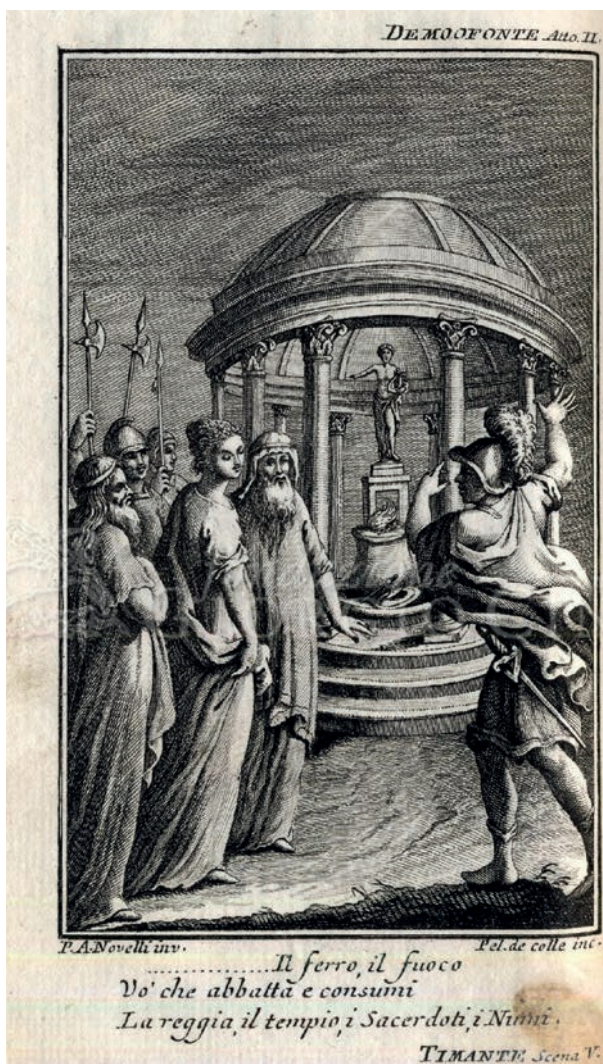


# L'OPERA ITALIANA NEI TERRITORI BOEMI DURANTE IL SETTECENTO

## V.



**Demofonte come soggetto  
per il dramma per musica:  
Johann Adolf Hasse ed altri compositori  
del Settecento**

a cura di Milada Jonášová e Tomislav Volek

ACADEMIA

Praga 2020

Il libro è stato sostenuto con un finanziamento dell'Accademia delle Scienze della Repubblica Ceca.



**Akademie věd  
České republiky**

Il convegno «Demofoonte come soggetto per il dramma per musica: Johann Adolf Hasse ed altri compositori del Settecento» è stato sostenuto dall'Istituto della Storia dell'Arte dell'Accademia delle Scienze della Repubblica Ceca con un finanziamento nell'ambito del programma «Collaborazione tra le Regioni e gli Istituti dell'Accademia delle Scienze della Repubblica Ceca » per l'anno 2019.

Altra importante donazione ha ricevuto l'Istituto della Storia dell'Arte dell'Accademia delle Scienze della Repubblica Ceca da Johann Adolf Hasse-Gesellschaft a Bergedorf e.V.

Prossimo volume della collana:

### **L'opera italiana – tra l'originale e il pasticcio**

In copertina:

Pietro Metastasio, *Il Demofoonte*, atto II, scena 9 „Vieni, mia vita, vieni, sei salva“, Herissant, vol. 1, Paris 1780.

In antiporta:

*Il Demofoonte*, atto II, scena 5 „Il ferro, il fuoco“, in: Opere di Pietro Metastasio, Pietro Antonio Novelli (disegnatore), Pellegrino De Col (incisore), vol. 4, Venezia: Antonio Zatta, 1781.

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ISBN 978-80-200-3152-5

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# 'Misero pargoletto': Kinship, Taboo and Passion in Metastasio's *Demofonte*\*

ÁLVARO TORRENTE  
ANA LLORENS

## *Introduction*

Metastasio's dramatic architecture can be regarded as a constellation of characters whose actions create circumstances that arise distinct passions, these to be expressed in poetry and music in the form of arias. The characters' circumstances and relationships define their personalities, impulses and behaviour. In Metastasio's universe, the social status determines the character's attitude, a higher status requiring more exemplary behaviour. In addition, kinship too conditions a character's demeanour, given superior values assigned to blood and family ties in the social fabric of the Ancient Regime. Another key factor in a character's conduct, and particularly in the eventual contradictions between the actions of individual roles, lies in the confronting influences of passion and reason.

This chapter presents a study of Metastasio's drama *Demofonte* from the perspectives of Descartes' theory of passions and Aristotle's ideas of tragedy, taking into account how these were reflected or challenged in Metastasio's own writings and with a special emphasis on the characters' circumstances, relationships and social status, as well as on the contrast between their passions and actions. It aims to demonstrate that this drama was designed to create circumstances allowing the expression of the extreme passions of pity and aversion when, in the third act, the principal character, Timante, suddenly realises that he has committed the most terrible of crimes, i.e. incest, having unknowingly married his own sister and having bear Olinto, a true 'misero pargoletto', an unhappy little boy born out of sin. As the drama was naturally conceived to be set into music, this study concludes by analysing and comparing manifold musical

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\* This chapter is a result of the research project *DIDONE. The Sources of Absolute Music: Mapping Emotions in Eighteenth-Century Italian Opera*, funded with an Advanced Grant no. 788986 (2017) by the European Research Council. The IP Álvaro Torrente is Professor of Musicology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Director of the Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales. Ana Llorens is 'Juan de la Cierva' Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales.

settings of Metastasio's original arias for the drama, in order to explore the compositional association between key musical features and specific passions as materialised in some forty settings of Timante's aria.

### *Le passioni di Cartesio*

Metastasio's extended commentary to Aristotle's *Poetics* attests to the centrality that he ascribed to passions in human life:

Human passions are the necessary wind with which one sails through this sea of life and, for the journey to be prosperous, it is not convenient to attempt the impossible goal of extinguishing them, but better that of taking advantage of them, narrowing or widening the sails, according to the winds, in proportion to their beneficial or harmful efficacy in leading us to the right path or in deviating us from it.<sup>1</sup>

He expresses this idea when questioning Aristotle's purported preference for the catharsis in tragedy through the destruction of human passions, as well as his reduction to just two passions: terror and pity. Metastasio goes further by explaining that:

Our affects are not restricted to terror and pity alone: wonder, glory, aversion, friendship, love, jealousy, envy, emulation, greedy ambition of acquisitions, anxious fear of losses and thousands and thousands others that are made up of the combination and the mixture of these, are also among those winds that push us to operate and that it is better to learn to hold, if we want to get our private peace and the public one.<sup>2</sup>

In just one sentence, Metastasio mentions twelve different passions, ten of which are to be found in the extensive 'catalogue' delineated by Descartes in *Les passions de l'âme*: wonder, love, fear, jealousy, emulation, terror, envy, pity, glory and aversion.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Metastasio emphasises

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<sup>1</sup> 'Son pur le umane passioni i necessari venti co' quali si naviga per questo mar della vita e, perché sien prosperi i viaggi, non convien già proporsi l'arte impossibile d'estinguerli, ma quella bensì di utilmente valersene, restringendo ed allargando le vele, ora a questo ora a quello, a misura della loro giovevole o dannosa efficacia nel condurci al dritto cammino o nel deviarcene'. Metastasio, *Estratto dell'Arte Poetica d'Aristotele*, ed. Elisabetta Selmi, Palermo: Novecento, 1998, p. 78. Unless stated otherwise, translations into English are ours.

<sup>2</sup> 'Or, gli affetti nostri non si restringono al solo terrore ed alla sola compassione: l'ammirazione, la gloria, l'avversione, l'amicizia, l'amore, la gelosia, l'invidia, l'emulazione, l'avida ambizione degli acquisti, l'ansioso timor delle perdite, e mille e mille altri che si compongono dal concorso e dalla mistura di questi, son pure, anch'essi, fra quei venti che ci spingono ad operare e che conviene imparare a reggere, se si vuol procurar la nostra privata e la pubblica tranquillità'. *Estratto*, cit., p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> In this article we make use of two different English translations of the treatise: René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul and Other Late Philosophical Writings*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford

that all the other thousands of passions ‘are made up of the combination and the mixture of these’, paraphrasing Descartes’s statement that other passions – beyond the six basic ones – are ‘either compounds of some of them or species of one of them’ [Art. 69]. The main discrepancy on this matter between the two authors is that, in his relation – which seems not to have been intentionally exhaustive–, the Italian poet mentions only two of the six basic passions coined by the French philosopher: wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness.

Metastasio’s description of a ship moved by the wind that can be controlled by the pilot is a metaphoric representation – very adequate for a dramatic poet – of Descartes’ own idea of human passions that can be controlled by reason and human will, summarised in the final two articles of his treatise:

When [our] imagination is strongly affected by the object of ... passions ... we should be on our guard and bear in mind that everything presented to the imagination tends to mislead the soul and make the reasons for pursuing the object of its passion appear much stronger than they are, and the reasons for not pursuing it much weaker ... we should delay making any decision about it and think about other things until the commotion in our blood has completely calmed down. [Our] will should devote itself mainly to considering and following the reasons for not acting in that way, even if they appear less strong [Art. 211].  
The chief use of wisdom lies in its teaching us to master and control so skilfully that the evils that they [the passions] cause are quite bearable, and even become a source of joy [Art. 212].

Metastasio expresses the same idea more clearly in one of his letters: ‘The diversity of human characters is born from the contrast of these two universal principles of human operations, passion and reason, depending on whether one, the other or both prevail in each person’.<sup>4</sup> In other words, passions are the winds and reason is the pilot governing the ship; there is no journey without passions, yet only a competent navigator can lead the ship to a safe harbour. Precisely, he illustrates these ideas with Timante:

My Timante is a courageous young man, exposed to the impetus of passions, but provided by nature with excellent acumen as well as

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and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); and the digital edition of Jonathan Bennett (2010), available at <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/authors/descartes>. Therefore, all the references made indicate chapter numbers.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Dal contrasto di questi due universali principii delle operazioni umane, passione e raziocinio, nasce la diversità de’ caratteri degli uomini, secondo che in ciascheduno più o meno l’una o l’altro o entrambi prevalgono’. Letter no. 260 to his publisher Bettinelli, dated 4-6-1747, talking about *Demofonte*. As in Bruno Brunelli (ed.), *Tutte le opere di Pietro Metastasio*, Milan: Mondadori, 1954.



equipped by his education with the most praiseworthy principles among his peers. When invaded by any passion, he is impetuous, violent, inconsiderate; when he has time to reflect or when any present object reminds him of his duties, he is righteous, moderate and judicious.<sup>5</sup>

The idea that passions are ‘necessary’ is also in consonance with the Cartesian statement on the usefulness of passions, which accordingly lies in that ‘they fortify and prolong thoughts that it is good for the soul to have and which otherwise might easily be wiped out’, while their harmfulness consists in that they ‘fortify and preserve these thoughts beyond what is required, or fortify and preserve thoughts that it is not good to give any time to’ [Art. 74].

Descartes himself even uses the word ‘wind’ metaphorically to describe the mechanics of human passions, transmitted to the rest of the body through the nerves, ‘which are like little threads or tubes coming from the brain and containing a certain very fine air or wind that is called the “animal spirits”’ [Art. 7].

Another evidence of Metastasio’s dependence from Descartes in his understanding of human passions is found in his criticism to Aristotle’s concept of *pathos*, as introduced in chapter XI of the *Poetics*: ‘La passione è una azione distruttiva; dolorosa, come le morti in palese, i tormenti, le ferite e tutte le altre cose di tal fatta’.<sup>6</sup> Metastasio claims that Aristotle confounds the suffering of the body with the passions of the soul, articulating one of the key concepts in Descartes’ treatise, already explicit in its title, namely that passions belong to the realm of the soul, not to that of the body.

These examples serve to illustrate the close influence of Cartesian philosophy in Metastasio’s dramatic conception, which was first investigated by Ezio Raimondi and confirmed, from different perspectives, by Gronda, Giarizzo, Sala di Felice and Ferrara.<sup>7</sup> When the poet was still a child, his protector Gian Vincenzo Gravina entrusted his education to the mathematician

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Il mio Timante è un giovane valoroso, soggetto agl’impeti delle passioni, ma provveduto dalla natura di ottimo raziocinio e fornito dalla educazione delle massime le più lodevoli in un suo pari. Quando è assalito da alcuna passione è impetuoso, violento, inconsiderato; quando ha tempo di riflettere, o che alcun oggetto presente gli ricordi i suoi doveri, è giusto, moderato e ragionevole’. *Idem*.

<sup>6</sup> We quote Metastasio’s own translation in his *Estratto*. All quotes from *The Poetics of Aristotle* in this chapter follow S. H. Butcher’s translation (London: MacMillan, 1895), who translates *pathos* as ‘tragic incident’. Other English versions prefer ‘suffering’ (Bywater) or ‘calamity’ (Fyfe). See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452b, trans. Ingram Bywater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920); trans. W. H. Fyfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952).

<sup>7</sup> Ezio Raimondi, “Ragione” e “sensibilità” nel teatro del Metastasio, in: Vittore Branca (ed.), *Sensibilità e razionalità nel Settecento*, Florence: Sansoni, 1969, pp. 249–67; Giovanna Gronda, *Le passioni della ragione: Studi sui Settecento*, Pisa: Pacini, 1984; Giuseppe Giarrizzo, L’ideologia di Metastasio tra Cartesianesimo e Illuminismo, in: *Convegno indetto in occasione del II centenario della morte di Metastasio*, Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1985, pp. 45–77; Elena Sala Di Felice, *Metastasio. Ideologia, drammaturgia, spettacolo*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 1998, esp. 57–59,

and Cartesian philosopher Gregorio Caloprese. As the poet reminds in a letter late in his life, Caloprese introduced him into the intricacies of Cartesian philosophy:

I heard again the revered voice of the distinguished philosopher Gregorio Caloprese who, adapting himself to my weak age in order to teach me, led me almost by the hand among the whirlpools of the, then reigning, ingenious Renato [Descartes], of whom he was the most energetic supporter ... I see him still laughing when, after having long immersed me in a somber meditation, making me doubt of everything, he realised that I could breath again after his *Ego cogito, ergo sum*; invincible argument of a certainty that I despaired of never finding again.<sup>8</sup>

It seems convenient to outline here in more detail some of the central features of passions as defined by Descartes in *The Passions of the Soul*, particularly because, as observed by Kivy, 'it may not be too much of an exaggeration to say that it was one of the most influential books of its time. It affected and formed (and indeed reflected) people's view of their psychology and projected them well into the eighteenth century'.<sup>9</sup>

Hassings has stressed that Descartes aims to explain the passions 'only as a physicist', based in his profound knowledge of the physiology of the human body, particularly the circulatory system.<sup>10</sup> He describes passions in a mechanic way: they are discrete states of the mind induced by certain actions that arouse specific changes in the human body. In other words, a certain action leads the soul to experiment a specific passion that is transmitted to the body, resulting in specific physical reactions in blood movements, heart rate, face colour, muscular movements, etc., that are particular to each passion and which, therefore, vary from one passion to another.

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176–81; Paul Albert Ferrara, Gregorio Caloprese and the Subjugation of the Body in Metastasio's *Drammi per musica, Italica*, 73:1 (1996), pp. 11–25.

<sup>8</sup> 'Ho sentita di nuovo la venerata voce dell'insigne filosofo Gregorio Caloprese che, adattandosi, per instruirmi, alla mia debole età, mi conducea quasi per mano fra i vortici dell'allora regnante ingegnoso Renato, di cui era egli acerrimo assertore ... e lo veggo ancor ridere quando, dopo avermi per lungo tempo tenuto immerso in una tetra meditazione facendomi dubitar d'ogni cosa, s'accorse ch'io respirai a quel suo *Ego cogito, ergo sum*; argomento invincibile d'una certezza che io disperava di mai più ritrovar'. Letter no. 2255 to Saverio Mattei, 1-4-1776, in Bruno Brunelli, *Tutte le opere*, cit.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Kivy, *Osmin's Rage. Philosophical Reflexions on Opera, Drama, and Text*, 2nd ed., Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> 'Mon dessein n'a pas été d'expliquer les passions en orateur, ni même en philosophe moral, mais seulement en physicien'. Reply to the second letter dated in Egmont on 14-8-1649, included as a preface in the *Princeps* edition of *Les passions de l'âme*, Paris: Henry Le Gras, 1649, p. [xli]; Richard F. Hassing, *Cartesian Psychophysics and the Whole Nature of Man*, Lamham: Lexington Books, 2015.

In general, [passions] can be defined as perceptions, or sensations, or emotions of the soul that we refer particularly to the soul itself, and that are caused, sustained, and fortified by some movement of the spirits [Art. 27].

The 'animal spirits' are a crucial concept to understand Descartes' system, though actually a metaphor to explain the extremely fast communication between the brain and the bodily organs, a remarkable intuition of the communication in the nervous system through neuronal synapse:

For what I call 'spirits' here are only bodies, and their only properties are that they are very small and fast-moving ... while some are flowing into the cavities of the brain, others are simultaneously flowing out through the pores of the substance of that organ. Through the pores they are conveyed into the nerves, and thence into the muscles, by means of which process they move the body in all the various ways it can be moved [Art. 12].

For example, he describes the physiological reactions when you see an animal:

If this figure is very strange and very terrifying, ... this arouses the passion of fear in the soul, and then the passion of boldness, or else that of terror and horror... the spirits that carry the reflection of the image ... flow partly into the nerves the function of which is to turn our backs and move the legs in order to flee, and partly into the nerves that expand or contract the orifices of the heart, or else agitate the other parts of the body from which the blood is conveyed to the heart, in such a way that the blood is rarefied in an unusual fashion. As a result, it sends spirits to the brain that are conducive to sustaining and augmenting the passion of terror [Art. 36].

Each passion provokes distinct movements of the spirits that generate movements in the blood, the muscles and other bodily organs. Descartes explains the mechanics of the main passions. For love, when you see a beloved person or object:

The impression made by this thought in the brain sends the animal spirits, through the nerves of the sixth pair, towards the muscles around the intestines and stomach, in the manner necessary to ensure that the juices from food, which are converted into new blood, flow quickly to the heart without lingering in the liver. This new blood, being impelled towards the heart with more force than the blood in the other parts of the body, enters it in greater quantity, and produces

in it a greater degree of heat ... As a result, the heart also sends spirits to the brain ... [that] fortifying the impression produced in the brain by the first thought of the beloved object, compel the soul to linger over this thought. It is in this that the passion of love consists [Art. 102].

One of the influences of passions is that they prolong ('font durer') thoughts in the soul. Duration is an essential feature of passions and is directly related to their intensity. The more violent a passion is, the longer it will last in the soul. The reason is that:

They are almost all accompanied by some excitation that affects the heart, and by extension the whole of the blood and the spirits, with the result that, until this excitation has ceased, they remain present to our awareness ... The soul can easily overcome the lesser passions, but not the most violent and intense, until after the excitation of the blood and the spirits has passed [Art. 46].

The physical response to human passions also provokes external signs, such as 'the expressions of the eyes and face, changes of colour, trembling, lethargy, fainting, laughing, weeping, groaning and sighing' [Art. 111]. For example, while joy causes blushing, sadness normally arises pallor, 'especially when the sadness is intense, or very sudden, as we see in the case of horror, where the element of surprise increases the constriction of the heart' [Art. 116].

To Descartes, the number of passions is indefinite but, as mentioned above, he identifies six fundamental passions: wonder, love, fear, desire, joy and sadness. All the other ones are 'either compounds of some of them or species of one of them' [Art. 69]. For example, wonder is one of the basic passions, but it has several species, such as esteem or contempt, depending on the greatness or littleness of the object admired [Arts. 72–78, 149–152], while astonishment, as a species of wonder, is a (negative) excess of wonderment [Art. 73]. Examples of compound passions are veneration, 'an inclination of the soul not only to esteem the object revered, but also to submit to it with a certain fear, in the attempt to gain its favour' [Art. 162], and aversion, a 'desire when our focus is on avoiding the evil contrary to that good, is accompanied by hatred, fear, and sadness' [Art. 87].

### Cartesian analysis of *Demofonte*

The plot of *Demofonte* can be analysed from a Cartesian perspective as a succession of actions of individual characters generating a passion in one or more characters, these passions in turn being expressed in an aria. The point of departure is the *argomento* that defines time and place and provides the preliminary circumstances: the story is set in pre-Christian

times in a remote Greek city in Thrace where human sacrifice to the gods is still common currency. It involves little-known mythological characters and circumstances, thus allowing Metastasio to invent – or more precisely, to borrow, as we shall see – new characters and intrigues. On this matter *Demofonte* differs from most Metastasio's librettos, as in most of them the title characters are well-known mythological or historical figures: Didone, Alessandro, Artaserse, Achille, Adriano, Demetrio, Tito or Issipile.

The potential of *Demofonte*'s plot to convey tragedy is already disclosed in the *argomento*, as it informs of two laws in the kingdom: the obligation of a yearly sacrifice to Apollo of a patrician virgin until the – unknown – 'innocent usurper' will cease occupying the throne, and the prohibition, under death penalty, for any woman to marry the heir of the throne. We know that the latter is already broken, as the prince Timante is secretly married to Matusio's daughter Dircea, while Matusio himself is confronting king Demofonte to prevent his daughter to enter the bloody draw, resulting in the king's indignation and his direct election of Dircea for the sacrifice. If that was not enough, the plot includes a female antagonist for Timante's love, the Frigian princess Creusa, whom Timante has to marry for political convenience, although she is loved by Timante's younger brother Cherinto. Finally, the *argomento* reveals that the real identity of two characters is unknown: Timante, 'believed to be the son and heir of Demofonte', and Dircea, 'of whom [Matusio] is thought to be the father', providing a hint to guess who the 'innocent usurper' may be.

The following paragraphs analyse the plot of *Demofonte*, scene by scene, from perspective of Descartes theory of passions. The assumption is that each aria tries to express in poetry and music the passion or a combination of few passions experimented by the character singing it, as a reaction to a previous action by other character(s). In most cases, we identify the passions from the list proposed by Descartes and write them in Italics.

### ***Act I: Hanging gardens of different apartments in the palace of Demofonte***

The opera starts with Matusio and Dircea arguing about the father's opposition for his daughter to be added to the lot for sacrifice if the king does not include his own offspring (I.1). Matusio's first aria, 'O più tremar non voglio', addressed to Dircea alone, shows his opposition to Demofonte, expressing *boldness*, but also paternal *love*. In the following scene (I.2), the married couple evaluate the disastrous perspectives for Dircea, and Timante offers to intercede with his father, prompting the aria 'In te spero, o sposo amato', where Dircea expresses both *love* and *hope*. Demofonte arrives to inform Timante of his wedding compromise with the Phrygian princess Creusa (I.3). The prince tries to change his father's mind but

the king explains that he has given his word, singing the aria ‘Per lei fra l’armi dorme il guerrero’, a declaration of *pride* and *vainglory* of the absolute rule of the monarch. When Timante is left alone (I.4), he addresses the stars in the aria ‘Sperai vicino il lido’, expressing his *fear* and *despair* for Dircea’s misfortune.

### *Sea port festively adorned*

Cherinto descends from a ship escorting princess Creusa (I.5). When she inquires about his *sadness*, Cherinto explains that he has fallen in love with her. The princess’ negative reaction intensifies Cherinto’s *regret*, disclosed in the aria ‘T’intendo, ingrata’. Timante arrives (I.6), begging Creusa to reject him in order to break the wedding arrangement. This incites the princess’ *indignation* (I.7), revengefully asking Cherinto to kill his own brother. Cherinto’s negative answer induces Creusa’s *contempt*, expressed in ‘Non curo l’affetto’. Cherinto remains puzzled (I.8), as he ignores the previous conversation between Timante and Creusa, but confesses to himself his *esteem* for the princess singing ‘Il suo leggiadro viso’.

Matusio promises Dircea that he will find a ship to flee (I.9). Dircea remains (I.10), lamenting her misfortune, but lies to her husband Timante when she tells that her father has found out about their marriage. When Matusio returns (I.11), Timante challenges him with the sword until father and daughter explain their escape plan to elude Dircea’s sacrifice. Adrasto and soldiers arrive, arresting Dircea (I.12), who sings an aria of *despair* addressed to both father and husband ‘Padre, perdona... oh pene!’. Timante promises Matusio to save his daughter (I.13), yet his aria ‘Se ardire e speranza’ does not express hope, but rather *sadness* and *despair*.

### **Act II: Apartments**

Creusa, humiliated, asks Demofonte for permission to return to Frigia (II.1). The king assures that Timante will finally accept the wedding, and Creusa responds with the aria ‘Tu sai chi son; tu sai’, where, reflecting her *abjectness*, she reminds Demofonte that he must command and punish his son. Timante tries to convince his father to forgive Dircea (II.2), and the king understands their secret love, offering him forgiveness if he marries Creusa. Timante rejects the offer, expressing his *anger* in the aria ‘Prudente mi chedi?’. The father (II.3), offended by the son’s negative answer, reacts with *complacency* and *disdain* in the aria ‘Se tronca un ramo, un fiore’, confirming his decision to sacrifice an innocent victim in order to save his kingdom and his honour.

## *Arcades*

Matusio and Timante ready themselves to help Dircea to escape (II.4). Timante assumes that this implies loosing wealth and throne; in the aria ‘È soccorso d’incongnita mano’, Matusio expounds the *boldness* that fills their hearts. When Timante sees his wife being taken to sacrifice decides to look for help (II.5). Dircea laments the gods for her misfortune with *regret* and *generosity* in the aria ‘Se tutti i mali miei’ (II.6), begging Creusa to marry Timante at her death and take care of him and their child Olinto. Creusa explains to Cherinto (II.7) that this exhibition of generosity has calmed her *anger* and moved her to intercede for the married couple in front of Demofoonte. The nobility of this gesture inflames Cherinto’s heart with more *love* and *hope* expressed in the aria ‘No, non chiedo, amate stelle’. When Creusa is left alone (II.8), she sings with *remorse* for her previous anger in the aria ‘Felice età dell’oro’, also worried for the risk of losing her royal position if she does not marry Timante.

## *Atrium of Apollo’s temple*

Timante attacks the temple with his companions (II.9), freeing Dircea but, when trying to find Olinto, they have to confront Demofoonte and his soldiers. The king offers his breast to his son (II.10), who is unable to kill his own father and surrenders, confessing his secret marriage to Dircea. Demofoonte sends the couple to prison to prepare for their execution, blaming both with *indignation* in the aria ‘Perfidi, già che in vita’. Before been separated (II.11), both lovers sing the duet ‘La destra ti chiedo’, expressing their *love* for the last time but also *regret* and *despair*.

## *Act III: Inner courtyard in the prison*

In prison, Adrasto tells Timante that Dircea’s begs him to marry Creusa at her death (III.1), but he rejects the offer. Adrasto explains his perplexity in the aria ‘Non odi consiglio?’.<sup>11</sup> Cherinto arrives to inform his brother of the sudden change of their father’s mind thanks to Creusa’s intercession (III.2). Timante offers to renounce the throne, inviting his brother to marry the Frigian princess, an action that moves Cherinto to express his *esteem* for Timante’s generosity in the aria ‘Nel tuo dono io veggo assai’, but also his *shame* for himself not being so virtuous.

Matusio arrives with a document proving that Dircea is in fact the offspring of Demofoonte and his wife and, therefore, Timante’s sister (III.3). Timante’s strange reaction provokes Matusio’s perplexity, expressed

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<sup>11</sup> Descartes’ enumeration of passions does not include any category reflecting the idea of perplexity, which we find necessary to explain the Adrasto and Matusio’s passions in response to Timante’s strange reaction.

in the aria ‘Ah, che né mal verace’. When left alone (III.4), the prince exposes his horror at having unconsciously committed the worst of all crimes, incest with his own sister and having given birth to his own nephew. Demofonte arrives with Creusa, Dircea and Olinto to inform Timante of the royal forgiveness (III.5), and they do not understand his strange behaviour. Timante expresses his *aversion* for his own acts and his *pity* towards his son Olinto in the aria ‘Misero pargoletto’, addressed primarily to his son but also to the gods/himself and to the concurrence.

The king addresses the gods asking for advice (III.6), while he expresses his *fear* in ‘Odo il suono de’ queruli accenti’. Creusa urges Dircea to follow Timante to help him (III.7), but Dircea sings her *despair* in ‘Che mai risponderai’. Left alone (III.8), Creusa reflects on the strange succession of events in her first day in Thrace, exhibiting her *hope* for some solution in the aria ‘Non dura una sventura’.

### *Magnificent place in the palace adorned for the wedding*

Timante explains to Cherinto his *despair* without unveiling the reason for it (III.9). Matusio arrives with a second document that proves that Timante is his own son (III.10). Demofonte explains that the two mothers exchanged the children Dircea and Timante at birth to guarantee the male inheritance of the throne (III.10). Thus, Timante ceases to be the ‘innocent usurper’, ending the need to sacrifice a virgin every year. His marriage with Dircea is no more illegal, while the real crown prince Cherinto can now marry his beloved Creusa. The play ends with the chorus singing with *joy* ‘Par maggiore ogni diletto’ (III.11).

### *Plot structure*

Metastasio deviates from Aristotle not only in his understanding of human passions, but also in the very nature of tragedy. He rejects ancient dramatists’ preference for portraying scoundrels and their restraint from presenting on stage the praiseworthy and luminous actions of elevated men or the admirable examples of the passions of love.<sup>12</sup> Piero Weiss has described this divergence as ‘the most exquisite evidence we could have of the gulf that separated 18<sup>th</sup>-century classicism from the true spirit of antiquity’.<sup>15</sup> Metastasio goes further by exposing his process of constructing a dramatic plot:

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<sup>12</sup> ‘La maggior parte de’ caratteri espressi nelle antiche applaudite greche tragedie, che sono ordinariamente scellerati’. *Estratto*, cit., p. 126; ‘le rappresentazioni d’azioni così lodevoli e luminose’, *Estratto*, cit., p. 78.

<sup>15</sup> Piero Weiss, Metastasio, Aristotle, and the Opera Seria, *Journal of Musicology*, 1:4 (1982), pp. 385–394: 391.



Any clear notion I may have succeeded in forming for my own guidance as to the beginning, middle and end of a dramatic plot reduces itself to little enough: one should begin ... with some subordinate action that will announce the approach of the catastrophe and furnish the occasion to convey to the public the antecedents necessary to the intelligence of the plot, by means of narratives or other resourceful devices that succeed in covering the intention of giving information: nor all at once, lest the spectator's memory be overtaxed and confused, but successively, as the need arises; one should end with the catastrophe, that is with the final reversal of fortune of the protagonist, from good to bad, or from bad to good; and the middle, which separates the beginning from the end, should be taken up by the necessary or likely incidents that will prepare and produce the conclusion which they have meanwhile delayed by means of skilful and delightful suspense.<sup>14</sup>

The key feature of the plot that becomes clear from this statement is the catastrophe, which Metastasio identifies with the beginning of the dénouement,<sup>15</sup> the point in the fable when the story starts to shift with the reversal of the fortune of the protagonist.

From this statement we learn three major steps in Metastasio's own poetic process: 1) his point of departure to design a dramatic plot is to decide the reversal of fortune, the issue from where he builds the rest of the fable; 2) the complication or knot is designed for the public to slowly understand the plot and to prepare them for the catastrophe; 3) the goal of the middle part of the drama is to prepare for the conclusion through 'artificiosa e dilettevole sospensione', artful and pleasant suspense.

### Plotting the plot of *Demofonte*

Menchelli-Buttini has demonstrated that the plot of *Demofonte* is the result of mixing three different stories: the mythological tale of Demophon

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<sup>14</sup> 'Quella chiara idea, che io ho potuto formarmi, per mia regola, del principio, del mezzo e del fine d'una favola drammatica, si riduce a ben poco, cioè: s'incominci ... da qualche azione subalterna che prometta vicina la catastrofe e che somministri occasioni di dare al popolo le notizie degli antefatti, necessarie all'intelligenza della favola, cioè con racconti o altre artificiose invenzioni che dissimolino la voglia di volere istruire, e non già tutte insieme, per non aggravare in un tratto l'altrui memoria e confonderla, ma successivamente ed a proposito del bisogno; che si finisca con la catastrofe, cioè con l'ultima mutazione di stato del protagonista da buona in rea o da rea in buona fortuna, e che il mezzo, che si frappone fra il principio ed il fine, sia occupato da' necessari o verisimili incidenti, i quali preparino e producano poscia quel fine che intanto, con artificiosa e dilettevole sospensione dal suo principio allontanano'. *Estratto*, cit., p. 82, as trans. in Weiss, *Metastasio, Aristotle*, cit., p. 592.

<sup>15</sup> 'Il nostro filosofo ... chiama *nodo* tutto ciò che precede al principio della catastrofe, includendo in questo nodo anche quelle circostanze del soggetto che precedono alla rappresentazione, e chiama scioglimento tutto il rimanente'. *Estratto*, cit., p. 142.

of Elaiousa as narrated by Hyginus, the French tragédie *Inés de Castro* by Houdart de La Motte (1723) and the Nordic tragedy *Il re Torrismondo* by Torquato Tasso (1587). Metastasio chooses from each play the dramatic elements that he finds more convenient for his goal, combining them with other components of his own coinage, yet, not less importantly to understand his creative process, he discards others which do not fit in his conception of tragedy, as we shall see.

The title name of the opera is already misleading, perhaps intentionally to create suspense, as the best known myth with this name was Demophon of Athens, son of Theseus and Phaedra and husband of Fillis, whose story is narrated, among others, by Pseudo-Apollodorus in his *Bibliotheca* [Epitome E.6.16] and, more importantly, by Boccaccio in the *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* [Book X, Ch. 52]. It is Demophon of Athens who inspires all the previous libretti with such character, including Nicolò Minato's *L'industrie amoureuse in Filli di Tracia*, premiered in Vienna in 1695 with music by Antonio Draghi, and Pietro d'Averara's *Il Demofonte*, premiered in Milano in 1698. Therefore, it is likely that an opera with such a title would have suggested the potential Viennese audience that it was about this character.

On the contrary, Metastasio's opera is inspired in the story of Demophon of Elaiousa, a little known mythological tale narrated by Hyginus in his *Astronomy* [II.40.3], pertaining to the description of the constellation of Hydra, specifically in the part devoted to the neighbour constellation of Crater. Quoting the ancient Greek writer Philarcus (whose writings have not survived), Hyginus explains the story as follows:

In the Chersonnese, near Troy, where many authors have said that the tomb of Protesilaos is to be found, there lies a city called Elaiousa. While it was under the rule of a certain Demophon, it was suddenly struck by a plague which caused the citizens to die in extraordinary numbers. Demophon, being greatly disturbed by this, sent a deputation to the oracle of Apollo to seek a remedy for the devastation; and the oracle responded by saying that a maiden of noble birth should be sacrificed to the guardian deities of the city each year. Demophon chose them by lot from all the girls apart from his own daughters, and had them killed, until the day came when a citizen of very noble birth took exception to Demophon's procedure, and refused to allow his own daughter to be entered into the draw unless the daughters of the king were also included. This so enraged the king that he had the man's daughter put to death without drawing any lots. Mastousios (for that was the name of the girl's father) pretended not to take offence at this for the present out of patriotic feeling, since she might have been drawn by lot afterwards and put to death; and by degrees that king came to forget the episode. And so when the father of the young girl had made a show of being just about the best friend of the king, he

said that he was going to offer an annual sacrifice and invited the king and his daughters to the ceremony. Suspecting nothing untoward, the king sent his daughters on ahead; being held back for his own part by affairs of state, he would come along later. Everything worked out just as Mastousios had hoped, he killed the king's daughters, mixed their blood in with some wine in a bowl, and when the king arrived, had this served up to him as a drink. When the king asked after his daughters and discovered what had happened to them, he ordered that Mastousios should be thrown into the sea together with the bowl. As a consequence, the sea into which he was thrown was named the Mastousian Sea in memory of him; and the harbour is known as Crater (the Bowl) to this day. The ancient astronomers represented it in the sky to remind people that no one can profit with impunity from a crime, and that personal hatreds cannot usually be forgotten.<sup>16</sup>

Metastasio does not borrow the whole story but just a few elements: the setting in Ancient Greece, the two main antagonists of the plot – Demophon and Mastousios –, the oracle of Apollo ordering a yearly sacrifice of one virgin of noble ascent, and the opposition of Mastousios to accept his daughter to enter the draw while Demophon excludes his own offspring. He consciously changes the reason for the sacrifice from a plague to an innocent usurper, and also dismisses the bloody slaughter of the young daughters of both men and the final punishment of Mastousios. This is to say, Metastasio adopts only the initial framework and intentionally modifies the story, particularly the dénouement.

The core of the *Demofonte's* complication comes from the *Inés de Castro* by Houdart de La Motte (1723), inspired in historical events. In this play, crown prince of Portugal Dom Pedre (Timante), the heir of king Alphonse IV (Demofonte), is secretly married to Inés de Castro (Dircea). The king engages Dom Pedro to marry princess Constanza (Creusa), leading to a confrontation between father and son, the imprisonment and trial of Inés and her final acquittal, though this does not prevent the tragic ending, as Inés is poisoned by the queen (and mother of the bride from a previous marriage). The parallel with the main characters and plot in our libretto is indisputable, yet Metastasio modifies his model by changing the dénouement, as well as by adding the heir's brother, Cherinto, as *secondo uomo*.

One further element in the story is borrowed from Torquato Tasso's *Il re Torrismondo* (1587), where Torrismondo, King of Gots (Timante), is engaged with Princess Alvida of Norway (Dircea) and sleeps with her before the marriage, only to find out later that they are siblings, which motivates both lovers to commit suicide. This story provides Metastasio with one

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<sup>16</sup> Eratosthenes and Hyginus, *Constellation Myths with Aratus's 'Phaenomena'*, Robin Hard (trans.), Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 113.

of the key elements of his narrative, the unconscious incest between Torrismondo and Alvida, yet he discards the final suicide.

As we have seen, the three stories have tragic endings that are altogether dismissed by Metastasio. The poet devises a story in which there are multiple elements for an unhappy ending, thus creating the atmosphere of suspense required by the drama: 1) there is an usurper in the kingdom but his identity is unknown to everyone; 2) the country has to sacrifice a virgin every year; 3) Dircea, supposedly a virgin, is a likely candidate to be the victim; 4) having married the crown prince, Dircea has incurred in a crime punishable to death; 5) Demofonte has given his word to make his son marry the foreign princess Creusa; 6) Timante's opposition to the marriage provokes the anger not only of his father, but also Creusa's, who asks Cherinto to kill his own brother; 7) Demofonte finally decides to punish both Timante and Dircea. With all these circumstances into play, the whole plot develops from the beginning with the assumption that the death of Dircea, and perhaps that of Timante too, is inevitable. However, Metastasio designs three consecutive reversals of fortune that lead to the happy ending, but not before incorporating an opportunity for something even more terrible than death to be disclosed: incest.

The first reversal of fortune is triggered by Dircea's aria 'Se tutti i mali miei' near the end of the second act, where she sings to Creusa on her way to the scaffold. Dircea's generosity deeply moves the Phrygian princess' heart, transforming her initial abjectness into remorse and motivating her to convince Demofonte to forgive both lovers – a decision of which we know at the beginning of the third act only – even if this could imply losing her eventual royal status.

When everything may seem to lead to a happy conclusion, the poet invents the first recognition – or anagnorisis – that involves the second and more dramatic reversal of fortune, a true coup de théâtre revealing that Timante and Dircea are in fact siblings. Even before the prince can express his emotions with words, his body reveals with external signs of trembling and pallor the profound transformation of his soul, as expressed by Matusio:

MATUSIO     [...] Tu tremi, o prence!  
                  Questo è più che stupor. Perché ti copri  
                  di pallor sì funesto?

In the midst of the happiness for the royal forgiveness, Timante alone experiments the deepest horror and aversion towards himself, expressed first in the recitative soliloquy 'Misero me! Qual gelido torrente' – set as *recitativo accompagnato* by virtually all composers – followed by the aria 'Misero pargoletto', the true pinnacle of the opera (III.5). This aria is particularly complex in its poetic structure, as every distich is addressed to a different interlocutor and reflects a different passion, a feature that has consequences in the musical settings, as we shall see:

Lines	Interlocutor	Passion
Misero pargoletto, il tuo destin non sai. Ah, non gli dite mai qual era il genitor!	Olinto  Dircea, Demofoonte, Creusa	Pity  Shame
Come in un punto, oh dio, tutto cambiò d'aspetto! Voi foste il mio diletto, voi siete il mio terror.	Gods/himself  Dircea and Olinto	Despair  Aversion

This terrible scenario does not last for long, as Metastasio invents a second recognition unveiling that Timante is not the son of Demofoonte but that of Matusio, thus solving in one instant all the conflicts and driving the plot into the happy end.

The resources used by Metastasio for the recognitions are not one, but two letters that have been hidden for years and which prove the real identity of the two characters. Aristotle makes a distinction between different kinds of recognition, explaining that ‘the least artistic form, which, from poverty of wit, is commonly employed [is the] recognition by signs’. He goes on stating that ‘this use of tokens for purposes of proof – and indeed, any formal proof with or without tokens – is an inartistic mode of recognition’. The second type of recognition is ‘invented at will by the poet, and on that account wanting in art’ [*Poetics*, 1454b].

What did lead Metastasio to use a trick that, from the point of view of the Philosopher, was the result of poverty of wit or lack of artistry?

The answer can be found in Metastasio’s *Estratto della Poetica*, where he problematises Aristotle’s ideas on this matter. He claims that the first type ‘can be more or less commendable, depending on whether it is more or less ingeniously used by the poet’, while the second is a ‘rule very difficult to be applied to any particular case, since the imagination of the poet operates, more or less generally, in every part of a drama’.<sup>17</sup>

The challenge of *Demofoonte* is precisely to explore the two passions that Aristotle claims to be necessary to move the hearts of the audience: terror (horror, aversion) and pity (compassion), as we have already seen. But he does not want to use the resources applied by the Classics, this is to say, to end his drama with the death of one of the leading characters. It is true that this happens in three of his plots: *Didone* (1724), *Catone in Utica* (1728) and *Issipile* (1732), yet while in the first two cases death is part of the legend or the history, in the latter the person who dies is the villain in the drama.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Questa riconoscenza [della prima maniera] può esser più o meno lodevole, secondo che più o meno ingegnosamente sarà dal poeta impiegata’. ‘Le riconoscenze della seconda maniera (dice Aristotile) son quelle che son fatte dal poeta; regola ben difficile ad applicarsi ad un caso particolare, poiché l’immaginazione del poeta opera, più o meno generalmente, in ogni parte d’un dramma’. *Estratto*, cit., p. 152.

Moreover, the crime on stake in *Demofonte* is even worse. The possibility that a nobleman or a princess may have incurred in real incest, even unconsciously, was well beyond the limits of the dignity attributed to the leading characters of any drama, so he needed to bypass certain dramatic assumptions to devise a short window of just seven scenes (III.3-10) during which the commission of a terrible crime could be verisimilar yet transitory, allowing the leading character to express an extreme passion such as aversion.

This has to do with Metastasio's conception of tragedy, very different from Ancient Greek drama precisely in the resources used to move the audience. Where Classical tragedy would recur to 'insanguinar la scena', Metastasio prefers the exemplarity of virtuous behaviour and self-sacrifice, as Piero Weiss has noted:

When we see an innocent son generously sacrificing his own glory and life for the safety of his father; a friend forgetful of himself for his friend's sake; a citizen set his fatherland's happiness above his own; one who has received favours renounce kingdom or the beloved, worthy object of his tenderest hopes in order not to be ungrateful to his benefactor; ... when, I say, we see such praiseworthy and luminous actions presented on the stage, our souls expand in the glory of our species that we didn't think to be able to do so, and, nurtured with so noble ideals, it can be expected that, at some point, we would be able to imitate them.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, where Ancient theatre uses exemplarity in a negative way, presenting on stage cases of scoundrels, examples that man should avoid, Metastasio systematically favours the opposite. He presents on stage an ideal model that man should aim to emulate, and emulation is described by Descartes as a species of courage, 'a heat that disposes the soul to undertake things it hopes it can achieve successfully, because it sees others achieving them' [Art. 172]. Thus, Metastasio lightens the artistry of some dramatic resources in order to obtain a superior objective.

The paramount position of this scene and this aria in the third act did not escape the attention of his contemporaries. In his extended

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<sup>18</sup> 'Quando veggiamo un innocente figliuolo sacrificare generosamente la propria gloria e la vita per la conservazione d'un padre, scordarsi un amico di sé stesso per non mancare all'amico, posporre un cittadino la propria alla felicità della patria, rinunciare un beneficato, per non essere ingrato al suo benefattore, all'acquisto o d'un regno o d'un caro e degno oggetto delle più tenere sue speranze, trascurare un offeso la facile vendetta d'una sanguinosa ingiuria ingiustamente sofferta, e non perdonarla solo all'offensore, ma porgergli la mano adiutrice in alcun suo grave pericolo; quando veggiamo (dico) le rappresentazioni d'azioni così lodevoli e luminose, s'ingrandisce l'animo nostro nella gloria della nostra specie *che ne crediamo capace, ci lusinghiamo d'esser atti ancor noi ad eseguirle e, nutriti di così nobili idee, si può anche sperar che talvolta ci rendiamo abili ad imitarle*'. Estratto, cit., p. 78. As trans. in Piero Weiss, *Metastasio, Aristotle*, cit., p. 390-91, except the words in Italics, missing in Weiss' citation, which are our own translation.

'Dissertazione' of the first edition of Metastasio's complete works, Ranieri de' Calzabigi devotes almost ten pages to explain the mastery of its plot, disclosing the steps leading to the resolution in the scene of 'Misero pargoletto' and the intense passions aroused in both the acting characters and the audience. Just after Matusio reveals the real identity of Dircea:

Timante in an abyss of confusion. He is horrified by such a monstrous wedding, and he paints all the terrifying complex of many fatalities to himself with those verses [the recitative 'Misero me! Qual gelido torrente'] ... One can well imagine what upheaval of passions causes these objects [Dircea, Olinto, his father] in the heart of Timante a moment before so dear, and now hateful so much; and in what amazement the souls of all of them fall when Timante avoids paternal embraces, escapes those of comfort, and sinister looks at the innocent Olinto, and when without further disclosure he bursts into saying to the boy 'Misero pargoletto...'

There is no scene without action [in *Demofonte*]: there is no part in the action that does not aim at the whole. It can be seen with what art the souls of the spectators are suspended from the beginning to the end; how they go step by step through so many emotions: tenderness, pity, wonder and terror; how every actor is necessary and how they are all pushed towards the main object. Every word, every gesture is immediately recognised to be essential, not useless and not superfluous. The tale is led by Demofonte's ferocity, Matusio's arrogance, Timante's amorous fury, all operating separately towards the unexpected, unforeseen resolution; the wishes that the spectators have conceived remain not fully satisfied: the deliverance from the atrocious sacrifice: the disengagement of the royal promise: the unveiling of the innocent usurper; and the happiness of poor Timante and his Dircea. Having the poet fulfilled all the laws of tragedy, this can be declared to be one of the noblest and most perfect that has ever been composed.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Timante in un'abisso di confusione. Inorridisce d'un imeneo sì mostruoso, ed a sé stesso va dipingendo tutto lo spaventevole complesso di tante fatalità con que' versi [the recitative "Misero me! Qual gelido torrente"] ... Si può bene immaginare qual sconvolgimento di passioni cagionino nel cor di Timante questi oggetti un momento prima sì cari, ed ora odiosi tanto; e in qual sbigottimento cadano gli animi di tutti loro quando Timante evita gli amplessi paterni, sfugge quelli della consorte, e bieco guarda l'innocente Olinto, e quando senza più oltre svelarsi prorompe in dire al fanciullo: "Misero pargoletto..."

Non v'è scena che in azione non sia: non v'è parte d'azione che al tutto non miri. Si veggia con qual arte dal principio fin'all'ultimo son sospesi gli animi degli spettatori: come passano grado a grado per le sensazioni di tanti affetti; tenerezza, pietà, meraviglia e terrore: come ogni attore è necessario, e come tutti sono spinti verso l'oggetto principale. Non inutile, non superfluo, ma essenziale ogni detto, ogni moto loro subito si ravvisa. La ferocia di Demofonte, la superbia di Matusio, il furore amoroso di Timante diversamente operando allo scioglimento impensato, e non preveduto, conducono la favola; e rimangono pienamente sodisfatti i desiderii che ponno aver concepiti gli spettatori, che sono: la liberazione dal crudel sacrificio; il disimpegno della parola reale;

Interestingly, in his summary of the opera's plot, Calzabigi entirely overlooks the parallel story of Cherinto and Creusa, confirming where Metastasio's contemporaries found the crux of the drama. The centrality of 'Misero pargoletto' is confirmed by the fact that this aria – sometimes together with the preceding recitative – was the one set to music more times separated from the opera, as illustrated by Mozart's well known setting (KV 77-73e) or Schubert's piano version (D 42).<sup>20</sup>

### Musicalising *Demofonte's* passions

The theoretical connection between Descartes theories and music is to be found in one of the most prominent theorists of the period, Johann Mattheson, who claims in *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister* that:

51. The doctrine of temperament and emotions, concerning which especially Descartes is to be read because he has done much in music, serves very well here, since it teaches one to distinguish well between the feelings of the listener and how the forces of sound affect them.

53. Where there is no passion or affect to be found, there is also no virtue. If our passions are sick, then they must be healed, not murdered.<sup>21</sup>

Hundreds of composers throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century felt attracted to Metastasian drama, and to his *Demofonte* in particular,<sup>22</sup> as the basis for their operatic works. While, as has been already commented, actions were translated in the form of recitatives, *secco* or, sometimes, *accompagnato*, passions themselves crystallised musically in the form of arias. Typically, a libretto by Metastasio would comprise 20 to 25 arias.

As Bianconi has underlined, 18<sup>th</sup>-century opera seria arias were all equal in their governing structural principle – the return to the opening section, corresponding to the first stanza in the text, after a potentially contrasting central part – but different in content.<sup>23</sup> And *Demofonte* is no

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lo scoprimento dell'usurpatore innocente; e la tranquillità del meschino Timante e della sua Dircea: con che avendo il Poeta adempite le leggi tutte della Tragedia, si può questa dichiarare per una delle più nobili e delle più perfette che siano mai state composte'. Rainieri di Calzabigi, *Dissertazione*, in: *Poesie del signor abate Pietro Metastasio*, 9 vols., Paris: Quillau, 1755, I, pp. xix–cciv; the pages devoted to *Demofonte* are xcii–cii.

<sup>20</sup> Further examples are discussed in Lucio Tufano's chapter included in this volume, particularly one fascinating testimony from the final days of Napoleon Bonaparte.

<sup>21</sup> Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister*, trans. Ernest Charles Harris, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981, pp. 150–51; Part I, Ch. 3, art. 51, 53.

<sup>22</sup> See the complete catalogue of musical settings – and their sources – for *Demofonte* in the catalogue to this volume: Ana Llorens, Gorka Rubiales and Nicola Usula, 'Operatic Sources for *Demofonte*: Librettos and Scores of Metastasio's "figliuolo"'.  
<sup>23</sup> Lorenzo Bianconi, *La forma musicale come scuola dei sentimenti*, in: G. La Face Bianconi and F. Frabonni (eds.), *Educazione musicale e formazione*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 2008, pp. 85–120.



exception. As explored above and summarised in Table 1, Metastasio's original libretto contains 24 arias (plus a *duetto* and a chorus) in which the characters express the passions prompted by their actions.

The following analysis explores composers' choices apropos the musical expression of those passions in the form of specific parameters, including the key signature, mode, key, metre and tempo chosen for each of them. All of them are structural parameters that are purportedly decided by the composer in the initial phase of the creative process, the *inventio*, and which, at least in theory, are supposed to reflect the overall emotional character of the aria.

We have focused on Metastasio's original arias<sup>24</sup> for the libretto, overlooking those that nonetheless appeared in later settings throughout the century. We have selected forty settings of the entire libretto,<sup>25</sup> plus twenty-eight composers that set into music only some of its arias.<sup>26</sup> The number of available settings per aria varies, as: 1) not all of the composers followed Metastasio's original structure; 2) some of them set the libretto several times and reused earlier arias in their later versions;<sup>27</sup> and 3) sources for all of the arias in an opera have not always been preserved. The number of versions analysed is presented in the penultimate column in Table 1).

Despite music theorists' well-known tendency to ascribe – normally shared – emotional meaning to the particular keys,<sup>28</sup> a close look to the arias and other closed numbers in the select *Demofonte* settings promptly reveals that there were no such clear predilections in the compositional practice of the time, with an average of 14% of the settings of each aria being in one specific key.<sup>29</sup> However, some arias deviate from the general

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The return to the opening section can be complete – *aria col da capo* – or partial – *aria dal segno* – or, later in the century, present a more complex tripartite design.

<sup>24</sup> For the sake of simplicity, henceforth we use the term aria to refer to arias and other closed numbers, i.e. *duettos* and choruses, alike.

<sup>25</sup> Namely, and by chronological order, Caldara 1735, Schiassi 1734, Sarro/Mancini 1755, Latilla 1757, Brivio 1758, Lampugnani 1758, Bernasconi 1741, Jommelli 1745, Gluck 1745, Graun 1745, Hasse 1748, Hasse 1749, Galuppi 1749, Fiorillo 1750, Perez 1752, Jommelli 1755, Manna 1754, Sarti 1755, Pampani 1757, Galuppi 1758, Hasse 1758, Traetta 1758, Bernasconi 1760, Piccinni 1761, Majo 1765, Jommelli 1764, Bernasconi 1766, Guglielmi 1766, Mysliveček 1769, Jommelli 1770, Sarti 1771, Koželuh 1771, Anfossi 1775, Mysliveček 1775, Paisiello 1775, Schuster 1776, Cimarosa 1780, Sarti 1782, Portugal 1794 and Portugal 1808.

<sup>26</sup> Namely Abati, Adolfati, J. Ch. Bach, Bachsmidt, Brandl, Brunetti, Conforto, Danzi, Errichelli, Friedrich II King of Prussia, Lenzi, Maraucci, Monza, Mozart, Naumann, Panerai, Perotti, Petrucci, Pignatelli, Ponzio, Quantz, Reggio, Reichardt, Reno, Rutini, Sacchini, Sickingen and Tenducci.

<sup>27</sup> This applies to Hasse (who reused most of the 1748 arias in the following year's setting) and Galuppi, as Jommelli, Mysliveček and Sarti did not reuse music among their various versions of *Demofonte*. Given that Anfossi did reuse in his Florentine setting the music for the arias that had already appeared in the previous Roman premiere, we count it here as a single setting. See Llorens, Rubiales and Usula, 'Operatic Sources for *Demofonte*: Librettos and Scores of Metastasio's "figliuolo"' in this volume for further details.

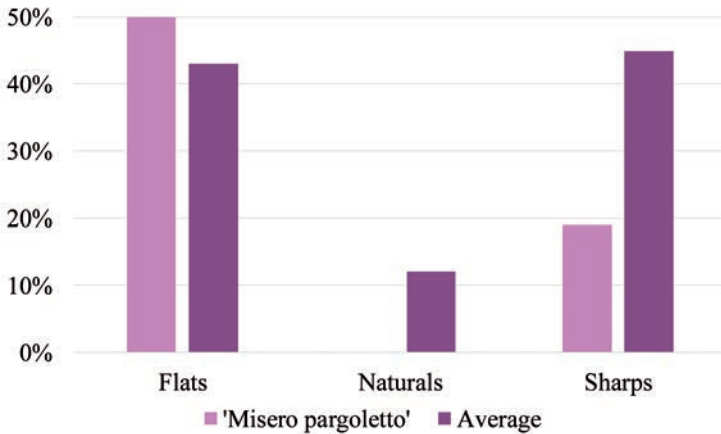
<sup>28</sup> This has been thoroughly studied by Rita Steblin, who offers English translations for forty-four such treatises. See Rita Steblin, *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteen Centuries*, Rochester: The University of Rochester Press, 2002.

<sup>29</sup> If not stated otherwise, in the analysis of key, metre and tempo we have taken into account the opening sections only, as it is the first stanza of the poem that defines the aria's main passion.

**Table 1** Closed numbers in Metastasio's *Demofonte*: characters, passion and number of settings analysed.

Act & Scene	Aria	Character	Passion	Analysed settings	No. of different keys
I.1	O più tremar non voglio	Matusio	Boldness, love	23	8
I.2	In te spero, o sposo amato	Dircea	Love, hope	28	6
I.3	Per lei fra l'armi dorme il guerriero	Demofonte	Pride, vainglory	25	6
I.4	Sperai vicino il lido	Timante	Fear, despair	30	8
I.5	T'intendo, ingrata	Cherinto	Sadness, regret	9	5
I.7	Non curo l'affetto	Creusa	Contempt	23	8
I.8	Il suo leggiadro viso	Timante	Esteem	18	7
I.12	Padre, perdona... oh pene!	Dircea	Despair	25	9
I.15	Se ardire e speranza	Timante	Sadness, despair	16	7
II.1	Tu sai chi son; tu sai	Creusa	Abjectness	19	7
II.2	Prudente mi chiedi?	Timante	Anger	23	10
II.3	Se tronca un ramo, un fiore	Demofonte	Complacency, disdain	10	5
II.4	È soccorso d'incognita mano	Matusio	Boldness	14	8
II.6	Se tutti i mali miei	Dircea	Regret, generosity	27	8
II.7	No, non chiedo, amate stelle	Cherinto	Love, hope	22	8
II.8	Felice età dell'oro	Creusa	Remorse	11	6
II.10	Perfidi, già che in vita	Demofonte	Indignation	21	6
II.11	La destra ti chiedo	Dircea & Timante	Love, regret, despair	34	11
III.1	Non odi consiglio?	Adrasto	Perplexity	16	7
III.2	Nel tuo dono io veggo assai	Cherinto	Esteem, shame	15	7
III.5	Ah, che né mal verace	Matusio	Perplexity	8	4
III.5	Misero pargoletto	Timante	Aversion, pity	37	10
III.6	Odo il suono de' queruli accenti	Demofonte	Fear	17	5
III.7	Che mai risponderti	Dircea	Despair	24	9
III.8	Non dura una sventura	Creusa	Hope	12	6
III.12	Par maggiore ogni diletto	Chorus	Joy	18	5

tendency. Significantly, the key of *ca.* 60% of the settings of both ‘Perfidi già che in vita’ and ‘Par maggiore ogni diletto’ is D major. The fact that they express contrasting passions – the king’s *indignation* and final *joy* respectively – further reinforces our suspicion that key alone was not direct enough a parameter in the musical expression of emotions. Another aria for the king Demofonte (‘Odo il suono de’ queruli accenti’) has more than half of its settings in one key (F major). While it expresses *fear*, another aria partially conveying the same passion, namely ‘Sperai vicino il lido’, shows a greater tendency to – the related – B flat major. This divergence may be explained through the combination of passions, as this aria is also expressive of *despair*. However, the *despair* arias ‘Padre, perdona... oh pene!’ and ‘Che mai risponderti’ have more versions set in E flat major (36%) and G major respectively (38%). That is, both flat and sharp keys were used to express the same emotions, with, specifically, 45% of the arias having a sharp key signature, 43% a flat one and the remaining 12% with no accidentals in their key signature (Figure 1). Hence, key ascription cannot be explained through univocal connections with the passion – or combination of passions – expressed in the text.

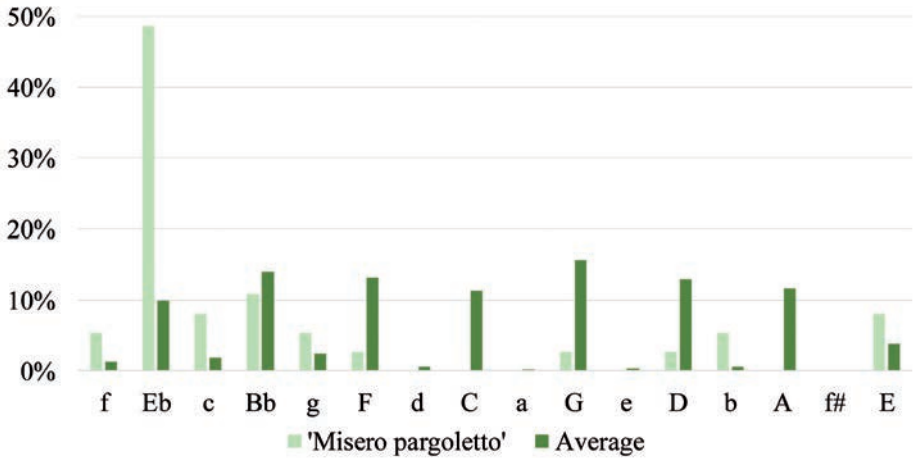


**Figure 1** Ratio of arias per type of key signature in musical settings of *Demofonte*: ‘Misero pargoletto’ and average

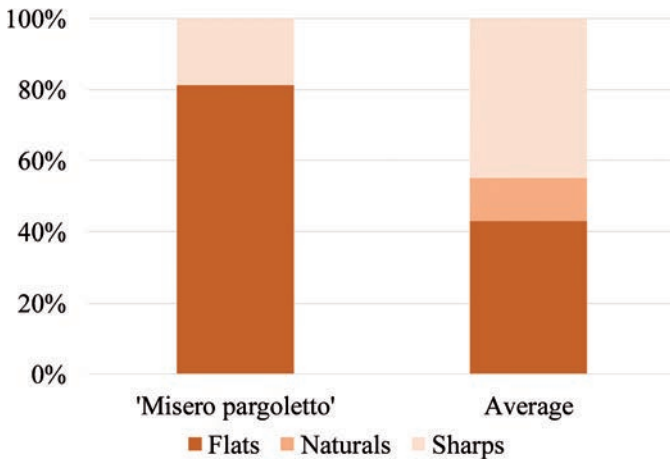
Taking a step further in the analysis, the above facts seem to confirm that, in the studied musical settings of *Demofonte*: 1) key is not necessarily determinant in the musical expression of passions; 2) the type of key signature, i.e. flat, natural or sharp, is not indicative of the affect expressed; and 3) there seems to be a general tendency towards major keys – in fact, 93% of the select arias are in the major mode.

As could not be otherwise, ‘Misero pargoletto’, the most important aria in the opera from a dramatic point of view, escapes the general rule. It has to be conceded that, in comparison to the two chiefly-in-D-major

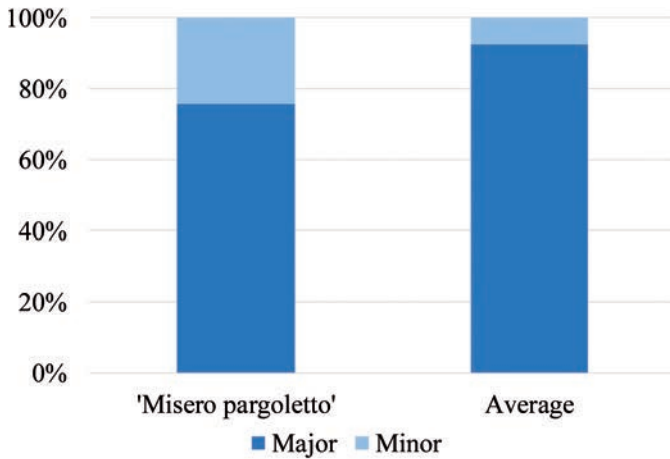
arias mentioned above, a 49% of the settings being in E flat major may not strike as so relevant. Yet, comparing this value to the 14% average, it is significant in itself (Figure 2). This 35-points-higher tendency towards E flat major results in a comparably-enhanced preference for flat key signatures (81% for ‘Misero pargoletto’ in comparison to the 45% average; Figure 3). However, the non-E-flat-major 51% of the musical settings of the aria show an enhanced variability in regards their key. To start with, 48% of those arias (24% of the total) are in the minor mode (Figure 4). This is particularly



**Figure 2** Ratio of arias per key in musical settings of *Demofonte*: ‘Misero pargoletto’ and average



**Figure 3** Typological distribution of key signatures in musical settings of *Demofonte*’s arias: ‘Misero pargoletto’ and average



**Figure 4** Typological distribution of modes in musical settings of *Demofonte's* arias: 'Misero pargoletto' and average

significant, as only 'Padre, perdona... oh pene!', expressive of *despair* shows such a comparatively increased use of the minor mode. However, only 8% of the settings of the emotionally-homologous 'Che mai risponderai' have a minor key, pointing to the dramatic and musical singularity Timante's *aversion* aria. Furthermore, the second most-represented key in the settings of 'Misero pargoletto' is B flat major, yet with only 11% of the total number of arias. In fact, notwithstanding the highly-marked tendency to E flat major, the tonal variability of the 51% remaining arias is so high that 'Misero pargoletto' shows the highest number of different keys among the arias of the libretto (Table 1): as Figure 2 illustrates, there are settings in f minor, E flat major, c minor, B flat major, g minor, F major, G major, D major, b minor and E major, which makes a total of 10 different keys. We suspect that this tendency to major keys with two or more flats in their key signatures (with the notable exception E major) may have to do with the tuning practices of the time.

The tonal approach to 'Misero pargoletto' and 'Se tutti i mali miei' in particular is notably similar, yet less intense in the latter: both arias show an enhanced emergence of the minor mode; in both cases there is a clear tendency to flat keys; and the tonal variability of 'Se tutti i mali miei', with only a maximum of 19% of the settings being in one key and a 8 different keys in total, makes this aria particularly relevant.

The individuality of Timante's third-act aria, and of Dircea's *regretful* yet *generous* second-act aria, is further confirmed by composers' metric and durational treatment of both texts, the latter being observable from the vantage points of both tempo and the number of bars of the aria. For the metric analysis, we have classified time signatures in three main

categories: A) simple duple and quadruple time, i.e. binary meter with binary subdivision, comprising the time signatures C, 4/4, C<sub>1</sub>, 2/4 and 2/2; B) compound duple time, i.e. binary meter with ternary subdivision, i.e. 6/8; and C) simple triple time, i.e. ternary meter with binary subdivision, i.e. 3/4 and 3/8.<sup>50</sup>

Given that in opera composition the text precedes the music, one could expect the metric nature of the verses to dictate composers' metric approach to the individual arias. The fact that, on average, *ca.* 70% of the settings of each aria belong to one specific metric category – normally simple duple/quadruple time, with extreme cases of more than 90% of the settings corresponding to one type, as it is the case of 'Per lei fra l'armi dorme il guerriero' – supports this contention. Most strikingly, the 37 settings analysed for 'Misero pargoletto' divide evenly between simple duple/quadruple and simple triple times.<sup>51</sup> Following this aria in metric fluctuation among the settings, Dircea's 'Se tutti i mali miei' has 57% of its versions in simple duple/quadruple and 43% in simple triple time, that is, again with a rather even distribution of metric types and, therefore, well divergent from the average tendency. Moreover, 'Misero pargoletto' has, after 'Non dura una sventura' the clearest predominance of the 3/4 time signature. It is as if the two most critical dramatic moments in the plot, i.e. the first reversal of fortune in 'Se tutti i mali miei' and the horrifying recognition in 'Misero pargoletto', triggered not only the most varied tonal responses on the part of composers, but also, and perhaps most significantly, their most diverse metric treatments.

In the common-practice tripartite arias, the central section normally presents a contrast, usually in the form of a modulation to a different key and, sometimes, with a change metre and, normally less so, tempo.<sup>52</sup> The analysis of a reduced number of settings of both 'Se tutti i mali miei' and 'Misero pargoletto'<sup>53</sup> reveals that the average number of metric changes –

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<sup>50</sup> Due to the agogic nature of the arias in 3/8, we have considered this time signature as being an example of simple triple time, and not of simple triple time. We have not considered a fourth category, i.e. compound triple time, as, in the analysed corpus – and in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century *opera seria* in general – there are no arias in 9/8.

<sup>51</sup> Specifically, 50% of the settings are in simple duple/quadruple time, 47% in simple triple time and the statistically-insignificant 3% are in compound duple time.

<sup>52</sup> See Marita P. McClymonds, *Aria: 4. 18th century*, in: *Grove Music Online*. Retrieved 18 Mar. 2020, from <<http://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.universidadviu.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000043515>>. For more detailed studies of tonal and tempo/character contrast, see Mary Hunter, *Haydn's Aria Forms: A Study of the Arias in the Italian Operas Written at Eszterháza, 1766–1783*, PhD dissertation (Cornell University, 1982) and Michael Hrair Arshagouni, *Aria Forms in Opera Seria of the Classic Period: Settings of Metastasio's Artaserse from 1760–1790*, PhD dissertation (University of California, 1994).

<sup>53</sup> The select settings are, for 'Misero pargoletto', Leo 1735, Jommelli 1743, Graun 1746, Hasse 1748, Galuppi 1749, Perez 1752, Jommelli 1753, Manna 1754, Galuppi 1758, Hasse 1758, Piccinni 1761, Jommelli 1764, Bernasconi 1766, Sarti 1771, Mysliveček 1775, Errichelli and Monza; and, for 'Se tutti i mali miei', Leo 1735, Jommelli 1743, Hasse 1748, Galuppi 1749, Perez 1752, Jommelli 1753, Manna 1754, Galuppi 1758, Hasse 1758, Jommelli 1764, Jommelli 1770, Mysliveček 1775 and a supposed version by Galuppi. See Llorens, Rubiales and Usula, 'Operatic Sources for *Demofonte*: Librettos and Scores of Metastasio's "figliuolo"' in this volume for an explanation of the difficulties posed by Galuppi's sources.

metric change index – within a single version is, in both arias, markedly higher than in a broader corpus of arias from *Didone abbandonata* and *Demofonte*<sup>54</sup> and that, even more significant for our purposes, the metric change index for ‘Misero pargoletto’ is almost double than that of Dircea’s aria, the latter with an average of 0.9 changes of metre in each setting (the average for a larger corpus is around 0.5). As a consequence, virtually all the studied settings of ‘Misero pargoletto’ have a metric change in the central part of the aria (metric change index: 1.8), as we have counted the changes in such a way that, in a ternary aria with a metrically contrasting central section, there would be 2 metric changes, one between the A and the B sections and another between the B section and the return to A.

It cannot be coincidental that it is precisely these two arias that are addressed to various interlocutors, ‘Se tutti i mali miei’ the gods and Creusa, and ‘Misero pargoletto’ to the gods/himself, Olinto and the concurrence. That is, changes of addressee are musically expressed through changes in the metric treatment, which, as we have seen above, does not always depend on the metric/rhythmic configuration of the lines themselves. In other words, it is the through metric contrasts that composers sought to convey most powerfully the changes in the communicative situation and, thus, in the passions being expressed too.

The two arias also stand out in regards of their duration too. If, as Zoppelli and Garavaglia have explored,<sup>55</sup> there is a direct correlation between the duration of the aria, its importance within the opera and its function of moving the human affects, ‘Se tutti i mali miei’ and ‘Misero pargoletto’ can be certainly considered as the two keystones of *Demofonte*’s not only dramatic but also musical settings. Attending to the average number of bars (153 and 173 respectively), they would seem not to be particularly long,<sup>56</sup> yet the other factor most determinant for a piece duration is its tempo. And, in this regard, both are exceptions among the 523 *Demofonte* arias closely studied in this chapter.

This aspect can only be empirically analysed in arias having a tempo marking, which, indeed, are the vast majority (85%, 443 out of 523). For clear classification of tempo indications, we have established three main groups: FT) fast tempi, comprising markings such as Vivace, Prestissimo, Presto, Allegro, Allegretto, Risoluto, Con spirito and Spiritoso; MT) moderate tempi, including Andantino, Minuetto, Grazioso, Andante, Affettuoso, Cantabile, Moderato, Maestoso, Spazioso, Comodo and Tempo giusto; and ST) slow tempi, such as Adagio, Larghetto, Amoroso, Largo, Sostenuto, Lento and Grave.

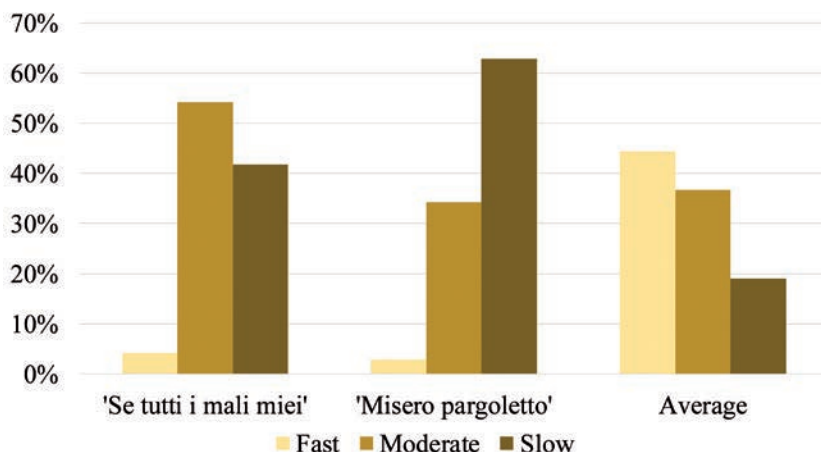
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<sup>54</sup> This corpus is being digitised and studied in the ERC project *DIDONE*.

<sup>55</sup> Luca Zoppelli, *Il teatro dell’umane passioni: note sull’antropologia dell’aria secentesca*, in: Lucia Strappini (ed.), *I luoghi dell’immaginario barocco*, Napoli: Liguori, 2001, pp. 285–294; Andrea Garavaglia, “La brevità non può mover l’affetto”. The time scale of the Baroque aria, *Ricerche*, 14:1–2 (2012), pp. 55–61.

<sup>56</sup> The average for the *DIDONE* project corpus so far is 171 bars/setting.

On average, *ca.* 44% of the arias analysed have an annotated fast tempo, whereas 37% and 19% have moderate or slow tempi respectively. For our two arias, the proportions are inverted (Figure 5). Only 4% of the settings of ‘Se tutti i mali miei’ and 3% of ‘Misero pargoletto’ have a fast tempo. Also the predominance of slow tempi in settings of Timante’s aria is unquestionable (63%) and, in this, it is unique in the whole opera. For its part, 54% of the settings of Dircea’s have a moderate tempo. Curiously, a similar preponderance of moderate tempi in conjunction with a virtual absence of fast tempi is observable the *duetto* expressive of *regret*, i.e. Dircea and Timante’s ‘La destra ti chiedo’, thus pointing to a correlation between passion and tempo greater than that between passion and key.<sup>37</sup> In any case, this, again, reinforces the uniqueness of ‘Misero pargoletto’, followed by ‘Se tutti mali miei’.



**Figure 5** Distribution of tempo markings in musical settings of *Demofonte*’s arias: ‘Se tutti i mali miei’, ‘Misero pargoletto’ and average

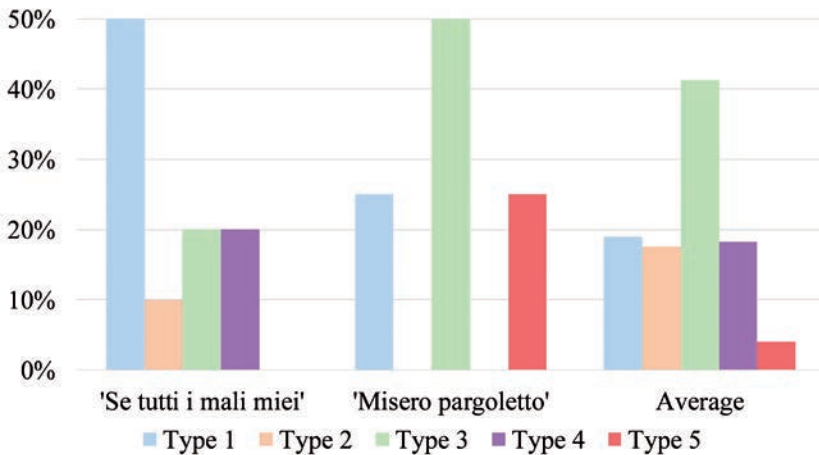
This is in respect of the main tempo indication. Sometimes, the initial Italian word for tempo is followed by a label that, *grosso modo*, can serve to: 1) enhance the expressive quality of the piece (in our corpus, *affettuoso*, *amoroso*, *cantabile* and *espressivo*); 2) indicate a livelier character (*con spirito*, *grazioso*, *risoluto* and *spiritoso*); 3) moderate or temper the tempo (*assai*, *comodo*, *giusto*, *maestoso*, (*ma*) *non troppo/tanto*, (*ma*) *non presto*, *moderato* and (*un*) *poco*); and 4) make it faster (*con brio*, *con moto*,

<sup>37</sup> In fact, a more thorough analysis of the relation between the passions expressed in the aria texts and the tempi annotated in their various settings supports this hypothesis, yet providing details here would extend the length of this chapter excessively.



molto – following a fast tempo marking – and piuttosto) or 5) slower (molto – following a slow tempo marking – and sostenuto).

‘Misero pargoletto’ conforms to the norm of the majority of secondary labels serving to moderate the tempo (Figure 5) – in this case, in order not to exaggerate its slowness–. Yet ‘Se tutti i mali miei’ is unique in having 50% of such labels as indicator of expressive enhancement, which is in line with the dramatic situation in which the aria emerges and, naturally, with the passion it expresses. An aria of *aversion*, such as ‘Misero pargoletto’, would hardly correspond with a tender or even touching atmosphere.



**Figure 6** Typological distribution of expressive labels in tempo markings in musical settings of *Demofonte's* arias: ‘Se tutti i mali miei’, ‘Misero pargoletto’ and average

Among the compositional resources that characterise the musical settings of ‘Misero pargoletto’, then, metre and duration/tempo seem to be the most direct conveyors of human passions. In fact, going back to the origins of Metastasio’s concept of passion, or at least of our analysis thereof, it seems that the emotional power of both parameters was at the core of Descartes’ own approach to the musical expression of human affects as stated in his *Compendium musicae*, written in 1618:

As regards the various emotions which music can arouse by employing various meters, I will say that in general a slower pace arouses in us quieter feelings such as languor. sadness, fear, pride, etc. A faster pace arouses faster emotions. such as joy, etc. On the same basis one can state that duple meter, 4/4 and all meters divisible by two, are of slower types than triple meters, or those which consist of three parts. The reason for this is that the latter occupy the senses more, since

there are more things to be noticed in them. For the latter contain three units, the former only two. But a more thorough investigation of this question depends on a detailed study of the movements of the soul.

'Misero pargoletto', in its various musical settings, seems to emanate directly from Descartes' expectations: a 'sluggish' passion, such as *pity* is conveyed through a duple/quadruple metre in a slow tempo, yet the agitation intrinsic to the feeling of *aversion* finds its counterpart in the similarly-frequent triple metres and the secondary tempo labels that serve to moderate the slowness of the main tempo indication.

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The Cartesian-dramaturgical study of Metastasio's libretto for *Demofonte* has revealed that the whole construction of the plot can be interpreted as a succession of actions that provoke specific passions in the different characters, these passions to be expressed in the arias and other closed forms. Moreover, it appears to be a coherent system designed to make the aria 'Misero pargoletto' the pinnacle of the drama. To that purpose, the poet had to bypass Aristotle's ideas of dramatic practice, heightening the plot with several reversals of fortune including a double anagnorisis to create an opportunity for the expression of an extreme passion such as aversion. 18<sup>th</sup>-century composers understood the aria's relevance and highlighted it by employing musical resources that were exceptional in the context of their settings of the entire libretto, be it for their sheer singularity or for their enhanced strength – as in comparison to 'Se tutti i mali miei', the second most distinct aria in the libretto both dramatically and musically, for instance. What is more, the poem is so powerful in its expression of human passions that manifold composers set it into music as a separate piece, though doubtless aware of its original dramatic context, ranging from now-forgotten authors to Mozart, or even to Schubert, who used the poem as the basis for a *Lied* with piano accompaniment.

We cannot be sure about the extent to which 18<sup>th</sup>-century composers were familiar with Descartes' ideas about human passions or with the emotional power of tempo and metre. Although, as Kivy has suggested, very few had the opportunity of a liberal education, there is a palpable congruity between the nature of *opera seria* and Cartesian psychology.<sup>58</sup> One of the plausible connections were the theoretical works of Johann Mattheson, particularly *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister*, as we have seen.

In any case, the results obtained in our analysis demonstrate that there was a culture-grounded sense of tempo and metre as the most direct conveyors of human passions in music. Curiously enough, later theory

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<sup>58</sup> Kivy, *Osmín's Rage*, cit., p. 99.

emphasised the role that key allegedly played in this respect, yet a closer look at the compositional practice itself undermines such contentions as cultural, theoretical constructions. The analysis has also shown that, consciously or not, there was also a shared sense among composers, the first-line consumers of Metastasio's works, of 'Misero pargoletto' as the expressive core of the libretto, a core that combined kinship, taboo and passion in just eight lines.