

Alessandro Scarlatti's serenata *Erminia* (1723), an unacknowledged work of Pietro Metastasio?

Erminia may well be the last major secular work of Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725). It was heard on June 16, 1723 in the palazzo Stigliano in Naples as part of the wedding celebration of Don Ferdinando Colonna, the Prince of Stigliano, with Donna Maria Luisa Caracciolo, the Princess of Santo Buono. The unfortunate fact that the three surviving scores from the eighteenth century preserve only the music from part one of this two-part cantata led Edward Dent to believe it "apparently unfinished."¹ The circumstances of its performance were established in modern times by the Neapolitan scholar Ulisse Prota-Giurleo when he brought to light an extract from number 25 of the *Gazzetta di Napoli* of June 15, 1723.²

On the same day [Saturday] Lady Maria Luisa Caraccioli of the Princes of Santobuono, wife of Don Ferdinando Colonna, Prince of Stigliano, entered the city. She was met by a great number of coaches drawn by six horses belonging to the entire nobility and to the great number of titled ladies and gentlemen, her relatives in this capital. And accompanied by them, she proceeded to the palace of the said Prince, her husband, on the Strada Toledo, which was so beautifully and superbly decorated that it defies description, all things pertaining to its architecture having been arranged by the celebrated Captain and Engineer Major Don Filippo Marinelli. And that evening, after an entertainment of

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- 1 Edward J. Dent, *Alessandro Scarlatti*, preface and additional notes by Frank Walker (1905: rpt. London: Edward Arnold, 1960), 169. A modern edition of the Scarlatti's serenata *Erminia*, edited by Thomas Griffin, is available from the *Istituto Italiano per la Storia della Musica*, (Rome, 2010). It contains the entire libretto as well as the music. After its publication two arias and a recitative from part two of the serenata were identified in the British Library, London. For details see <http://www.ascarlatti2010.net> accessed November 26, 2022. The libretto and all music sung by Farinello are online here.
 - 2 Ulisse Prota-Giurleo, "Breve storia del Teatro di Corte e della Musica a Napoli nei sec. XVII-XVIII," in *Il Teatro di corte del palazzo reale di Napoli* (Naples, 1952), 94. Extracts from the Neapolitan news sheets of musical interest for this period have been published in Thomas Griffin, *Musical References in the Gazzetta di Napoli 1681-1725* (Berkeley: Fallen Leaf Press, 1993) and in Ausilia Magauida – Danilo Costantini, "Serenate e componimenti celebrativi nel Regno di Napoli" in *La serenata tra seicento e settecento: musica, poesia, scenotecnica*, a cura di Nicolò Maccavino (Reggio Calabria: Laruffa Editore, 2007), 73-235 and in their magisterial *Musica e spettacolo nel Regno di Napoli attraverso lo spoglio della 'Gazzetta' (1675-1768)*, Rome: ISMEZ, 2011.

fine music, games of chance, and the enjoyment of abundant and very choice refreshments, there was a very lavish supper . . . On Sunday, in the same palace, an excellent serenata for four voices entitled ERMINIA was sung—set to music by the never sufficiently praised Cavaliere Alessandro Scarlatti, of whom it may truly be said that the more his age increases the more he acquires novel and sublime ideas in his compositions—by four *virtuosi* of highest rank to be found in the city, that is Carlo Broschi (called Farinello) soprano, who played the part of *Erminia*, to much applause, so also did Andrea Pacini contralto, *Tancredi*, Annibale Pio Fabri tenor, *Polidoro*, and D. Antonio Manna bass, who played the role of the *Shepherd*; and His Eminence the Viceroy [Cardinal Michele Federico d’Althann] attended privately and gave evidence of his special esteem for it; and while they sang the said serenata, dainty refreshments were continually served of well-made desserts of various sorts of sweets fashioned in the foreign manner by the pastry chefs and confectioners belonging to the said Prince of Stigliano, as well as to the Duchess of Madalona, who, with other ladies related to the most noble bride, engaged in a galant competition regaling her with capricious works of very precious gems.

Napoli – 15 Giugno 1723. Num. 25

Nel medesima dì [sabato] entrò in Città D. Maria Luisa Caraccioli de’ Principi di Santobuono, Sposa di D. Ferdinando Colonna, Prince di Stigliano, quale con gran numero di Mute a sei cavalli fu incontrata da tutta la Nobilissima, e copiosa Parentela di Principali Dame, e Titolati di questa Capitale, con l’accompagnamento de’ quali si portò al Palazzo di detto Principe Sposo a Strada Toledo, quale non può certamente esprimersi come stasse vagamente, e superbamente adobbato, avendo avuta la cura di disporre il tutto concernente all’architettura il rinomato Capitano, e Ingegniero Maggiore D. Filippo Marinelli, e la sera, dopo il trattenimento di famosa

Musica, e gioco, e compartimento di abbondanti, e sceltissimi Rinfreschi, vi fù una lautissima Cena . . . Domenica poi nel medesimo Palazzo si cantò una eccellente Serenata, intitolata ERMINIA, a quattro voci, posta in Note dal non mai abbastanza lodato Cavaliere Alessandro Scarlatti, che veramente può dirsi, che quanto più cresce nell'età, tanto maggiormente acquista nuove sublimi Idee nelle sue Composizioni, e fu cantata da' primi quattro Virtuosi, che si ritrovano in questa Città, cioè Carlo Broschi (detto Farinello) Soprano, che con molt'applauso rappresentò la parte d'Erminia, come altresì Andrea Pacini Contralto, Tancredi, Annibale Pio Fabri, Tenore, Polidoro, e D. Antonio Manna Basso, che rappresentava la parte di Pastore, e vi si portò in forma privata ad ascoltarla Sua Eminenza il Signor Vecerè, che ne dimostrò un spezial compiacimento, e nel mentre si cantò la sudetta Serenata, furono continuamente compartiti prelibatissimi Rinfreschi con ben composte Deserte di varie sorti di dolci lavorati alla forestiera, dagli Ripostieri, e Confettieri, così di detto Principe di Stigliano, come anco della Duchessa di Madalona, dalla quale siccome dall'altre Dame congiunte, si è fatta a gara a presentare alla Nobilissima Sposa de' preziosi regali consistenti in galanterie di capricciosi lavori di preziosissime gemme.

Three manuscript scores from the eighteenth century preserve the music, for part one only, of the serenata. And a single exemplar of a printed *libretto* from 1723 provides the complete text of *Erminia*. It is very curious that the scores, *libretto* and the *Gazzetta* account of the performance all identify the composer, while the author of the *libretto* is nowhere named. Printed *libretti* from this era almost always identify the poet, while often failing to name the composer who set the text to music. This odd fact suggests that an effort was underway at Naples in 1723 to suppress the librettist's identity. Perhaps this indicates he was a member of the nobility. When

Scarlatti's opera *Il Ciro* (1712) was given in the Cancelleria at Rome the poet's name was missing in the printed libretto and musical scores, although journalists and diplomats of the Eternal City were soon to identify the author as Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni.

Several circumstances surrounding the performance of *Erminia*, however, have suggested to Roberto Pagano that the young Pietro Metastasio may have been the poet.³ A review of the circumstantial evidence for this possible attribution shows Pagano's suggestion to be of real merit. The Austrian Viceroy who "gave evidence of his special esteem for *Erminia* was Cardinal Federico d'Althann. Like Metastasio and Scarlatti, Cardinal d'Althann was a member of the Arcadian Society, and it was to this Viceroy that Metastasio dedicated his first full-fledged operatic text, *Didone abbandonata* (1724), the year following the performance of *Erminia*. Metastasio must have come to the attention of the Althann family as early as 1720, however, for in that year he composed an epithalamium at the instigation of the Countess Marianna d'Althann (née Pignatelli), the Cardinal's sister-in-law. To her he dedicated his pastoral drama *Endimione* in 1721. After her husband's death (1722) and Metastasio's arrival in Vienna as Imperial Poet Laureate (1730), she became his chief patron and close confidante—some even asserted his wife.⁴

Even more suggestive than the Cardinal's presence at this performance is the fact that Farinello sang the main role of *Erminia*. Robert Freeman⁵ has demonstrated that Metastasio and Farinello's habit of referring to one another as *caro gemello* has an almost literal significance. Farinello explained to Burney that ". . .

3 Roberto Pagano, *Alessandro Scarlatti* (Turin: ERI, 1972), 232. Pagano did not marshal any evidence for this assertion, hoping simply to be given credit as the first to suggest it, if it should later be proven true.

4 Information reported by Bruno Brunelli, ed., *Tutte le opere di Pietro Metastasio* (Verona: Mondadori, 1951), 3:1182-83.

5 Robert Freeman, "Farinello and his Repertory," *Studies in Renaissance and Baroque Music in Honor of Arthur Mendel* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1974), 301, note 2.

Metastasio and he were twins of public favor, and entered the world at the same time, he having performed in that poet's first opera."⁶ In fact, the work in question was not an opera, but rather Porpora's setting of the serenata *Angelica*, heard in Naples on 4 September 1720 on the occasion of the Austrian Empress Elisabeth Christine's birthday.⁷ It appears to be Metastasio's first text set to music and Farinello's first appearance as a singer.

But what of other youthful collaborations between the two? The close bonds of friendship evinced in Metastasio's letters to Farinello, although dating from much later in their lives, suggest an intimacy the result of youthful, shared endeavor and personal contact which cannot be entirely accounted for by the few known facts of their early careers. After finishing *Angelica*, Metastasio is known to have written three other occasional poems set to music in Naples, *Endimione* (1721), *Gli Orti esperidi* (1721), and *Galatea* (1722). In the spring of 1723 he extensively revised D. David's text *La Forza della virtù*, which was heard as *Siface* in the *teatro* San Bartolomeo, Naples, just a month before the performance of *Erminia*.⁸ Farinello sang in none of these. The suspicion remains, however, that Metastasio may have written other works during this period that he never acknowledged, perhaps even suppressed, and in which Farinello sang.

Metastasio's earliest biographers report an anecdote which may explain this lack of much documentation for his activities as a poet in Naples during the early 1720s. At that time he had undertaken the study of law and apprenticed himself to a lawyer with the condition that he renounce poetry. His fame was already such that he was nevertheless obliged to satisfy a number of highly placed

6 Charles Burney, *The present State of Music in France and Italy*, (London: T. Becket, 1771). 212.

7 The details surrounding the early performances of *Angelica* are discussed by Gaetano Pitarresi in the introduction to his edition of the serenata (Palermo: Alfieri e Ranieri, 2002).

8 Nathaniel Burt, "Opera in Arcadia," *The Musical Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (April 1955), 157.

patrons who requested texts from him. His only recourse was to insist on strict secrecy surrounding the name of the poet. The anecdote ends by recounting how one of the singers in such a piece, Marianna Benti-Bulgarelli, was so enchanted by the poetry that she persisted in discovering the identity of the poet and befriending him. Later biographers, including Charles Burney,⁹ were quick to dispute this anecdote since Metastasio's name is to be found in printed *libretti* from this period. Not until the twentieth century was it known that the earliest *libretti* for *Angelica*¹⁰ and *Gli Orti esperidi*¹¹ appeared anonymously and that this anecdote deserves credence.

If as a young poet in Naples Metastasio was constrained to hide his identity, as a celebrated poet of European renown he seems to have shown no greater desire to acknowledge his early works. Metastasio's complete works were first published under the poet's supervision by the Venetian printer Bettinelli in 1733-34. The four early occasional poems most closely resembling *Erminia* (*i.e.*, *Angelica*, *Endimione*, *Gli Orti esperidi* and *Galatea*) were placed at the end of volume three in an *aggiunta*. Of them Bettinelli writes in his preface:

If in order to print the first [*i.e.* the first works in this volume] I had to presume the permission of him who daily found new reason for delay in granting it to me, in the printing of these I was required to violate the explicit intentions of the same, he having declared many times his firm wish that they not be published. As the reason, he alleged his insufferable repugnance for the youthful period in which he composed them and his complete dissatisfaction with them.

9 Charles Burney, *Memoirs of the Life and Works of the Abate Metastasio* (1796; rpt. New York, Da Capo Press, 1971), 1:18ff.

10 The anonymous, undated libretto cited by Freeman, "Farinello and his Repetory," surely antedates the one printed in Naples by Felice Mosca, 1722, and cited by Benedetto Croce, "I teatri di Napoli del secolo XV-XVIII," *Archivio storico per le province napoletane*, 15 (1890), 336, note 2,

11 Brunelli, *op. cit.* 2:1312.

Se per istampare le prime ho dovuto prevenire il consentimento di lui, il quale trovava ogni qualche nuovo motive di differirmelo, per questi sono stato in necessità di andare contro le positive intenzioni del medesimo, essendomi egli più volte dicharato di non voler assolutamente che si pubblicassero. Ha addotta per ragione di questa sua insuperabile ripugnanza l'età giovanile, in cui gli ha compositi, ed il non esserne egli stesso nulla affatto contento.

Clearly Metastasio would have preferred to suppress these works, but was unable since they were already widely known as his. In the case of *Siface*, however, he was more successful. Although Quadrio¹² correctly reported it as a work of Metastasio, it was not reprinted in the earliest editions of his complete works. When confronted with a copy of this *libretto*, Metastasio explained his reason for disowning it in a letter to Vincenzo Camillo Alberti dated June 29, 1772:

I know not whether I ought congratulate you on the huge purchase you have made of Italian dramas. You will find, as formerly happened to myself, in an immense quantity of straw, but very little grain, and that of a bad quality. *Siface* will not compensate for the bad harvest. I am extremely grateful to you for the obliging offer of it, which you make me, but having, some years ago, met with a copy of this old opera, I gave it a perusal, and am by no means tempted to acknowledge it as my legitimate offspring. It is a drama composed against my will: the idea was to reform an old opera at the request of Porpora; and in reforming it was entirely changed, as the original materials were so totally different from the additional, and so discordant as to form a contrast that was insupportable and monstrous. And yet it is not mine, although I believe there remains not one verse as it was written by the first author. In order to be truly mine, the first

12 Francesco Saverio Quadro, *Della storia e della regione d'ogni poesia* (Milano: Francesco Agnelli, 1744), vol. 3, part 1, 491.

design should have been of my invention; but my intention was merely to rectify some particular parts; and though I have left none untouched, I have never regarded them as member of a whole fabric of my construction. Therefore, the connection must necessarily remain imperfect. Make, however, what use you please of *Siface*, only do not let it pass for a child of mine, as I cannot conscientiously regard it as such.¹³

Metastasio's insistence that the first design of a work be his before he would claim it as his "legitimate offspring" surely explains his reticence to have his early works printed by Bettinelli. *Angelica*, for example, is clearly based on Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, as Metastasio admits in its preface.¹⁴ Likewise, Metastasio would most certainly have denied his paternity in the case of *Erminia* were he its author, for part one is clearly based on Torquato Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata*, while part two contains surprising allusions to Canto V of Dante's *Divina Comedia*.

The Plot of *Erminia* Summarized

Tasso's epic of 1575, which tells the story of the Christian conquest of Jerusalem, had served as the basis of innumerable music-dramatic works¹⁵ by 1723. In Tasso, *Erminia*, Princess of Antioch, is taken prisoner by Tancredi during the conquest of that realm by Christian forces. He generously restores her liberty and she takes

13 Translated by Charles Burney, *Memoirs . . . Metastasio*, 3:9-19. Italian original in *Brunelli*, 3:171-72. As mentioned above, *Siface* was first performed in Naples (May 1723) with music by Feo. Subsequently it was set by Porpora and performed in Milan (late 1725) and in Venice (Carnival 1726). Evidently Metastasio had been sent a *libretto* for one of these performances since he fails to mention Feo's setting of the text.

14 Burney, *Memoirs of . . . Metastasio*, 1:26-8, translate Metastasio's preface found in the libretto dated Naples, 1722. The anonymous, undated libretto cited above in footnote 10 also contains this same preface. The author expresses his gratitude to Robert Freeman for furnishing notes taken from this libretto.

15 Lists have been compiled by Biancamaria Brumana, Giovanni Morelli and Elvidio Surian in *Tasso, la musica i musicisti* ed., Maria Antonella Balsano and Thomas Walker in *Quaderni della Rivista italiana di musicologia*, 19 (Florence: Olschki, 1988) and in a review of that volume by Tim Carter, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 15, 2, (1990), 259-61.

refuge in Jerusalem shortly before it is put to siege. But soon, uneasy because of her passion for Tancredi and impatient to tend his wounds, she flees Jerusalem dressed in the arms of the pagan warriorress Clorinda. Before she can reach the Christian tents, however, she is seen and pursued by a squad of Christian knights who mistake her for Clorinda. Her pursuers are led by the brothers Poliferno and Alcandro, who have good reason to hate Clorinda, for she has slain their father in combat.¹⁶ Canto VII of Tasso's poem, the so-called *pastorale of Erminia*, serves as the basis for the text of the serenata. The action can be summarized as follows:

The tired and frightened Erminia wanders alone in a dark forest where she has been chased by the Christian knights. Only by calling the name of her beloved Tancredi can she be consoled. Suddenly, hearing the sounds of rustic wind instruments and a chorus of youths, she sees an old man at work at the threshold of a rustic hut. He is startled at the sight of an armed knight, but Erminia quickly reveals herself as a woman and calms him. She begs for shelter and aid, which he is glad to provide, for unlike those who live at court, shepherds harbor in their breast neither worry, ambitious desire, nor greed; all that life requires is provided by the flock, garden, and stream. She divests herself of the baleful arms and, dressed as a simple shepherdess, accompanies the children as they lead the snowy flock to pasture. Polidoro, enraged at the thought that Clorinda has escaped him, enters. He questions the fair shepherdess and is soon smitten by her beauty and demeanor. Losing all thought of vengeance, he only desires to stay with her; but she must leave, for it does not become the lowliness of a shepherdess or the lovely purity of a bashful virgin to be found among warriors. Tancredi enters in search of his beloved Clorinda. He finds her arms beside the shepherd's hovel and, fearing foul play, roughly questions him.

¹⁶ Only Poliferno, called Polidoro by the author of the serenata, appears in Scarlatti's setting. Alcandro is mentioned briefly by Tancredi.

The shepherd tries to conceal the girl's presence, but at the sight of Tancredi's blade, tells where she can be found. Polidoro enters and tells Tancredi of his love for the beautiful shepherdess. Tancredi suffers the stings of jealousy, for surely she is the beautiful Clorinda. Part one of the serenata ends with Erminia alone beside a clear brook.¹⁷ She takes a measure of comfort from the beauty of nature. As she lies down to sleep, however, doubts and fear assails her. Love torments her.

Part two begins with the return of Tancredi from his unsuccessful search for Clorinda. He wishes to question the shepherd further, but Polidoro enters, and the shepherd offers both knights shelter in his humble cottage. The worn-out Polidoro accepts, while the ardent Tancredi burns to continue the chase. As the sun sets Erminia and the children gaily return with the flock. The shepherd points her out to Tancredi, who is disappointed not to see Clorinda. Erminia, agitated at the unexpected sight of the hero for whom she has conceived such an undeclared passion, swoons. The shepherd is enraged at Tancredi for causing such a change in her bearing. Polidoro attempts to console her, but only at the sound of Tancredi's voice does she revive. He questions her, and gradually she reveals her identity and, to Tancredi's dismay, her love for him. He in turn begs for pardon since he loves another, at which news Erminia is afflicted by such pain that she begs him to kill her.¹⁸ Erminia, Tancredi and Polidoro express their perplexity in a trio. Finally, at the evidence of such fidelity, Polidoro renounces his claim to Erminia's affection and entreats his fellow warrior to accept her. Tancredi can resist no longer; after bidding farewell to Clorinda in an aria, he gives himself to Erminia. The shepherd is overcome with sudden joy. In a vision he sees his poor home

17 This final recitative and aria from part one of the serenata has been edited by Raymond Meylan, *Erminia: Rezitative und Aria für Soprano, Streicher und Basso Continuo* (Frankfurt: Henry Litoff's Verlag. [1971]).

18 "It is the use and custom of one who loves to threaten himself with death," says the Chorus in act III of Tasso's *Aminta* dryly, "but rarely does the deed follow."

transformed into a rich, splendidly ornate royal palace from the midst of which rises a lofty COLUMN of choice white marble whose top is magnificently formed into a generous LION by the skilled hand of the sculptor.¹⁹ The shepherd wishes the pair much happiness and many offspring. They embrace and the serenata ends with a chorus of rejoicing.

As would be expected, the anonymous poet of *Erminia* has taken a number of liberties with Tasso's plot. In Tasso, Erminia's approach to the Christian camp is made known to Tancredi by a messenger sent by her. The messenger, Erminia's squire, has been instructed by the princess to tell Tancredi only that a lady spurred on by love wishes to dress his wounds. When Tancredi hears that his beloved Clorinda is being pursued by Christian forces, he believes she may be the lady. Fearing for her safety, he hastily arms himself and rides out in search of her. With Tasso, this leads into another episode of the poem. Erminia is left in the care of the shepherd while the reader follows Tancredi into further adventure. The meeting of Tancredi and Polidoro, as well as that of the two knights and shepherd, is the creation of Scarlatti's librettist.

Borrowings from Tasso and Dante

A detailed comparison of Tasso's text with that set by Scarlatti shows that the poet of *Erminia* worked closely from the original. Not only are characters and arguments taken from Tasso, but numerous poetic images, metaphors, similes, and even entire lines of verse are borrowed. Tasso uses the image of the stag to illustrate the power of love, as it affects Erminia, in canto VI, stanza 87, lines 1-4 (VI.87.1-4):

Sì potrò, sì: ché mi farà possente
a tolerarne il peso Amor tiranno,

19 The coat of arms of the Caracciolo family bearing the lion and that of the Colonna bearing the column are pictures by Scipione Mazzella, *Descrizione del regno di Napoli* (Naples: Gio. Battista Capello, 1601), pp. 618 and 751, respectively. Filippo Martinelli may have indeed raised such a column during the redecoration of the palace for the wedding festivities in 1723. The column and lion rampant are stamped in gold on the front and back covers of the one surviving exemplar of the libretto in the Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome.

da cui spronati, ancor s'arman sovente
d'ardire i cervi imbelli e guerra fanno.²⁰

Love, strong, bold, mighty, never-tired Love,
Supplieth force to all his servants true;
The fearful stags he doth to battaile move,
Till each his hornes in other's blood imbrew;²¹

The image of the stag is similarly employed in Tancredi's entrance aria to *Erminia*. In this case the wounded knight compares himself with the stag who runs as if wounded in search of his doe.

Come suol veloce ardito	How quickly, as if already
corre il Cervo ancor ferito,	wounded, the daring stag
	runs
se la diletta	if he goes
vaga Cervetta	in search of his delightful
cercando va.	beautiful doe.

Isolated borrowings from Tasso of several words or a poetic image, such as the above, are found repeatedly in *Erminia*. Although less common, even entire lines from Tasso are found in the libretto. One of the more striking examples occurs in the dialogue between Erminia and the shepherd. At one point in Tasso Erminia asks:

. . . or che d'intorno
d'alto incendio di guerra arde il paese,

20 Torquato Tasso, *La Gerusalemme liberata*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli (Florence: Salini, 1957).

21 Torquato Tasso, *Godfrey of Bulloigne, or the recoverie of Jerusalem: Done into English heroicall verse by Edward Fairefax* (London: Laggard and Lownes, 1600).

come qui state in placido soggiorno
senza temer le militari offese?²²

In Recitative 10 of the serenata Erminia speaks almost exactly the same words:

Or che incendio di guerra arde	Now that the devastation of
	war is
il paese,	destroying our land,
come qui state in placido	how can you live here in a
soggiorno,	peaceful abode
senza temer le militari offese?	without fear of the military
	offensives?

Few if any borrowings from Tasso are found in the second part of the serenata, of which, for the most part, only the text is known. Since *Erminia* was written in celebration of a wedding, the poet was certainly required to provide a happy ending. This effectively ruled out Tasso's poem as a model. There is, of course, a reconciliation of sorts between the Christian knight and the Moslim princess in *Gerusalemme liberata*, but it occurs only after many subsequent episodes, perhaps the best known being the battle between Tancredi and Clorinda. But as Tasso's poem ends it is by no means clear that Tancredi and Erminia will live together happily ever after. In part two of the serenata the anonymous poet, forced with the necessity of uniting the lovers as the work ends, turns surprisingly to Dante for inspiration.

In Canto V of the *Divina Comedia* Dante is guided by the Latin poet Virgil into the second circle of Hell (*Inferno*). Here he encounters, in a furious storm, the souls of those damned for the sin of lust. Among them he recognizes Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta, historical figures whom Dante may have known in real life. As the

22 Tasso, *La Gerusalemme liberata*, VII.8.1-4.

storm abates Dante calls out to the couple and Francesca courteously responds, recounting the tale of their damnation and murder.

Paolo was the brother of Francesca's husband, Gianciotto, and a confidant of the lady. While reading the story of Lancelot and Guinevere together, Paolo impetuously kissed Francesca; and immediately the couple lost control and became illicit lovers. Gianciotto, discovering the couples *in flagrante*, murdered them with his sword. As Francesca recounts the power of their love and its painful, devastating consequences, Dante is so overcome with pity that he falls senseless.

Like Francesca, Erminia too recounts the painful details of her love, in this case for Tancredi. At hearing Erminia's tale of woe, the shepherd and Polidoro are deeply affected by pity for the maiden. But when Tancredi fails to respond to her entreaties and renounce his love for Clorinda, his fellow warrior Polidoro chides him for this ignoble behavior, reminding the knight that "*Amore, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona.*"²³ This line, one of Francesca's most famous in the *Comedia*, draws on the late twelfth-century treatise *The Art of Courtly Love* by Andreas Capellanus. The basic premise here, and a truism of *amor cortese*, is that reciprocity in love is obligatory.

At hearing these words Tancredi dismisses Clorinda from his thoughts with an aria and embraces Erminia. The shepherd, perhaps following Dante's example, swoons, and in a vision sees his rude countryside transformed into a splendid city, *bella Napoli*, and his rough cottage into a resplendent palace, the *palazzo Stigliano*. The serenata ends with general rejoicing.

23 "Love, which pardons no one loved from loving in return," or perhaps better translated by Longfellow as "Love, that exempts no one beloved from loving."

Of course, these examples are just circumstantial evidence and do not prove that Metastasio was the author of *Erminia*. How does the anonymous poetry of the serenata compare with the known works of Metastasio?

The arias of his mature dramas consist of two parts, which correspond to the parts of the *da capo* aria universally employed during the early eighteenth century. Each part might be made up of four or more verses, with the last verse having one less syllable than those that came before. This last syllable of the verse would always carry the accent, and in Italian would be called a *verso tronco*. A good example of this can be found in Megacle's first aria in Metastasio's opera of *Olimpiade* of 1733.

*Superbo di me stesso
andrò portando in fronte
quel caro nome impresso,
come mi sta nel cor.*

*Dirà la Grecia poi
che fur comuni a noi
l'opre, i pensier gli affetti
e al fine in nome ancor.*

Most of the aria texts of *Erminia*, but not all, end with a single *verso tronco* in this manner, as found in *Erminia's* first aria:

*Al dolce nome
dell'idol mio
(pur non so come)
la selva, il rio*

*l'orrido aspetto
cangiando va.*

Altro ristoro

*non m'è concesso,
il mio tesoro,
chiamando spesso,
l'orror diletto
farsì potrà.*

Those arias that don't end with a single and final *verso tronco*, usually have extra *versi tronchi*, such as in the shepherd's aria eleven.

Mentre quel solco

*ara il bifolco,
tonde l'agnello
quel pastorello,
pur canta e gode
sua libertà,
né invidia o frode
sa mai temer.*

Per le campagne

*pascendo l'agne
danzan talora
le Ninfe ancora,
né alcun sospetto
turbar le sa,*

sempre in diletto

sempre in piacer.

Aria texts used before the eighteenth century varied greatly in form and structure, but rarely employed *versi tronchi* like this. If Metastasio should be proved the author of *Erminia*, this over-use of *versi tronchi* might be explained by his youth and lack of experience.

To prove the true identity of the author, however, some other sort of documentary evidence would have to be found, perhaps a citation in a letter written by a trustworthy observer, or an annotation in an account of the financial records.²⁴ Given the vast archival materials yet to be studied at Naples, surely somebody must have known the author's identity.

²⁴ The libretto of *Erminia*, published at Naples in 1723 was done by the viceroy's printer "Con Licenza de' Superiori." That is to say, it had been read and approved by the censors appointed by the state and church. Prof. Francesco Cotticelli has searched their records in the *archivio di stato di Napoli* without finding the poet's name.