

HYPSIPYLE FROM LEMNOS TO VIENNA*

AN APPROACH TO THE METASTASIAN HEROINE

Flavio Ferri-Benedetti

Universitat de València
flaviofbg@gmail.com

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RESUMEN

Issipile de Metastasio (1732) no se encuentra entre los libretos más estudiados del poeta. Aparte de la maravillosa música escrita por Conti para su estreno vienés, el interés de la obra reside en sus mecanismos operísticos y su estrecha relación con la Tradición Clásica, en una intrincada mezcla de fuentes grecolatinas adoptadas y adaptadas por Metastasio. A partir de la investigación realizada para mi *Masterarbeit* en la Schola Cantorum Basiliensis y a la vista de nuestras futuras investigaciones sobre Metastasio y Tradición Clásica, el artículo introduce el libreto, un visionado de las fuentes clásicas del mito y las características musicales y literarias principales de la obra.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Tradición Clásica, *Dramma per música*, Metastasio, Hipsípila, *Issipile*, Mitología, Francesco Bartolomeo Conti, Libreto, Ópera seria.

ABSTRACT

Metastasio's *Issipile* (1732) is not among the poet's most discussed libretti. Apart from the beautiful music written by Conti for its premiere in Vienna, the interest resides in its operatic mechanisms and its deep bonds with classical tradition, in an intricate mixture of Greek and Latin sources, both adopted and adapted by Metastasio. Originating from the research done for

* It is my wish here to re-elaborate the information I collected during my Master of Music at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis (Basel), where I had the opportunity to focus in my *Masterarbeit* on *Issipile* (Vienna 1732). My thesis consisted of a brief analysis of the work, a critical, modern edition of the Overture and Act I, plus a translation into English of its text. The work started on my *Masterarbeit*, supervised by Prof. Gerd Türk and reviewed by Prof. Dr. Thomas Drescher, was completed one year later with the critical edition of the whole opera, since published by Gran Tonante in 2011 (cfr. bibliography). I would like to add here some other details of interest, especially in view of our future research into *Issipile*, Metastasio and classical tradition. Special thanks to Adrian Horsewood for proofreading the English. TUTOR MENTOR: Prof. Dr. Carmen Morenilla Talens, Catedrática de la Universitat de València (Proyecto de I+D FFI2012-32071 del Ministerio de Industria y Competitividad).

my *Masterarbeit* at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and in the view of our future research on Metastasio and classical tradition, the article introduces the libretto, an overview on the classical sources of the myth and the main musical and literary features of the work.

KEYWORDS: Classical Tradition, *Dramma per musica*, Metastasio, Hypsipyle, *Issipile*, Mythology, Francesco Bartolomeo Conti, Libretto, *Opera seria*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Opera, with its unique conjunction of arts and disciplines, was the star genre in baroque music. Verse, in the form of a specific *libretto*, would constitute its first layer. This poetical work of more or less literary quality is set to music by a composer who, in turn, is bound to adapt the contents of the chosen (or imposed) text to the singing voice. The voice is accompanied by a certain instrumental group according to stylistic and practical reasons. Finally, acting, staging, stage design and eventual choreography of *balletti* (all with defining codes and rituals) are added to the mix. The operatic phenomenon as a whole (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) normally tries to follow the aesthetical guidelines of each epoch and geographical area. The actual realisation of this scheme is, of course, not always as fluent as it should: musical factors such as audience's tastes, singers' expectations or demanding impresarios have influenced the process in more than one way –as Benedetto Marcello's *Il teatro alla moda* sarcastically portrayed in 1720, if we wish to refer specifically to the late baroque product.

I would like to address an exceptional and rather neglected example of *opera seria*: *Issipile* (often named with the use of the definite article as *L'Issipile*). This opera was first performed at the Imperial Court of Vienna during the Carnival of 1732. It is based on a beautifully inspired, highly dramatic libretto by Pietro Metastasio (Rome 1698-Vienna 1782), the most important librettist of the late baroque / early classical epoch and one of Italy's finest poets. Francesco Bartolomeo Conti (Florence 1681-Vienna 1732), theorist and composer at the Viennese Imperial Court, was the first musician to use the libretto. This is an important fact to be taken into account, for libretti were often used by more than one composer: Metastasio's dramas especially, having gained such huge popularity among audiences and composers, were taken and used (or misused) throughout the eighteenth century (and the first half of the nineteenth).¹

¹ *Artaserse*, for instance, was set to music on more than 80 occasions after its first performance in 1730. Metastasio's libretti appear in at least 850 musical versions altogether (Mollia 1995²: XV; Cattelan 2005).

In the limited space of this article, I will provide an overview of the libretto's main literary and musical aspects, with a special focus on the myth's literary sources, the works of the *corpus* that Metastasio supposedly consulted and those that he might have had used too.

2.1. METASTASIO'S *ISSIPILE*: A QUICK OVERVIEW OF THE SOURCES AND THE LIBRETTO

Issipile, Metastasio's second operatic libretto as imperial poet in Vienna, must have been practically ready, as a complete opera, by the beginning of 1732.² After the success of *Demetrio* in the winter of 1731, Metastasio turned directly to Greek mythology and chose what would certainly have been a delicate topic, that of the slaughter of men on the isle of Lemnos – a myth that had not seriously been visited before in the history of opera, probably because of its crudity. Metastasio mentions a few sources in the preface to his libretto: '*Erudoto, libro VI, Erato; Ovidio, Valerio Flacco, Stazio, Apollodoro ed altri*'.³

Quoting classical sources is typical of Metastasio and I shall address this process more deeply (specifically for *Issipile*) in future studies. Yet it is possible here to introduce some of the main aspects. As often happens in this kind of work, the information drawn from literary sources is taken 'as it is' or changed and transformed by *inventions*, licenses that the librettist allows himself in order to re-organise the plot or the information given by the *corpus*. For instance, he may create accessory characters who are inspired by figures either appearing in the quoted works or not having an exact equivalent in the sources: this is the case of Hypsipyle's confidant Rhodope, the pirate Learchus and, the widow princess Eurynome, names used in the *corpus* for other mythological figures.⁴

² In his letter of 12th January 1732 to Bulgarelli, he writes: 'Non vi è cosa di nuovo della malattia della madre della padrona, onde l'Issipile si farà.' ('No news about the illness of our Lady's mother. So, *Issipile* will be performed') (Brunelli: III, 60-61). Marianna Benti Bulgarelli (Rome 1684 – 1734) was an Italian soprano also known as 'La Romanina'. She convinced Metastasio to leave his job as a lawyer in view of his talent as a librettist. She died in 1734 when travelling to Vienna in order to meet him.

³ Brunelli (I, 481).

⁴ Among others, Bellina (2003) identifies some of the several 'Eurynomes' in the *corpus*: for Valerius Flaccus (II: 136-138), Eurynome is the first Lemnian to receive the visit of Fama/PHEME (disguised as Neaera) and the false news on her husband's adulterous activities in Thrace; Eurynome appears also as a pre-Olympian figure, as the Oceanid nymph who gave shelter to Vulcan after falling from Olympus (Iliad XVIII, 394-405) and as a waiting woman of Penelope (Odyssey XVII, 495). Bellina also mentions the presence of 'Learchus' as the name of a traitor

The arrival of Jason and the Argonauts on Lemnos does not necessarily happen at the same time as the men's slaughter in the literary works that handle this myth, but Metastasio decides to make the two events coincide, thus adding to the drama: Hypsipyle, after having hidden her father in order to save him from the women's fury, has to welcome her fiancé –yet, she cannot openly tell him that she has saved her father, or both he and she could be discovered by the rebelling women and punished. On the other hand, Jason is horrified that the princess might have performed such a horrible crime, not knowing that she actually has not. Hypsipyle, as is the case with many Metastasian heroines, is split between filial piety and marital love (as she is bound to lose Jason if she cannot demonstrate that she has not killed her father). It is also true that Hypsipyle is not engaged to Jason in the *corpus*, as we shall later observe, but, in most versions of the myth, makes her acquaintance upon the Argonauts' unexpected arrival.

In future works I will take a deeper look into the use of sources and classical tradition by Metastasio for the creation of *Issipile*. Yet I would like to give here a schematic overview of Hypsipyle's presence in the *corpus*, at least in those passages that refer to both the men's slaughter in Lemnos and the arrival of Jason and the Argonauts on the island. I omit here the references to the Nemean saga, where Hypsipyle, at a later stage, serves king Lycurgus as the nurse of baby Opheltes. A more or less complete view of Hypsipyle's presence in Greco-Latin literature can be found in the encyclopaedic articles of Klügmann (1886-1890, I: 2853-2856), Jessen (1914, IX, 1: 436-443), Boulotis (1981-1999, VIII: 645-650), Dräger (2003: 40-41) and Harauer&Hunger (2006: 239-240). AA.VV. (2005) *Vicende di Ipsipile – Da Erodoto a Metastasio* contains the works presented at a congress about Hypsipyle in Urbino (5th-6th May 2003) and it is a considerable mine of information about our heroine throughout literature and iconography. The bibliography at the end of this article gives all the necessary references to the quoted works.

2.2. HYPPIPYLE IN GREEK LITERATURE

Hypsipyle (Ἵψιπύλη or Ἵψιπύλεια, poet. – even Ὑψώ in Aeschylus' *Hypsipyle*, f. 247) was mainly referred to as the daughter of king Thoas of Lemnos

in Herodotus IV, 160, 4, a son of Ino (Stattius *Theb.* III, 187) and a king of Phrygia, which Metastasio might have found in Corneille's *Bérénice*. The characterisation of Learchus not only as a traitor but also as a pirate, in Metastasio's libretto, draws from the presence of pirates in later events of Hypsipyle's myth, as we shall see later. The name of Rhodope (Rodope) also appears as that of an Oceanid sister of Eurynome and as the queen of Thrace who was turned by Zeus and Hera into a mountain (Ovid *Met.* VI, 87-89).

and, consequently, granddaughter of Dionysus. The earliest extant mention in the *corpus* is her appearance as the mother of Euneus in the *Iliad*, without any further reference to the dreaded events of Lemnos (VII, 469: Εὐνήος, τὸν ῥ' ἔτεχ' Ὑψιπύλη ὑπ' Ἰήσωνι, ποιμένι λαῶν). The *scholion* to this verse, though, does mention the men's slaughter by their jealous wives as a reaction to their having kidnapped Thracian women, inspired by Aphrodite. After the brief Homeric episode, Pindar is the first author who mentions the delicate situation of Lemnos. In his *Pythian* 4 (252 etc.), unlike most other sources, Jason and the Argonauts are said to visit the island during their journey back, having intercourse with the 'man-killer' (ἀνδροφόναι) Lemnian women. The reason of the slaughter is unclear: the scholiast to *Pythian* 4, 88b speaks of an unpleasant smell sent by Aphrodite to the women as a punishment for having neglected her worship.

The repulsion felt by their husbands and the consequent rejection had awoken, then, the women's rage. A later *scholion* (4, 449) does not mention the terrible smell: Aphrodite would have simply inspired hatred (μῖσος) in their husbands because of her forgotten worship –whence the women's fury. Moreover, the *scholion* to *Olympian* 4, 31a mentions the rescue of king Thoas by the princess, quoting Apollonius Rhodius. The saving of Hypsipyle's father (inside a chest or ark thrown into the sea) is also referred to by the *argumentum* b of the *Hypothesis Nemeonicarum*. Herodotus, in VI, 138, explains the meaning of the famous expression Λήμνια ἔργα as being synonymous with σχέτλια ἔργα but also adds an earlier crime of Lemnos: before the women agreed to kill all the men on the island, the Pelasgian men had already slaughtered their kidnapped Attic wives and all the children that originated from these unions. Thus, the Lemnian horrors would necessarily be doubled in meaning and effectiveness, as is confirmed also by the *scholion* to Euripides' *Hecuba*, 887, quoting Didymus Grammaticus as a source.

In Greek theatre, most works about Hypsipyle have been lost, with only a few fragments remaining. For instance, only two words remain of Aeschylus' *Hypsipyle*, but we have an idea of its contents thanks to the *scholia* to Apollonius Rhodius (I, 769-773) which, in turn, quote Herodorus the mythographer: in this *Hypsipyle*, the Argonauts are allowed to land only with the promise of sexual relationships with the women of Lemnos, who were about to receive Jason and his fellows armed and prepared for battle. It seems that a terrible battle (μάχην [...] ἰσχυράν) did take place, however, in Sophocles' *Lemniai* –also according to the scholiast of Apollonius Rhodius. Little do we know of Aeschylus' *Lemniai* (or *Lemnioi*), although it would most likely have focused on the men's slaughter as well. The infamous crime of the Lemnian women is mentioned briefly in both Aeschylus' *Coephorae* and Euripides'

Hecuba; it is referred to as an exemplary criminal case in *Coephorae* (vv. 631-634: κακῶν δὲ πρεσβεύεται τὸ Λήμιον / λόγῳ· γοῶται δὲ δημόθεν κατά- / πτυστον, ἤκασεν δὲ τις / τὸ δεινὸν αὖ Λημνίοισι πῆμασιν) and it is used as an example by Hecuba in order to prove to Agamemnon that women are also able to kill (vv. 886-887: τί δ'· οὐ γυναῖκες εἴλον Αἰγύπτου τέκνα / καὶ Λῆμον ἄρδην ἄρσένων ἐξέγκισαν;). Several comedies (all lost or very fragmentary) focused on the relationship between Lemnian women and Argonauts, like Aristophanes' *Lemnias* or Alexis' *Lemnia* –too fragmentary for us to form any hypotheses about their exact contents.

Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, of which many more fragments have survived, is another matter. The plot refers to the Nemean episode of her myth, but from her own words throughout the tragedy we gain useful information about her past in Lemnos, allegedly speaking twenty years after the events that she narrates. Fr. 752g features a nostalgic *souvenir* of Argo's arrival to Lemnos. In fr. 759a, Hypsipyle has been freed of her charges after having forgotten baby Opheltes on the lawn –where he has been killed by a terrible snake. This liberation has been made possible thanks to the protection of the Argive heroes, who had been led by Hypsipyle to the only remaining water source in the land after a long period of thirst. With a final *anagnorisis*, the former queen of Lemnos finds her own twin sons, now adults, and briefly informs Euneus of the main past events: at the time of the political unrest, she refused to kill her father Thoas. Thus, having to flee the island, she reached Nemea sold as a slave by some pirates. Despite the interest of this fragmentary work so intensely related to our heroine, Metastasio could not have had access to it, as the papyri were found at the beginning of the 20th century.

I have already mentioned Apollonius Rhodius: his well-known epic work, the *Argonautica*, contains the first strong literary appearance of Hypsipyle in relationship to Jason and his arrival on Lemnos (I: 609-909) –certainly one of the major influences on Metastasio's adaptation of the myth along with the Latin works of Valerius Flaccus and Statius, as we shall see later on, although one not explicitly mentioned by the author in his *argomento* to *Issipile*. Apollonius places the arrival of the Argonauts one year after the Lemnian crime, which he describes in a flashback: the men, feeling hatred towards their wives, had rejected them and felt 'wild love' (τρηχὺν ἔρον, v. 613) for their Thracian slaves. This change in their hearts was caused by Aphrodite, whose worship had been neglected for a long time.

Thus, the enraged women had decided to kill all males on the island, including their sons –in order to prevent being judged later by them. Hypsipyle saved her father by throwing him into the sea in a box, to be rescued later by fishermen. Jason and the Argonauts were not welcome at first: the women, as

in Sophocles and Aeschylus, awaited them armed and looking like ‘raw-meat-eating Bacchants’ (v. 636). The exchange of messages between the two parties would end up in a peaceful meeting between the hero and the queen: the women acknowledge the fact that they desperately need offspring and this implies having to find new sexual partners after all men have been slaughtered. This argument had been advocated by the elderly Polyxo, the same who had instigated the crime the year before.

The meeting between Hypsipyle and Jason in Apollonius Rhodius gives the reader (and Jason himself) a second version of the facts, actually a new ‘official’ version that Hypsipyle considers useful in order not to give a bad impression to the visitor: the women have expelled all the men from Lemnos as these had migrated to Thrace in order to live their new romances with foreigner wives –thus, the men had demanded to carry their sons with them. At the end of the narration, Hypsipyle invites Jason to stay and offers him the throne of Lemnos, which he kindly refuses. The joy caused by the new relationships between Lemnian women and Argonauts and the restored rites of Aphrodite continue until Heracles, mocking Jason’s *otium*, reminds his fellows that they have to go on with their expedition. The hero departs, leaving Hypsipyle pregnant and asking her to send any male offspring to his parents as a *souvenir*.

The *scholia* to Apollonius Rhodius make references to the famous ‘bad smell’ associated with the Lemnian women –which the poet omits. The scholiast also quotes a different version, that of Myrsilus of Methymna: the smell had not been sent by Aphrodite but by a jealous Medea during the Argonauts’ journey back from the Colchis –more precisely, in the form of a φάρμακον thrown onto the island by the sorceress. Moreover, the *scholion* to v. 620 gives three reasons for Hypsipyle to have saved the king from the slaughter –he was, after all, her father (the motif of filial piety); he was already ‘elderly’ (πρεσβύτερος); and, last but not least, he had not participated in the men’s hatred towards their wives.

The interesting *Argonautica Orphica*, showing clear inspiration in the work of Apollonius Rhodius, also includes the Argonauts’ visit to Lemnos, even though quite briefly (vv. 471-483). The author sees the story of the Lemnian women as superfluous (ἀλλὰ τί σοι περὶ τῶνδε πολλὸν λόγον ἀμφοδὸν εἰπεῖν... v. 476) and summarises it in a few verses. The men were murdered because of their arrogant rejection and ‘illustrious Hypsipyle, the most beautiful of the women there’ (ἡ κλυτὴ Ὑψιπύλεια / ἔλδομέναις κραίνεσκε, γυναικῶν εἶδος ἀρίστη, vv. 474-475) ruled the man-free island. Hypsipyle did not seem to fall in love with Jason, but was rather seduced by the hero. In this work it is Orpheus (and not Heracles) who convinces the Argonauts to continue their quest after their intercourse with the Lemnian women.

Other brief mentions of Hypsipyle in Lemnos are found in the mythological *Bibliotheca* of Apollodorus (or Pseudo-Apollodorus), as well as in most paroemiographers. In *Bibl.*I, ix, 17 a summarisation of the Argonauts' visit to Lemnos is provided: the slaughter's cause was jealousy; the men had been having relationships with their Thracian slaves –also because of their wives' bad smell, sent by Aphrodite. Still, Apollodorus points out that the women had neglected the goddess' worship, not the men. Hypsipyle is remembered here, as well, for having saved her father. The paroemiographers have given several definitions of the famous Λήμνιον κακόν, mostly without important differences. Zenobius (IV, 91) mentions both the slaughter of men and the earlier murder of the Attic wives and their children, although he suggests that the 'bad smell' (δυσσομία/δυσωδία/*odor*) might also have been an originating cause of the proverb. Interestingly, Nicholas of Damascus (III, 18), already in Roman times, does not mention the rescue of Thoas by his daughter –nor the existence of a twin to Euneus. Theologian Michael Apostolius, in modern times, defines the κακόν in XII, 96 (translated into Latin as *Lemnium malum* o *Lemnia mala*), quoting both Myrsilus' version of the bad smell as a product of Medea's actions, and Caucalus of Chios' version (the δυσωδία was sent by Aphrodite as a punishment for having neglected her worship). Shockingly, Apostolius states that Hypsipyle was the only woman to save her *husband*, Thoas (μόνη δὲ ἡ Ὑψιπύλη ἔσωσε τὸν ἑαυτῆς ἄνδρα Θόαντα). The other paroemiographers (Diogenian. VI 2.10, Georg. Cypr. cod- Mosqu. IV 13, Macar. V 60, Photius, etc.) give similar definitions of the proverb.⁵

2.3. HYSIPYLE IN LATIN LITERATURE

Propertius gives in his elegy I, 15 the image of a Hypsipyle à la Penelope, faithfully waiting for her husband Jason: *nec sic Aesoniden rapientibus anxia ventis / Hypsipyle vacuo constitit in thalamo: / Hypsipyle nullos post illos sensit amores, / ut semel Haemonio tabuit hospitio* (vv. 17-20). This Roman image of the Lemnian princess quickly established itself as her most typical portrait: that of an abandoned wife looking forward to the never-happening return of Jason. This concept would explode in the massive expressiveness of Ovid's *Her.* VI: a true 'tragic' monologue in the form of an imaginary letter, where Hypsipyle's words find a new perspective. The queen of Lemnos regrets having heard about Jason's accomplished quest from rumours rather than from a letter of his (*fama prior quam littera*, v. 9). This gossiping in-

⁵ For a deeper view in this respect see Dorati (2005).

cludes news about a possible romance of the hero with a barbarian –Medea, of course. In a flashback, Hypsipyle remembers how Jason had stayed two years with her (longer than in other versions of the *corpus*).

In fact, he left with a vow of faithfulness on his lips (*Vir tuus hinc abeo, uir tibi semper ero*, v. 60), leaving her on the island, praying for his well-being. Ironically, her prayers did succeed, but it was another woman who enjoyed the results of them. Ovid's Hypsipyle makes yet one last attempt to convince Jason to come back. After all, she is the proud daughter of Thoas and grand-daughter of Bacchus (vv. 114-118), while Medea has obscure origins. Plus, Medea is a sorceress and has betrayed her own father. Hypsipyle cannot conceive, then, why the rival has triumphed over her much more evident virtue. Enraged, Hypsipyle curses Jason and becomes a pseudo-Medea, with the famous expression *Medeae Medea forem* (v. 151). The almost 'baroque' dramatic flair of the *Heroides* has necessarily had an impact on operatic literature (see also the case of Arianna and Monteverdi). Hypsipyle is also briefly mentioned by Ovid in *Met.* XIII, 399-401.

Hyginus gives, in *Fab.* XV, a standard version of the crime of Lemnos where Venus is not only the inspirer of the men's passion for the Thracian slaves (which will ignite their wives' jealousy) but also the inspirer of the slaughter (*Veneris impulsu coniuratae*), as is the case in Valerius Flaccus and Statius. Hypsipyle saves her father: not in a box/ark but on a little ship that will bring him to Tauris. The Argonauts arrive *interim* (which fits the timing chosen by Metastasio) and stay *plures dies* until Hercules insists on the pending quest. Thoas' rescue is discovered by the other women and Hypsipyle, fleeing, is kidnapped by pirates who sell her as a slave to king Lycurgus of Nemea. The filial piety of Hypsipyle, Metastasio's starting point for the dramaturgy of *Issipile*, is also remembered by Hyginus in *Fab.* CCLIV, a list of the most 'righteous' figures in the myth. The reason of her inclusion is, indeed, the rescue of her father: *Hypsipyle Thoantis filia patri, cui uitam concessit*.

Valerius Flaccus and Statius are surely Metastasio's strongest influences in the shaping of *Issipile*, and the two largest appearances of the Lemnian saga in the Latin *corpus*.⁶ Valerius Flaccus' *Argonauticon*, book II, features this episode in a similar length to the passage in Apollonius Rhodius and begins with the explanation of Lemnos' bond with the god Vulcan, fallen from heaven onto the island and hosted by its inhabitants. Their friendship with the deity would cause

⁶ Especially when it comes to the filial piety of *Issipile* in Metastasio, Raffaelli (2005) points out the importance of Valerius Flaccus and Statius as pillars of classical tradition where the piety of Hypsipyle is shown, indeed, in its strongest perspective.

the decay of Venus' worship after the discovery of her liaison with Mars. After v. 101 (*struit illa nefas...*), Venus appears as a goddess of vengeance, practically a Fury. With the help of Fame (Pheme), the offended deity is able to inspire fatal jealousy in the women's hearts –for the men are to return from the war supposedly accompanied by new Thracian slave-concubines. The description of the rivals (*picta manus ustoque placet sed barbara mento...*, v. 150) is clearly reflected in Eurynome's entrance speech in *Issipile's* first act and enrages the Lemnian women –the false welcome succeeds in confusing the returning husbands, in a context of dances and feasts. Venus is able to ignite the slaughter as the men sleep or lie drunk on their beds, all crudely narrated by Valerius. Even some of the Thracian women are murdered. Only Hypsipyle, *patriae laus una* (v. 243), saves her father by organising his escape on a chariot of Bacchus' temple, decorated with wreaths and festoons (also an image taken by Metastasio for the stage decorations). Metastasio will also adopt the silent, mysterious forest where Thoas hides later on. As in Hyginus, Thoas sails on an old ship after a dramatic farewell scene (*Quam, genitor, patriam...*, vv. 290-299).

The Argonauts arrive shortly after the Lemnian crime. Here, Polyxo (who, in Valerius Flaccus, plays the role of a seer and priestess of Apollo) recommends welcoming the visitors to the island: Vulcan and Venus are keen on this eventual new union and, after all, the visit is to be profitable as long as the women are still of fertile age. Thus, the heroes disembark without further problems and the altar of Venus finally has a new fire.⁷ The Queen falls in love with Jason and a spectacular storm forces the Argonauts to stay (vv. 357-369). As in other versions of the *corpus*, Hercules accuses Jason of a lazy stay on Lemnos and his departure causes much distress among the Lemnian women. Hypsipyle, in tears, gives him the sword of Thoas and a cape embroidered with stories (including the rescue of Thoas). The words she uses in order to refer to the child she is already bearing, 'the Jason that you leave in my womb' (*hunc utero quem linquis Iasona nostro...*, v. 424), are especially touching. But Hypsipyle is destined to remain abandoned as Jason goes on to his legendary quest.

In Statius' *Thebaid*, Hypsipyle appears as a relevant 'guest star' at the end of book IV and receives special attention throughout book V. Even though the context belongs to the Nemean saga of her myth (with the death of baby Opheltes after meeting the Argive heroes and the *anagnórisis* of her two twin sons), Hypsipyle gives an extended, dramatic summarisation of her adven-

⁷ For a deeper analysis on the ritual of the 'new fire' on Lemnos, see the already classic article of Burkert (1970).

tures in Lemnos, although slightly unwillingly at first: as in Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, she has been thanked by the Argive men for having led them to the only remaining source of water, thus quenching their thirst –but now they are curious to know more about this mysterious woman who definitely does not look like a simple nurse, nor a mere slave of king Lycurgus. In tears of shame, Hypsipyle reminds Adrastus that it is not easy to 'revive such enormous wounds' (using an expression that leads to Vergil's Aeneas,⁸ *immania uulnera* [...] *integrare*, vv. 29-30). In fact, she briefly mentions the terrible crime of Lemnos and the rescue of her father even before stating clearly her identity (*Hoc memorasse sat est: claro generata Thoante / seruitium Hypsipyle uestri fero capta Lycurgi*, vv. 38-39). Yet, Adrastus insists on a more accurate flashback on how she saved her father Thoas and escaped the island. The following long speech of Hypsipyle, therefore, comes as a sort of therapy: *Dulce loqui miseris ueteresque reducere questus*, v. 48.

Again, the neglected worship of Venus had caused the goddess' rage: as a consequence, she instilled frigidity in the hearts of wives and husbands, their beds being governed by *Odia*, *Furor* and *Discordia* rather than by *Hymen*, muted by Venus herself. Moreover, the men began a journey to Thrace, leaving wives and children on Lemnos. It is the old Polyxo who incites the other women to rebel (v. 89 et seq.) as if possessed by a fury. She explains that murdering all men (and all male children, in case they demand an explanation in the future) is the only solution –Polyxo herself shows her four children grabbing her breast and says it will not be easy for her either (*plena mihi domus atque ingens, en cernite, sudor*, v. 124).⁹ Venus had apparently talked to her in a dream, promising better and more worthy unions if they had succeeded to slain their husbands. The Lemnian women revolt at the thought of their men probably betraying them with new Thracian wives (*Bistonides ueniunt fortasse maritae*, v. 142). They promise to perform the slaughter in a nearby forest (again, the forest of Metastasio's *Issipile*) –even with the sacrifice of

⁸ See Álvarez & Iglesias: 'Estacio, queriendo que se entienda que la narración de Hipsípila tiene para la *Tebaida* la misma importancia que la de Eneas ante Dido en *Eneida*, hace que la lemnia responda a la petición de Adrasto (5.29-30): *immania uulnera, rector, / integrare iubes*, lo que es un claro eco del *infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem* de *Aen.* 2.3 [...]. *Palabras sabias de mujeres*, F. De Martino & C. Morenilla (edd.), Bari, Levante Editori, 2013, pp. 15-45.

⁹ Polyxo mentions here Procne as an example of homicidal mother using mountain Rhodope as an adjective: *Rhodopeia coniunx*. 'Rodope' will be used in fact later on as the name of Hypsipyle's confidant by Metastasio. Curiously, in Lactantius Placidus (*In Statii Thebaida commentum* V, 150-151) the breast-feeding is questioned by the author: if it is true that their men have already being missing for three years is it possible that Lemnian women are still breast-feeding their children?

Charops's child. Horrified, Hypsipyle comments, here, how luckier the Lemnian men would have been if they had died in the war instead of returning to the island, not knowing the terrible destiny awaiting them.

The women fall on the sleeping men after a feigned feast celebrating their return: wives, sisters and daughters fulfill their horrible promise. Even two half-brothers of Hypsipyle and her own fiancé Gias are murdered; three family members who are not mentioned elsewhere in the *corpus*. The sight of Alcimede holding her father's head shocks the princess, who runs in order to save her own father. Bacchus, father of the king and grandfather of our heroine, helps their escape –although his prayers to Jupiter have not prevented the massacre from taking place. He guides the two to the shore, where Thoas is put onto a little ship and sent to sail the seas –eventually saving himself. Back to the city, the anguishing, ashamed women realise their deeds and try to hide the corpses of their men. Only spirits remain to accompany the lonely females on the island (*spirant [...] manes*, v. 312). Hypsipyle, meanwhile, has put up a funeral pyre as if she had actually killed her father –hoping to avoid the other women's fury– while she is quickly crowned as the new queen of Lemnos.

The arrival of the Argonauts takes place shortly after, with the added complication of a strong storm sent by Jupiter and the Lemnian women attacking from the city walls. As the heroes finally disembark (Hypsipyle makes a typical 'catalogue' of the most distinguished guests, such as Theseus, Hylas, Admetus, Orpheus, Castor and Pollux: v. 431-444), Venus and Juno inspire the women with trust and attraction towards the Argonauts (*Ergo iterum Venus et tacitis corda aspera flammis / Lemniadum pertemptat Amor. Tunc regia Iuno / arma habitusque uirum...*, vv. 445-447). In Statius, curiously, Hypsipyle is conquered by Jason against her will, thanks to his seducing manners (*testor ut externas non sponte aut crimine taedas / attigerim –scit cura deum– etsi blandus Iason / uirginibus dare uincla nouis*, vv. 455-457) and gives birth to twin brothers –whose fate she currently ignores. In her tale, she explains to the Argives that they must be around twenty years old by now (*iam plena quater quinquennia pergunt*, v. 466), if it is true that Lycastus, to whom she had entrusted the babies, has raised them properly.

After Jason and the Argonauts leave, desperation falls on the women of the island. Shortly after, they discover that their queen had actually saved king Thoas, now ruling on his brother's island, Chios (vv. 486-487). The women reflect thus on the situation: if the massacre was god-induced, and Hypsipyle did not participate in the crime, then she is impious, not having obeyed the divine frenzy. In this case, she is not worthy to sit on the throne. The queen flees, but she is captured by pirates and brought to Nemea, where she is sold to king Lycurgus as a slave, becoming the nurse of Opheltes, the king's son.

This extended speech of Hypsipyle has a fatal consequence: Opheltes, left sleeping on the grass, is attacked and killed by a massive, terrifying snake. This becomes the central fact of Hypsipyle's Nemean saga, treated by Statius and other authors in works that I will deal with in future research but not here, as they do not directly relate to the Metastasian contents chosen for *Issipile*.

3. *ISSIPILE* IN 1732

Metastasio created *Issipile* following the footprints of his previous works, which had already contributed to shape the paradigm of *dramma per musica* for most of the eighteenth century. Titles such as *Artaserse*, *Demofonte* and *Didone Abbandonata* had become standards by the time Metastasio reached Vienna—for example, libretti with a clear structure, both external and internal, a careful selection of topics, a dignity of poetical language and the abolition of additional comical roles as a decoration to the dramatic *personaggi*, which was a typical trait of opera in the *Seicento*. This model does not originate from nothing, though. As it is known, the reformation of 'corrupted' late seventeenth century theatre had been initiated by the Arcadian academics—and Zeno, most prominently, made an effort to purify the structure and the contents of opera, a polemic genre that did not enjoy a good reputation among all Arcadians. Zeno himself, despite his work on the genre, did not believe opera was worthy of being considered a real tragic genre, or theatre interesting enough to be taken into account. It was Metastasio, Zeno's successor in Vienna, who was responsible for turning opera (and the opera libretto specifically) into a literary work deserving of attention; a dignified genre.¹⁰

Of great interest is, of course, the *argomento* preceding the libretto. Here, Metastasio summarises the intricate plot and presents the characters. Here is our own English translation of the original, to be found in Brunelli (I, 481):

The inhabitants of Lemnos, an island in the Aegean Sea, first busy fighting in neighbouring Thrace then delighted by the possession of their own conquests and by the love of their attractive female foes, for a long time did not care to return to their homeland and to the wives they had left behind. Thus, the latter, irritated by such cruel contempt, turned their spurned love into ferocious disdain. Eventually, Thoas, king and leader of the people of Lemnos, who wished to be

¹⁰ Metastasio and his work are the focus of a very large bibliography. As an introduction, see the encyclopaedic articles of Neville (2001²) and Leopold (1994-2007). Brunelli (1943-1954, 5 vol.) is still the reference edition of Metastasio's works. Of strong interest are the works of Elena Sala di Felice, Mario Valente and Raffaele Mellace.

present at the wedding of his daughter Hypsipyle to Jason, prince of Thessaly, persuaded the other men to return to their homeland. This news was not well received by the women of Lemnos, for besides the memory of the old affronts, the rumour spread that the unfaithful husbands would return bringing the hated rivals of Thrace before the sight of the betrayed wives. Disdain and jealousy thus degenerating into fury, they prepared and executed a terrible plan: to kill them all at the moment of their arrival, feigning a tender welcome and making themselves busy celebrating the festivities of Bacchus –so that the mayhem of that noisy celebration would cover and obscure the turmoil and screaming that would arise from such a slaughter. Hypsipyle, who abhorred the idea of shedding her father's blood and did not have the chance to warn Thoas of the danger before he arrived in Lemnos, copied the anger of the other women but received and hid her father, claiming to have slaughtered him already. But this pious act came at great expense to the virtuous princess, for she was first rejected and refused by Jason, who believed that she had killed her father, and then, as the truth emerged, she was exposed to the disdain and anger of the other disillusioned women. Leader and inciter of the women's pact was the ferocious Eurynome, whose disdain had other, hidden reasons besides those held by the others. Learchus, her own son, after having for a long time loved Hypsipyle and having asked in vain for her hand in marriage, eventually tried, unsuccessfully, to kidnap her. Thus, forced to flee the anger of King Thoas, he had escaped Lemnos and spread the rumour that he had killed himself in desperation. Believing that her son had actually killed himself, Eurynome harboured deep hatred towards the King –thus, when the men returned to Lemnos, she had been able to use public reasons in order to facilitate her personal revenge. Meanwhile, Learchus, exiled and desperate, became a pirate leader, but despite time and distance, could not forget his passion for Hypsipyle. Having known that Jason was travelling to celebrate his planned wedding with her, he deliberately hid himself in the palace after arriving at the shores of Lemnos with his followers, with the intent of kidnapping the princess again, or at least of disturbing the wedding. The intrigues of the infatuated Learchus form the largest part of Hypsipyle's travails. But she sees how in the end, through several actions, her father is safely rescued, the evil schemer punished, the turmoil in Lemnos quelled and Jason convinced of her innocence, becoming then her husband. (Sources: Herodotus, book VI, Erato; Ovid, Valerius Flaccus, Statius, Apollodorus and others). The action unfolds in Lemnos.

The macrostructure of *Issipile* is more or less standard and respects the usual scheme of the genre. The libretto is divided into three acts composed of a series of recitatives/arias and a final *coro*. The *recitativi*, as usual, alternate freely lines of seven and eleven syllables (*settenari / endecasillabi*), rhyming normally only in the last two lines of an important section. A line can be split among several characters, creating a quick, nervous rhythm corresponding to scenes with intense action, as in I, 13:

GIASONE

Chi?

EURINOME

La tua sposa.

ISSIPILE

(Oh dio!)

GIASONE

Parla. Difendi,

Idol mio, la tua gloria.

Arias are written in the usual *da capo* structure. Metrics vary but lines rarely exceed eight syllables. *Da capo* arias are indeed a tiny *microcosmus* of a maximum of eight to ten lines where at least two contrasting concepts are exposed. The special skill of Metastasio is that of creating little masterpieces of elegant, vibrant, yet clear language in each of his arias.¹¹ Some of the arias, instead of commenting on stage action or the direct feelings of the *personaggio*, focus on ethical-philosophical reflections, like Rodope's aria from the first act, when she replies to evil Learco, who despises her pity and her attempt to warn him about the massacre. As an answer, Rodope gives a lesson of psychology that is rare in contemporary libretti:

Perché l'altrui misura
ciascun dal proprio core,
confonde il nostro errore
la colpa e la virtù.

Se credi tu con pena
pietà nel petto mio,
credo con pena anch' io
che un traditor sei tu. (Parte)

[People measure other people's hearts
Only from their own hearts. This is why
We mistakenly confuse guilt and virtue.

If you can scarcely believe
The compassion in my breast,
I shall then scarcely believe
That you betrayed me. (Exit)]

¹¹ The work of Benzi (2005) is highly recommended when it comes to the technical perspective of Metastasio's operatic arias.

Often, in *Metastasio*, the focus moves on to the exaltation of virtue, love and humanity. In other cases, the comment on a *personaggio*'s doubtfulness becomes the key to the libretto's dramaturgy: *Metastasio*'s heroes and heroines are constantly fighting their own doubts. While other librettists of his time give more importance to pomp, superficial effects and *horror vacui*, *Metastasio* cares about *message*, about human/social meaningfulness.

Quite exceptionally, *Issipile* has no duets; individualism is predominant in this libretto. The situation is hectic and problematic (all the action takes place overnight and the socio-political unrest of the island adds confusion), so love duets probably would have seemed inappropriate. Instead, the poet decided to include a pure gem of tragedy, a hit of *kátharsis* that is necessary to reach the obligatory (at least in baroque *opera seria*) *lieto fine*. In a final scene worthy of Hollywood, with all characters on stage, Learco –responsible for most of the troubles throughout the opera– threatens to kill king Toante aboard his ship. He demands *Issipile* in exchange and, as this is happening, his widow mother, *Eurinome*, appears. She is an incredibly strong, feminist, modern character in the libretto, a towering creation of *Metastasio* who does not appear as such in the *corpus* of mythology, except the similar figure of *Polyxo* in *Statius' Thebaid*, the Lemnian woman who instigates the massacre.

In a very complicated exchange of dialogues, where *Giasone* threatens to kill *Eurinome*, *Learco* has a sudden flash, a moment of consciousness that falls on him like a sword. In very few words, he shows his mother and everybody else a last streak of (anti)-heroism. Doubt and regret, weakness and guilt: *Learco* wounds himself with his weapon, a self-inflicted stab intended as a purifying, purging act. He is not interested anymore in being forgiven. And as a testament, his last words are: 'My death shall be similar to my life'. Immediately after, he throws himself in the water. It is a strong statement, almost Shakespearean: a hectic life deserves a hectic end. It was rather daring of *Metastasio* to stage a suicide in only his second drama for the Court, a decision which surely shocked more than one person in the audience (III, 9):

Non spero
e non voglio perdono. Il morir mio
sia simile alla vita. (*Si getta in mare*)

I do not hope
for forgiveness, nor do I want it.
My death shall be similar to my life. (*He jumps into the sea*)

Our poet was also concerned with elegance and symmetry. *Issipile* is a fine example of balance as regards the *dramatis personae*. There are six characters,

three men and three women (as occurs in *Didone Abbandonata*) –all of them with clear psychological features. Princess Hypsipyle (Issipile) is the undisputed heroine, torn between love for Jason and love for her father, trying to maintain sanity in a social context that is literally becoming crazy (the women of Lemnos plotting and performing the massacre of all men, a real social revolution against male power), showing virtue and firmness, yet still doubting, confused by her own weakness and her own strength. Her confidant, Rhodope (Rodope), not present in the *corpus*, is discrete and collaborative as is typical for a *seconda donna*, but shows noble feelings of love towards the ungrateful Learco –a nobility of heart that is often a trademark of Metastasio’s female characters. Eurynome (Eurinome), the widowed princess who leads the plot against the men of Lemnos, is another outstanding creation of our poet’s pen. In some traits she is similar to the (yet) very distant and romantic Azucena in Verdi’s *Il trovatore*, as Paolo Cattelan comments in his essay about the libretto and its dramaturgy.¹²

The men are even more contrasting in their personalities. King Thoas (Toante) is dignified, noble, firm. He shows an immense love for his daughter, to whom he had given the power on the island during his absence. His words are mature and he tries to keep calm even when his life is being threatened. It is also true that, as much as the figure of Hypsipyle relates, in the Viennese imperial context, to that of Maria Theresa, wise Thoas strongly relates to the figure of Emperor Charles VI, thus creating a link between politics, literature and music –although it is never just vulgar propaganda: rather, it is a refined allegory of the Court and its hierarchies. Prince Jason (Giasone) is also an example of heroic firmness and sentimental honesty; although we could agree with Cattelan (2005) that his lines are probably not of the brightest inspiration, but are nonetheless elegant.

The real star here is Learchus (Learco), the tormented son of a tormented widow (Eurinome). Exiled and hidden, converted into a pirate: criminal, evil, treacherous, insidious. A true shadow, a heavy stain on a kingdom that is already falling into pieces, all because of the lack of common sense and measure, as is often Metastasio’s message. Learco is ‘evil’ and has no regrets about it, as he confirms in I, 7:

Di colpa in colpa
tanto il passo inoltrai
ch’ogni rimorso è intempestivo ormai.

[I have been wandering so much already from guilt to guilt,
that any regret would be in vain now.]

¹² Cattelan (2005: 238).

In any case, what is really striking in *Issipile* as well as in other Metastasio *libretti*, and what really makes him unique in his time, is this ability to portray, to humanize. Metastasio creates a landscape of human feelings that is only possible through his mastery of words and forms. A Metastasio libretto was, no doubt, a high-quality product of its time. And as such, it was liable to be used, reused, misused, recycled, tortured, combined, extrapolated and put into music by composers, singers and impresarios, sometimes doing honour to it, sometimes not.

At last, we should not forget to mention the meticulous attention with which Metastasio supervised or envisaged the technical aspects of the staging, at least when it came to the first musical settings of his works, when he was personally present and, almost always, loved to interact with the composer. In the case of *Issipile*, Metastasio never mentions Conti in his letters, but he does comment staging technicalities in a very precise way, sending a copy of the score to his dear friend Marianna Benti Bulgarelli, to whom he also gives very clear stage instructions for an eventual performance in Rome (the emphasis is mine):

La seconda scena dell'atto primo, che torna per prima dell'atto secondo e deve necessariamente esser la medesima, bisogna che rappresenti nel prospetto **un bosco d'alberi isolati e praticabili; dovendosi fra quelli nascondere più d'un personaggio**. Nella scena seconda dell'atto secondo bisogna avvertire **che le tende militari siano solamente dalla parte del primo cembalo**, e non altrove. Nell'ultima scena dell'atto terzo bisogna avvertire **che la nave principale venga molto innanzi, che sia vicina al laterale del primo cembalo quanto si può, e che sia comoda per due persone che parlano dalla poppa di essa**.¹³

It is clear that Metastasio cared about the way his works were performed, and his letters reveal that he was often saddened to hear about his libretti being misused throughout Europe: cut, abridged, *pasticcianti* with extracts by other poets. But, of course, copyright was not an option in the eighteenth century, and poetical/musical works were liable to be taken, used and manoeuvred *a piacere del consumatore*.

4. MUSICAL ASPECTS: CONTI AND HIS SCORE

Issipile was premiered in 1732 on a little stage of the Imperial Court in Vienna.¹⁴ The libretto printed by Van Ghelen does not mention the original cast, but

¹³ Letter XXXVIII of 19th January 1732 (Brunelli: III, 61-63).

¹⁴ The opera was performed again in Hamburg in 1737 as *Sieg der Kindlichen Liebe, Oder Issipile, Printzeßin von Lemnos*. It featured German verses paraphrasing the original recitatives

it mentions the two choreographers for the three *balletti* that conclude each corresponding act (Simon Pietro Levassori della Motta for *balletto* I and III and Alessandro Phillebois for *balletto* II), as well as the composer of the music for these *balletti*, Nicola Matteis –actually Nicola Matteis Jr., also known as ‘the Young’ (b. late 1670s-d. Vienna 1737), son of the seventeenth-century composer and violinist Nicola Matteis and working in Vienna since 1700, initially under Fux. It was indeed typical in Vienna at this time, that each opera featured *balletti* composed by musicians who were specially hired by the Court for instrumental music. Matteis Jr. had been writing *balletti* for Viennese operas since 1714.

Issipile did not achieve considerable success in its time, and in 1732 was granted only three performances at the Court (a fact on which Metastasio comments ironically in his letters).¹⁵ (It is true, though, as Metastasio writes, that the Emperor personally acknowledged his liking of the work).¹⁶ This relative fiasco might have influenced the future appeal of this libretto to other composers.¹⁷ Still, the premiere was performed by a fantastic cast of well-known singers in Vienna, as listed on the full score’s manuscript which I have used to elaborate a critical edition (folio 1v).¹⁸ Thoas/Toante was tenor Gaetano Borghi (Bologna 1686-Vienna 1777), who sang at the Court from

and almost all of the original arias were kept in Italian. The manuscript of the music can be found, for instance, at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz. A digitalisation of the libretto can be consulted at Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Preussischer Kulturbesitz): <<http://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/dms/werkansicht/?PPN=PPN688556744>> (04/06/2013). Further study on this version of Conti’s *Issipile* would definitely be of interest.

¹⁵ ‘Martedì sera si recitò l’ultima volta la mia *Issipile* a Corte con un concorso senza esempio. I padroni clementissimi non hanno voluto dare un disgusto ad una compagnia di cavalieri che recitano assai male il *Cicisbeo* sconcolato del Fagioli, commedia recitata in Napoli, e di cui vedemmo la prova in casa dell’abate Andrea Belvedere. Avrebbero potuto farne fare una recita di meno, per averne una di più dell’*Issipile*, come tutta la Corte, la città ed essi medesimi avrebbero voluto; ma, schiavi della loro grandezza, hanno creduto che questa sarebbe stata una chiara disapprovazione della cavalleria comica, e si sono sacrificati a sentirne tre recite...’ [Letter XXXIX, 23rd February 1732, in Brunelli: III, 63-64].

¹⁶ ‘Finita l’ultima recita dell’*Issipile*, l’augustissimo padrone, nello scendere dalla sua sedia, mi venne all’incontro, ed in presenza di tutta la Corte ebbe la clemenza di mostrare d’essere contento della mia fatica, esprimendosi: Che l’opera era bella molto; ch’era assai bene riuscita, e che egli era di me soddisfatto. Grazia tanto distinta quanto difficile ad ottenere dal nostro padrone, così sostenuto in pubblico che, quando si degna di farla, è certamente fatta a bello studio e non a caso...’ [Brunelli, *ibid.*]

¹⁷ In fact, *Issipile* was set to music relatively seldom compared to other *libretti* by Metastasio: only 19 times that we know of.

¹⁸ Ferri-Benedetti (2011). Our main source was a manuscript in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna (A-Wgm Mus. Hs. 17240 1-3): three tomes decorated with gold, in very

1720 to 1740 and also premiered the role of Fenicio in 1731 for Metastasio's *Demetrio*, the poet's operatic debut in Vienna. Hypsipyle/Issipile was sung by soprano Teresa Reutter (b. 1705), daughter of organist and composer Georg Reutter *senior* (Vienna 1656-1738). Eurynome/Eurinome was sung by 'La Perroni', actually Anna d'Ambreville (b. Modena 1693-d. ca. 1760), an Italian alto married to Giovanni Perroni, cellist and composer (b. near Novara 1688-d. Vienna 1748). Jason/Giasone was sung by alto castrato Pietro Casati (b. Milan 1684-d. Vienna 1745), also a composer, who sang at the Viennese Court for a long period (1717-1740). Rhodope/Rodope was a soprano called 'La Pisani', about whom I have not yet been able to find more information. The complex role of Learchus/Learco was given to alto castrato Giambattista Minelli (b. Bologna 1687), also a favourite of the Roman audience.

The music by Conti, although it is slowly being rediscovered, still remains unknown to wider audiences. The only exhaustive work on Conti was written by Hermine Weigel Williams and provides an overview of the abilities of the composer.¹⁹ The music written for *Issipile* (his last work before his death in 1732) is never banal. In fact, it is rich of surprises and rhetorical asides, always in tight relationship with the text and its nuances. The relatively simple scoring (only four instrumental lines throughout the score –three for some of the arias) does not necessarily imply a poverty of sound or invention. Moreover, string parts would have been doubled, when possible, by oboes and bassoon in *tutti* sections.

The *Sinfonia*, previously published in the early 1980s by Williams,²⁰ is particularly striking, written in an Italian structure with three movements. The initial *allegro* features stormy 16th-note figures of an unquestionable Italian taste (see fig. 1), alternating *forte* and *piano* sections (respectively with and without oboes in the upper line). Starting at bar 39 there is a lively fugue which alternates, eventually, the two first *piano and forte* motives. The middle *largo* is one of singular beauty, despite its short length (nine bars), probably intended as a violin solo –judging from the intimate, yet very ornamented setting.²¹ A very danceable *allegro* completes the *Sinfonia*, this time with unison violins and a lively 2/4 time.

precise, clean hand-writing and arias written out in full (i.e. written-out *da capi*, probably in order to avoid turning pages back during the performance).

¹⁹ Williams (1999).

²⁰ Williams (1983).

²¹ 'The *largo* movement of the Overture is in a minor key and has a very lyrical melodic part for the first violin, the nature of which suggests it was intended for a solo violin. The other

The recitatives present some interesting features, compared to standard contemporary writing. The most dramatic moments are underlined by daring modulations and unexpected broken cadences —there are many examples of this throughout the opera. This kind of writing makes the long recitatives more interesting for the audience, adding to the dramatic side of the action. Moreover, Conti adds a large number of *recitativi accompagnati* in this opera, quite a modern feature for its time. Eurinome's first entrance, for instance, is crowned by a strong *accompagnato*, underlining the theme of vengeance and anger that accompanies the character throughout the whole opera (see fig. 2)

The arias are of a high musical quality. Even with a set of four (or three) instrumental lines Conti devises lively, interesting and curious solutions of counterpoint and melodic intertwining. The plays between the two violin lines are richly inspired (as in the A-Section of Toante's 'So che riduce a piangere' or Learco's 'Chi mai non vide'); slow, dramatic arias are beautifully crafted, with a special sense of the melodic, vocal line that is a trademark of Conti. Toante's second aria ('Ritrova in quei detti') contains incredibly rich contrapuntal orchestral writing (see fig. 3), of comparable artistic level to similar arias by Handel²² (such as Rinaldo's 'Cara sposa' or Radamisto's 'Ombra cara'). A special moment is, of course, the closing aria of Issipile in Act I. It is an incredibly dramatic piece that embodies the tension of the whole plot. The writing is rich, dense, colourful, with an alternation of *tempi*: *Adagio non troppo* / *Presto* (like many *prima donna* arias of Handel). We are surprised though, that Williams (1999: 146) describes the A-Section of the aria as being scored only for the *basso continuo*, contrasting with a four-part *presto* in the B-Section. In our manuscript, the A-Section of this aria ('Crudo amore'), is clearly set for a highly ornamented *violino primo* line and a pulsating string ensemble underneath (see fig. 4).

The vocal writing is quite varied. The two soprano roles have virtuosic moments that require a very agile technique. Still, Issipile clearly has more heroic, *prima donna* writing (coloratura, long lines, more dramatic contrasts and an extensive range up to a written high C), while the part of Rodope (who has fewer arias and is obviously the *seconda donna*) features a style that we could describe mainly as *sentimentale*, more reflective. Eurinome has

three string parts accompany with pulsating chordal motion. Although the movement is only nine bars long, it gives the impression of being a substantial piece' Williams (1999: 92-93).

²² In fact, the quality of Conti's music should not be underestimated. As Williams (1999: 76) reminds us: 'In 1716, when Bach was in Weimar, he made a copy of Conti's *Offertorium de venerabilis*. Handel took some of Conti's Clotilda for a pasticcio...'

a totally different character: the range is that of a very central alto, with arias that go from ironical ('Non è ver', Act I) to furious, with an amazingly tragic *ombra*-scene at the beginning of Act II. It is certainly a role with a strong dramatic sense and a very strong personality within the opera. The men are also interestingly portrayed. King Toante is a noble, mature tenor role without an especially wide range (low c to high f). His arias are musically rich, and Borghi, the singer who premiered the role, was held in high esteem during his career. It is unsurprising, then, that Conti provided the role with very well written arias (which is not always the case when it comes to tenors and basses, who are often relegated by *opera seria* composers to secondary roles). In fact, that of Toante is a high-quality tenor role for baroque opera in general. The role of Giasone is probably the most standard in writing, but also features beautiful music (his aria from Act I is the only one to start directly with a vocal phrase instead of with an orchestral *ritornello*). The pirate Learco is certainly a star both in Metastasio's and Conti's conceptions of the work: this evil, yet ambiguous, character has some of the most sparkling music throughout the opera, and his two arias from Act I are a good example thereof. We should also mention that the ranges of both Giasone (castrato Casati) and Learco (castrato Minelli) are those of a standard, comfortable alto.

For reasons of space I do not provide here a more complete, deeper musical analysis of the work. Nonetheless, there will be a world modern premiere of the Conti/Metastasio *Issipile* in January 2014 at the Wigmore Hall in London. My excitement is considerable: it will be the first performance of the whole opera since the eighteenth century, and it can only be good news that such an interesting, varied work will finally come out into the light after almost three hundred years. Critics are certainly looking forward to it: theory and praxis go hand in hand, so it is important for theatre and music to actually *happen* and be heard, not only studied and researched.

5. MUSICAL EXAMPLES

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Allegro". The score is written in 4/4 time and consists of four staves. The first staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The third staff is in alto clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The fourth staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The tempo marking "Allegro" is positioned at the beginning of the first staff. The score is enclosed in a rectangular frame.

(Fig. 1)

Presto
forte, senza hautbois

Violini

Recitativo

la giu - ram - mo: s'á - den - pia.

Ah ven - der - ra, ven - der - ra.

36

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score. At the top, it is marked 'Presto' and 'forte, senza hautbois'. The score is divided into two main sections. The first section, labeled 'Violini', consists of four staves of music for violins, showing a complex melodic line with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The second section, labeled 'Recitativo', consists of two staves of music, likely for voice and piano. The lyrics are in Italian: 'la giu - ram - mo: s'á - den - pia.' followed by 'Ah ven - der - ra, ven - der - ra.' The page number '36' is located at the top left of the score area.

(Fig. 2)

The image displays a musical score for two instruments: Violini and Tocarite Aria. The score is divided into two systems, starting at measure 1 and measure 8. The Violini part is written in three staves (treble, treble, and bass clefs) and the Tocarite Aria part is written in two staves (treble and bass clefs). The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and rests. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The Tocarite Aria part includes a dynamic marking of *(forte)* and a fermata over a note in measure 8.

(Fig. 3)

The image displays a musical score for an 'Aria' by Flavio Ferri-Benedetti. The score is written for Violino (Violin) and Timpale (Timpani). The tempo is marked 'Adagio non troppo' and the dynamics are 'Violini sempre piano senza hairbois'. The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The Violino part begins with a first-measure rest and a dynamic marking of *mp*. The Timpale part is marked 'Timpale - Aria' and 'Adagio non troppo'. A section of the score is marked 'Senza Camb.' (without change) and '(simile)'. The score concludes with the lyrics 'Cri-do a - mo - rei' and a fermata over the final note.

(Fig. 4)

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