while in the second, he is concerned at her possible inconstancies.

Both these arias illustrate the difficulty of knowing exactly which aria setting was used on any particular occasion. As far as the first aria is concerned, Piccini never set *Semiramide* as an independent work, so the setting here was either something he had written separately (perhaps for a singer as a 'suitcase aria') or was a setting not by him. In the case of the second aria, Piccini had, though, set the source opera *Zenobia*—for the Teatro San Carlo in Naples in 1756—but that was not the setting used here, which is that published as a song sheet by John Bland, which advertises it as 'A Favourite Rondo, sung by Signor Moschino at Munich and Signor Savoï in the opera *La schiava*, composed by Signor Antonio Tozzi'.⁴⁰

All in all, in the period 1728 to 1800, nearly 300 different Metastasio aria texts appeared in contexts other than their original ones, and of the receiving works, only about 55 were other works by Metastasio; a breakdown of these figures is shown in Table 2. There is no particular pattern to be found in the choice of the works from which the arias were drawn, and it is important to emphasise that the popularity of any individual opera story or aria text had no bearing whatever on what texts were redeployed. The greatest number of aria texts re-used from any single Metastasio work is 18 from *Semiramide riconosciuta*, an opera which was performed in London in only three versions, whereas there were 12 versions each of *Artaserse* and *Didone abbandonata* in circulation, but only 11 and 12 of the works' arias respectively were re-used. Further, there is no evidence to suggest that one aria was particularly popular. Of the 271 texts mentioned above, only some 48 appeared in two different contexts and 13 in three. There were only four relatively popular texts. Three of these appeared in four different contexts,⁴¹ and one that appeared in five.⁴² The re-use of Metastasio's

⁴⁰ See GB-Lbl/H.345.h (3).

⁴¹ 'Vo solcando un mar crudele' from *Artaserse* (which appeared in *Andromaca* (1755), *Arminio* (1760), *Astarto re di Tiro* (1762), and *La Frascatana* (1781)); 'Quel labbro adorato' from *Demetrio* (which appeared in *Issipile* (1758), *L'Olimpiade* (1767), *Sifare* (1768), and

arias reaches its zenith in one quite bizarre but inevitable instance, when the anonymous compiler of the pasticcio *Senocruta* of 1764 used nine Metastasio arias in a new story that Rolli fashioned around them in recitatives.⁴³

TABLE 2: Re-use of arias from Metastasio's operas in other works

| Operas | Once | Twice | Three or more |
|---|------|-------|---------------|
| <i>Adriano in Siria</i> | 22 | 3 | |
| <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | 50 | 1 | 9 |
| <i>Antigono</i> | 18 | 3 | |
| <i>Artaserse</i> | 52 | 6 | 12 |
| <i>Attilio Regolo</i> | 11 | 2 | |
| <i>Catone in Utica</i> | 15 | | |
| <i>Ciro riconosciuto</i> | 5 | | |
| <i>La clemenza di Tito</i> | 46 | 4 | 19 |
| <i>Demetrio</i> | 28 | 7 | 11 |
| <i>Demofonte</i> | 49 | 1 | |
| <i>Didone abbandonata</i> | 80 | 15 | 4 |
| <i>L'eroe Cinese</i> | 8 | 1 | 9 |
| <i>Ezio</i> | 55 | 3 | 15 |
| <i>L'impresario delle Canarie</i> | 5 | | |
| <i>Ipermestra</i> | 16 | 12 | |
| <i>Issipile</i> | 31 | 8 | |
| <i>Nitteti</i> | 9 | 14 | |
| <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | 38 | 15 | 33 |
| <i>Il re pastore</i> | 9 | 2 | |
| <i>Semiramide riconosciuta</i> | 27 | 7 | |
| <i>Siroe re di Persia</i> | 28 | 4 | 1 |
| <i>Temistocle</i> | 3 | | |
| <i>Zenobia</i> | 15 | | |
| <i>Feste, Azioni, Componimenti</i> | | | |
| <i>Angelica</i> | 29 | | |
| <i>Endimione</i> | 12 | 1 | |
| <i>La Galatea</i> | 5 | | |
| <i>L'asilo d'amore</i> | 7 | | |
| <i>L'isola disabitata</i> | 9 | | |
| Total | 682 | 109 | 113 |

La contadina in Corte (1782)); and 'Sentirsi dire dal caro bene' from *Semiramide riconosciuta* (which appeared in *Ormida* (1730), *Tolomeo* (1761), *Orfeo ed Eurdice* (1773), and *Didone abbandonata* (1775)).

⁴² 'Disperato, in mar turbato' from *Demetrio* (which appeared in *Artamene* (1745), *Adriano in Siria* (1765), *Eumene* (1765), *Astarto re di Tiro* (1770), and *Quinto Fabio* (1780)).

⁴³ This opera, not noted in CS, had six performances, and two copies of the libretto survive, one in US-PH O Hal Seno 52326 D.3, and the other in US-SM 308815.

Reactions to the results of aria re-use (or more specifically, textual alteration) varied. Susan Burney felt that as long as due care had been taken with the adaptation, the audience member could be moved just as profoundly as if it was a work by single composer.⁴⁴ But many felt otherwise, and the problems caused by the singers' interference were now the subject of comment; for example, Federici's version of *Demofonte* attracted derision:

We could not see without surprise the Opera of *Demofonte* disguised under the appellation of L'Usurpator Innocente. Such an insult, from the hand of some botching pruner, to the names of Metastasio, the first poet of the Italian stage, should not have been tolerated.⁴⁵

To the delight of some, the age of the 'botching pruner' was coming to an end, as the more complex musical structures and changing notions of authorship combined to sideline the practise.

The music for Metastasio's operas was kept before the public through print, most importantly in the *Favourite Songs* collections. It is in this series that the bulk of the music survives for the majority of these operas. The series, starting in 1721 with the songs from Bononcini's opera *Cyrus*, was published until 1725, by John Walsh and John and Joseph Hare, and then, until 1730, by Walsh and Joseph Hare, and finally by John Walsh alone until 1766. As Table 3 shows, between these dates, the firm published some 44 sets of songs associated with Metastasio's operas. As Walsh's overall output in this series was about 124 different titles and editions, they account for about a third of the *Favourite Songs* titles.⁴⁶ Throughout this period, Walsh published collected volumes of his *Favourite Songs* series under the title of *Le Delizie dell'Opere*, a series that had one printed title page per volume, and the original plates stamped with a through-numbered sequence for the entire volume.

⁴⁴ Price, Milhous and Hume, *Italian Opera. Vol.1*, 193.

⁴⁵ Quoted in William C. Smith, *Italian Opera* (London, 1957), 14.

⁴⁶ This figure is taken from William C. Smith and Charles Humphries, *A Bibliography of the Musical Works Published by the Firm of John Walsh During the Years 1721–1766* (London, 1968). The volume inexplicably lacks a title index, so this represents a manual count of the 1564 entries.

TABLE 3: *Favourite Songs* collections from Metastasio operas published in the time of John Walsh

| Date | Opera | Composer Responsibility |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------|
| Walsh and Hare | | |
| 1730 | <i>Siroe, ré di Persia</i> | Handel |
| John Walsh | | |
| 1731 | <i>Porus, re dell'Indie</i> | Handel |
| 1732 | <i>Catone</i> | Leo |
| 1734 | <i>Arbace</i> | Vinci |
| 1736 | <i>Adriano in Syria</i> | Veracini |
| | <i>Siroe, ré di Persia</i> | Hasse |
| 1737 | <i>Demetrius</i> | Pescetti |
| 1740 | <i>Angelica e Medoro</i> | Pescetti |
| | <i>Diana and Endymion</i> | Pescetti |
| 1742 | <i>Meraspeo l'Olimpiade</i> | Anon. |
| 1743 | <i>Temistocle</i> | Porpora |
| 1744 | <i>Alceste</i> | Lampugnani |
| | <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Handel |
| 1746 | <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Lampugnani |
| | <i>Antigono</i> | Galuppi |
| 1748 | <i>Didone abbandonata</i> | Hasse |
| | <i>La Semiramide riconosciuta</i> | Hasse |
| 1750 | <i>Adriano in Siria</i> | Ciampi |
| 1751 | <i>L'forza d'amore</i> | Paradies |
| 1754 | <i>Attilio Regolo</i> | Jommelli |
| | <i>Didone abbandonata</i> | Ciampi |
| | <i>Ipermestra</i> | Hasse |
| | <i>Demofonte</i> | Pasticcio |
| 1755 | <i>Ezio</i> | Hasse |
| | <i>Ezio</i> [1st Set] | Perez |
| | <i>Ezio</i> [2nd Set] | Perez |
| | <i>Siroe, ré di Persia</i> | Lampugnani |
| 1756 | <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | Galuppi |
| 1757 | <i>Demetrio</i> [1st set] | Cocchi |
| | <i>Demetrio</i> [2nd set] | Cocchi |
| [1757 | <i>Alessandro</i> (Proprietor) | Corri |
| | <i>Antigono</i> (Proprietor) | Conforti |
| | <i>Antigono</i> (James Oswald) | Conforti |
| | <i>Il re pastore</i> (Proprietor) | Hasse ⁴⁷ |
| 1758 | <i>Issipile</i> | Cocchi |
| | <i>Zenobia</i> [with <i>Demetrio</i> songs] | Cocchi |
| | <i>Zenobia</i> | Cocchi |
| 1759 | <i>Il Ciro riconosciuto</i> | Cocchi |
| 1760 | <i>La clemenza di Tito</i> | Cocchi |
| 1761 | <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Cocchi (pasticcio) |
| | <i>Didone</i> | Perez |
| 1764 | [<i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Cocchi] ⁴⁸ |
| 1765 | <i>La clemenza di Tito</i> | Cocchi |

⁴⁷ These three sets were printed 'For the Proprietor', that is Regina Mingotti and Felice Giardini; see Burney, ii, 855, and Michael Burden, 'Regina Mingotti in London as Singer and Impresario', forthcoming.

⁴⁸ This set was printed 'For the Proprietor', that is Felice Giardini.

After Walsh's death in 1766, things become less clear. The Walsh imprint passed to Randall and Abell until July 1768; William Randall then carried it on his own until his death, and his widow Elizabeth took it over in January 1776, until she was succeeded by Wright and Wilkinson in 1783. However, as Table 4 shows, after the death of her husband, she ceased to publish new volumes of *Favourite Songs*. What she did do was to capitalise on the editions and plates she already held, and published a twelve-volume edition of *Le delizie dell'opere. Being a collection of all the Favourite Songs in score, collected from the operas compos'd by Bach, Perez, Cocchi, Jommelli, Galuppi, Vinci, Pergolesi, Leo, Lampugnani, Terrandellas, Hasse, Popora, C.S. Germain, Pescetti, Veracini, Bononcini*. There was some attempt at re-organisation of the contents of the original sets of songs. In the case of Galuppi's 1746 *Antigono*, for example, the two separate sets were grouped together, while the two songs from Lampugnani's 1755 *Siroe* sung by Regina Mingotti which were published separately 'by particular Desire' by John Cox for Walsh were brought into the fold. Cocchi's settings of songs for the 1757 *Demetrio* and the 1758 *Zenobia*, which had been published in a combined volume, were re-united with the other pieces of the respective operas. The re-arrangement for *Le delizie dell'opere* was not always done as carefully as might have been—Hasse's 'Non a ragione ingrata' as sung by Signora Casarini in the title role of the 1748 version of *Didone abbandonata* ended up in Volume III, while the rest of the songs for that setting appeared in Volume V—but on the whole the new ordering was not bad, and the collection did put back into circulation a large number of settings relating to Metastasian operas which were not otherwise available.

TABLE 4: *Favourite Songs* collections from Metastasio operas after the death of John Walsh

| Publisher | Date | Opera | Composer Responsibility |
|----------------|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | 1765 | <i>Berenice</i> | Gierdini |
| Robert Bremner | 1766 | <i>Demofoonte</i> | Vento |
| | | <i>Ezio</i> | Pasticcio |
| | | <i>Siroe, ré di Persia</i> | Giardini |
| Peter Welcker | 1766 | <i>Adriano in Siria</i> | Gluck |
| Robert Bremner | 1770 | <i>Ezio</i> | Guglielmi |
| | | <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | Anon. (pasticcio) |
| Peter Welcker | 1771 | <i>Artaserse</i> | Vento |
| Robert Bremner | 1772 | <i>Artaserse</i> | Giordani |
| Robert Bremner | 1774 | <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Corri |
| | | <i>Antigono</i> | Giordani |
| | | <i>Nitteti</i> | Sacchini |
| Peter Welcker | | <i>Antigono</i> | Giordani |
| Robert Bremner | 1775 | <i>Didone abbandonata</i> | Anon. (pasticcio) |
| | 1776 | <i>Antigono</i> | Giordani |
| William Napier | 1778 | <i>Demofoonte</i> [1st set] | Anon. (pasticcio) |
| | | <i>Demofoonte</i> [2nd set] | Anon. (pasticcio) |
| | 1779 | <i>Artaserse</i> | Bertoni |
| | | <i>L'Olimpiade</i> | Gluck |
| | 1780 | <i>Alessandro nell'Indie</i> | Anon. (pasticcio) |
| Robert Bremner | 1781 | <i>Ezio</i> | Anon. (pasticcio) |
| John Preston | 1784 | <i>Issipile</i> [1st set] | Anon. (pasticcio) |
| | | <i>Issipile</i> [2nd set] | Anon. (pasticcio) |

The new sets of *Favourite Songs* were now produced by Robert Bremner, Peter Welcker, John Preston and William Napier. Bremner and Welcker appeared to have coxed and boxed until the late 1770s. Peter Welcker was a long established music seller, printer, engraver and publisher; after his death in 1775 the business was carried on by his wife. The Scottish music publisher Robert Bremner was similarly established, having opened his shop in London in 1762. Bremner bought some plates from John Cox—the publisher of the 1755 ‘Two favourite songs in the Opera call’d Siroe, sung by sign^{ma} Mingotti’—and the plates and music from Mrs Welcker’s estate in 1779, thereby apparently concentrating many of the later *Favourite Songs* sources in his hands. William Napier, who appears to have established himself as a credible publisher very quickly (he is found from about 1772 at an address in the Strand), published five sets of songs relating to Metastasio operas, and then moved on to other things; in fact, he seems to have reduced his publishing activities and established a circulating musical library in 1784, a move which was probably the reason for his bankruptcy in 1791. John Preston, whose only contributions to the series are the two sets of songs from the 1784 *Issipile*, was to purchase the plates and stock of Robert Bremner in 1789, so presumably he ended up with the plates of Bremner’s editions, and any others that Bremner had acquired through the purchases from the firms of Cox and Welcker. Significantly, Preston does not seem to have regarded it as worthwhile to produce new editions or to continue with the series, suggesting that it had lost its appeal.

The sets of *Favourite Songs* were printed from copies of the operas sold to the publishers by the theatre copyists for whom it was a perk. Indeed, the copyist of the King’s Theatre claimed that he had the ‘absolute and exclusive power of disposing of the Copy right thereof it being part of his

salary.⁴⁹ As Table 3 shows, there was a brief rebellion in 1755, when the songs to *Alessandro*, *Antigono*, and *Il re pastore*, were published not by Walsh, but by Regina Mingotti and Felice Giardini. According to Burney, ‘At this time, Mingotti and Giardini not allowing the opera-copyist to dispose of the favourite songs to Walsh upon the usual easy terms, had them printed elsewhere; this was also the case with *Il re Pastore*, some of the songs in *Demofonte*, and other operas.’⁵⁰ In the case of *Demofonte*, Walsh got his hands on some of the songs—‘La destrati chiedo’, ‘No, non chiedo, amate stelle’, ‘Padre, sposa, io vado a morte’, ‘Ogni amante puo dirsi’, and ‘Tu sai chi son; tua sai’—which appeared in one collection, but ‘FOUR SONGS in the OPERA *Call’d* IL DEMOFONTE [*sic*] sung by *Sig^{ra} Mingotti*’ could be ‘had at Sr de Giardini’s lodgings’.⁵¹ But the stranglehold of the copyists of these songs clearly continued.

What does seem to be the case, though, is that the copyists did not have any claim to the *aria di biaggolo* introduced by the singers, whether they were considered to be part of the opera or not. It is otherwise difficult to account for how few of the settings of inserted arias were included in the series, given that one of the reasons for introducing the arias in the first place was that they were the pieces that were best suited to show off the performers’ talents, and that the songs, once associated with a well known singer—Mara, Billington, Farinelli, Senesino, or whoever—could be expected to sell better.

That the songs that were published were the ‘favourites’ of anyone other than the copyist was something that seems to have been entirely left to chance; as Burney remarked of the songs by Abos and Lampugnani from the 1756 opera *Tito Manlio*, ‘the *favourite airs* of this opera were printed by Walsh, though none were favoured by the public’.⁵² While a publisher would undoubtedly want to bring out the popular *numbers*, getting the name of the popular *singer* on the top of the page was probably more of a priority.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Metastasio’s position in the theatre was in decline. His works were represented almost solely by stagings of Mozart’s *La clemenza di Tito*, and Arne’s *Aratxerxes*, while works such as the versions of *Didone abbandonata*, by Mercadante and Paer, and Charles Horn’s version of *Demofonte*, the opera *Dirce, or the Fatal Urn*, were really Metastasian in name only, with havoc being wrought on the libretto by the need to incorporate an entirely different musical structure and an integrated chorus. There was, however, one new area in which Metastasio’s texts came into their own, and that was the new genre of art song. Composers, both professional and amateur, produced a large number of settings of texts from his operas and cantatas, most notably of the three texts *La Palinodia à Nice*, *La Liberta à Nice*, and *La Partenza*, which inspired settings by composers such as Fisher, Cherubini, and Storace.

But even this activity would be all but finished by the late nineteenth century. In fact, the writing had been on the wall for some time; when George Hogarth was writing his *Memoirs of the Musical Drama* in 1838, Metastasio had finally been eclipsed as a stage poet:

With all their beauties... the dramas of Metastasio are chargeable with many faults. He has introduced *Love* to an immoderate and absurd extent. In every one of his pieces love is a principal feature – even in those, such as *Catone*, *Temistocle*, and *Attilio Regolo*, where it seems most out of place... This constant introduction of love gives an

⁴⁹ The defendants’ affidavit (London, National Archives, C31/247/81); Storace’s affidavit (London, National Archives, C31/247/39); see Jane Girdham, *English Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London* (Oxford, 1997), 89.

⁵⁰ Burney, iv, 466.

⁵¹ GB-Lbl G. 201 (1*).

⁵² Burney, ii, 855.

effeminate and affected air even to characters in themselves noble and striking... This conventional love, which enters so largely into Metastasio's operas, has the necessary effect of making his language forced and artificial – full of the cold suggestions of the fancy instead of the warm impulses of the heart. Hence we find heroes and heroines, when supposed to be under the influence of the most agitating feelings, amusing themselves with making strings of ingenious similes – comparing themselves to ships, flowers, or turtle-doves; and tracing the points of resemblance through a dozen labouring lines... This appears to be Metastasio's greatest fault, and that for which he is most liable to censure; for it was voluntary and might have been avoided. His other defects, the want of individuality and historic truth in his characters, the frequent improbability of his incidents, and the deficiency of variety in his denouements, arose from the nature of the musical drama, and the restraints under which he laboured.⁵³

Metastasio's London star had waned, overtaken by changing musical styles and dramatic aims. However, the publishing of Metastasio's collected works continued unabated, the poems appeared in selections for contemplation, and Nicola Vaccai published his *Practical Method of Italian Singing*, in which he chose Metastasio's texts to teach the singer 'to pronounce the language itself, rather than confine himself to syllables devoid of meaning'.⁵⁴

The catalogue that follows reflects not simply Metastasio's operas on the London stage, but examines in precisely what form they reached the public. It is concerned with the extent of Metastasio's influence in the theatre in Great Britain, and shows that Metastasio's works could be located in nearly every theatre season and could be found in every publishing house and music shop. To say that it remains a work in progress is axiomatic; but the picture that emerges is of a poet revered by the British public, and ever-present in the operas they saw and in the texts they read for over eighty years.

⁵³ George Hogarth, *Memoirs of the Musical Drama* (London, 1838), i, 344–8.

⁵⁴ Nicola Vaccai, *Practical Method of Italian Singing* (London, 1832), 3.

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