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A performer’s guide to the role of Aspasia

Melissa McCann
James Madison University

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A Performer’s Guide to the role of Aspasia

Melissa McCann

A Doctor of Musical Arts Document submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

More than fifteen operas based on Jean Racine’s play, *Mithridate* (1673), were composed in the eighteenth-century. However, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s version, *Mitridate, ré di Ponto* (1770), is the only one which is remembered and performed today. *Mitridate* has earned a special place in Mozart’s operatic output because it can be considered the precursor to *Idomeneo* (1781), and a “prototype” for the Neo-Neapolitan School. Mozart composed *Mitridate* at the age of fourteen, which has led scholars to question his maturity level and mental capacity to comprehend grand operatic concepts. Through careful consideration of the sources of Mozart’s musical inspiration, some scholars even debate *Mitridate’s* overall worth.

The purpose of this Doctor of Musical Arts document is to create a performer’s guide to the role of Aspasia. This DMA document chronicles Mozart’s life leading up to and including the composition of the work, provides a detailed description of the genre *opera seria* as well as eighteenth-century vocal performance practices. Previous literature is reviewed pertaining to the composer’s maturity level, use of musical forms, inspiration, and musical sources. A comparative analysis between Jean Racine’s play, *Mithridate*, and Amadeo Cigna-Santi’s Italian libretto is provided. Translations of Aspasia’s recitatives and arias are included, along with suggested cadenzas and ornamentation appropriate for the period.

Aspasia’s four arias and duet are analyzed in a musico-poetic context. Analysis of the text in relation to musical form and human emotions exhibited in Aspasia’s role proves Mozart was more than capable of understanding the dramatic and emotional nature of the libretto. The analysis of Aspasia’s arias and duet is completed by examining
three aspects of each piece: A) the formal structure and key relationships (paying particular attention to the instances in which Mozart strays from conventional forms), B) the text and the direct relationship to the vocal line, and C) the vocal line with text in relation to the accompaniment. Examination of these elements in Aspasia’s role provides evidence, that though Mozart was young, he clearly comprehended the libretto and was able to translate his understanding into music.
INTRODUCTION

More than fifteen operas based on Jean Racine’s (1639-1699) play, *Mithridate* (1673), were composed in the eighteenth-century by, among others, Quirino Gasparini (1721-1778) in 1767 and Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725) in 1701. However, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s (1756-1791) version is the only one which is remembered and performed today. Surviving letters from the Mozart family give a detailed view of the circumstances during the time Mozart composed *Mitridate, ré di Ponto* as well as a “well-chronicled account of how an eighteenth-century opera was created.”¹ According to Charles Osborne and William Mann, *Mitridate* has garnered historical significance because it is considered the precursor to *Idomeneo* (1781). Ilona Pichler goes so far as to call *Mitridate* a “prototype” for the Neo-Neapolitan School, which evolved from the Neapolitan School of Niccolò Jommelli (1717-1774) and Johann Adolph Hasse (1699-1783).² However, at least two topics surrounding the work are hotly debated among scholars. Wolfgang composed this *dramma per musica* at the age of fourteen. His maturity level and mental capacity to comprehend grand operatic concepts at this point in his life are often called into question. Even more controversial are the sources to which Mozart turned for musical inspiration when completing this work.

In 1991 when Rita Peiretti discovered the autograph score of Gasparini’s with the same libretto by Amadeo Cigna-Santi (1730-1795), she opened the floodgates for debate.³ Since then, the similarities between the Gasparini and Mozart scores have been

discussed at length. More recently, Daniel Freeman pointed out the similarities between Mozart’s opera and Josef Mysliveček’s (1737-1781) *La Nitetti* (1770). These are but a few examples of the controversies surrounding Mozart's first *opera seria*. It is essential to look first at the very beginning of Mozart's musical career to fully understand all debates to date concerning the work.
CHAPTER 1
MOZART’S BACKGROUND

In 1756, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) was born in Salzburg. From earliest childhood, Wolfgang’s father, Leopold Mozart (1719-1787), groomed him to become not only a musical prodigy but also a child celebrity. As a violinist, Leopold shaped his son’s musical-world view. As a manager, Leopold was able to make important connections with the musical elite. One such advantageous connection stemmed from Leopold’s position in 1743 as fourth violinist under Archbishop Leopold Anton von Firmian (a musical tie to the Archbishop would later benefit Wolfgang’s career). 4

Leopold became court composer in 1757, and the following year he was promoted to second violinist and began to take care of his children’s musical education. Wolfgang was able to study the harpsichord seriously beginning at age four, while his older sister, Nannerl (1751-1829), was already competent on the instrument at age eight. In 1762, Leopold took brother and sister on a wunderkind reise through various cities including Munich and Vienna. 5

Both Father and children began to excel in their careers as Leopold advanced to Vice-Kapellmeister at court. From 1762-1773, Leopold took his children on a series of tours through “Vienna, France, England, and the Netherlands.” 6 Thanks to his father’s encouragement, Mozart became familiar with every kind of music being written or heard at that time in Western Europe. At each stop, he acquired music which was unavailable in Salzburg and met musicians who introduced him to new musical ideas and compositional

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5 Ibid., 11.
techniques. During performances in aristocratic homes and in public, Wolfgang played prepared pieces, sight-read concertos, and improvised fugues, variations, fantasias, and arias. Young Mozart’s musical proficiency was repeatedly tested by experts, including Daines Barrington. In 1769, the philosopher published a report about Mozart for the Royal Society stating that the prodigy could improvise recitative and arias in the “operatic styles suited to anger and tenderness.”

All the while, Mozart was composing, producing his first minuets at age 5, his first symphony at 9, his first oratorio at 11, and his first opera at 12.

In June 1763, the whole family embarked on a three-and-a-half-year tour which included lengthy stops in Paris (November 1763-April 1764) and London (April 1764-July 1765). In Paris, Mozart became interested in the music of Johann Schobert (1735-1767). In London, the Mozarts met Johann Christian Bach (1735 – 1782). As Queen Sophie Charlotte’s master musician, Bach was in charge of the Mozart’s visit to court, and he even allowed Wolfgang to sit on his lap as they played harpsichord together.

Johann Christian’s mastery of the Italian style gave him the nickname “Italian Bach.” Around 1754 Bach had gone to Milan to be the private music master to Count Agostino Litta which enabled him to study with Padre Giovanni Battista Martini (1706-1784). While there, Bach developed a taste for Neapolitan opera and the symphonies of Giovanni Battista Sammartini (1700-1775), who taught Gluck. He brought this influence with him to London as the Music Master to the queen and head of the Royal Opera and

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7 Rushton, “Mozart”.
9 Gianturco, 12.
10 Ibid., 18.
passed it down to young Mozart.\textsuperscript{11} Bach had a lasting influence on the boy, and enriched Mozart’s keyboard and symphonic works with features from Italian opera: “songful themes, tasteful appoggiaturas, and triplets, and harmonic ambiguities.” These traits appealed to Mozart and became permanent marks of his writing.\textsuperscript{12}

On September 11, 1767, Leopold took the children on a second tour. By this time, Wolfgang and Nannerl had outgrown the \textit{wunderkind} age; Leopold was desperate to find continued and lasting success for his son. On November 14, 1767, Leopold strategically used his position as Vice-Kapellmeister to convince Archbishop von Schrattenbach to give Wolfgang the unpaid position of third Konzertmeister of his chapel. This position was still not enough, as Leopold understood well that opera was the means by which his son would launch his career as a composer and earn a steady income from commissions.\textsuperscript{13} Wolfgang made his first attempts in opera at the age of nine with the sacred \textit{Singspiel, Die Schuldigkeit des ersten Gebots} (1767) followed by the Latin intermezzo \textit{Apollo et Hyacinthus} (1767), a “German pastorale” \textit{Bastien und Bastienne} (1768), and the \textit{opera buffa La finta semplice} (1769).\textsuperscript{14} On December 13, 1769, Leopold exploited Wolfgang’s talents as a roving musical ambassador on a tour through Italy. Ilona Pichler points out that Leopold’s decision to tour Italy was astute, as Italy was the opera capital of the world in the eighteenth-century. While in Italy, Wolfgang gave concerts and made connections with the aristocracy and musical elite.\textsuperscript{15}

The most important patron they encountered on this trip was Count Karl Leopold \textsuperscript{18}Gianturco, \textsuperscript{12}Eisen, \textit{Mozart}. \textsuperscript{13}Gianturco, \textsuperscript{14}Harrison James Wingall, “Mozart, Guglielmo d'Ettore and the composition of Mitridate (K.87/74A),” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1995), 1. \textsuperscript{15}Pichler, “Mozart in Bologna. Motivation Und Ziel Der Ersten Italienreise.”
von Firmian, who came from an old Tyrolean aristocracy and resided in Milan as Governor-General of Lombardy.\textsuperscript{16} On February 7, 1770, the Mozarts had lunch with Count Firmian, whose brother was the current Superintendent and Inspector of Music at the Salzburg Cathedral.\textsuperscript{17} Wolfgang was asked to perform, and he played for an audience which included the famous composer Sammartini. After the event, Count Firmian gave Wolfgang the complete works of Metastasio as a gift.\textsuperscript{18} On February 18, 1770, Count Firmian arranged another *accademia* at his palazzo. Here, Wolfgang played for the Este Duke Francesco III of Modena, to whom *Mitridate* is dedicated. The Duke attended the event with his granddaughter, Maria Beatrice Ricciarda. In the following year, Wolfgang composed the opera *Ascanio in Alba* for Maria’s wedding to Archduke Ferdinand of Austria.\textsuperscript{19} \textsuperscript{20}

After a successful performance, Wolfgang was asked to write three arias and a recitative to Metastasian texts, which he performed for 150 nobles of the district. On March 12, 1770, Wolfgang performed the pieces he had written including, the massive aria *Misero pargoletto* K 77 from *Demofoonte*. With this concert, which in effect became an audition, Wolfgang exhibited his adaptability and assimilation of the Italian musical culture. The young Mozart proved he was capable of tackling a highly prestigious art form and as a result, he was given the contract to write an *opera seria* for the December 1770 Carnival at the Teatro Regio Ducale in Milan.\textsuperscript{21}

In March of 1770, the Mozarts became close friends with the Czech composer

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Pichler, “Mozart in Bologna.”
\item[17] Gianturco, 75.
\item[18] Mann, *The Operas of Mozart*, 75.
\item[19] Gianturco, 75.
\item[20] Mann, 75.
\item[21] Mann, 75.
\end{footnotes}
Josef Mysliveček (1737-1781), who was completing his opera *La Nitetti*. On March 24, 1770 contracts were exchanged with the Teatro Regio Ducale, and coincidentally, Wolfgang was assigned the same Metastasian libretto Mysliveček was working on.\(^{22}\)

Before the rehearsals scheduled in Autumn, Leopold decided to take Wolfgang on a tour through Italy to Naples. The route led them to the Accademia Filarmonica in Bologna to meet Padre Martini. A strong relationship with Padre Martini boosted Wolfgang’s reputation. Further, Padre Martini tutored the boy in counterpoint and fugue. Padre Martini’s tutelage enabled Wolfgang to pass the entrance exam for the Accademia Filarmonica di Bologna.\(^{23}\)

On July 27, 1770, Mozart received the text for his opera; he was surprised it was not Metastasio’s *La Nitetti*. Instead, he was assigned a condensed version of Racine’s *Mithridate* (1673), translated by Giuseppe Parini. Parini’s translation was adapted into a libretto by the Turin-based poet, Amedeo Cigna-Santi (1728-1799).\(^{24}\) *Mithridate* had recently been set in 1767 by the Turin Cathedral maestro di cappella and court chamber composer Quirino Gasparini (1721-1778). Gasparini was also friends with Mysliveček, studied under Padre Martini, and was a member of the Accademia Filarmonica of Bologna. He had been a Kapellmeister at the Turin Cathedral since 1760 and remained in this role until the end of his life in 1778. Gasparini's *Mithridate* had a successful run of 28 shows after the premiere. Therefore, “choosing a libretto that had recently been set by a reputable composer was [clearly an insurance plan] that meant that Gasparini’s arias

\(^{22}\) Daniel E. Freeman, *Josef Mysliveček, “Il boemo”: the man and his music* (Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2009), 54.
\(^{23}\) Gianturco, 75-76.
\(^{24}\) Mann, 75-76.
could be [substituted] if Mozart’s failed to satisfy the singers.”

Wolfgang spent September through October writing the recitatives before his arrival in Milan on October 18, 1770. The entire month of November was spent conferring with singers one by one so Wolfgang could tailor the arias to their specific voices, as was the custom at the time. However, the process of writing this opera did not come without its challenges. After resolving scheduling conflicts to find singers for the cast, the prima donna Antonia Bernasconi (soprano), primo uomo Pietro Benedetti aka Sartorino (soprano-castrato), Giuseppe Cicognani (alto-castrato), seconda donna Anna Francesca Varese (soprano), and Guglielmo d’Ettore (tenor) were settled upon.

Mozart weathered multiple “storms” when it came to the singers’ demands. When the prima donna met with Wolfgang to write her arias, she arrived with the arias from Gasparini’s Mitridate in tow. An unknown saboteur had encouraged Bernasconi to sing Gasparini’s settings, but Mozart and her vocal coach Giovanni Battista Lampugnani (1708-1786) convinced her otherwise. Further negotiations with Bernasconi led to Mozart rewriting the opening aria Al destin che la minacci, the first aria of the second act, Nel grave tormento, and the duet with Sifare which closes the second act, Se viver non degg’io. Wolfgang had to rewrite arias, especially for d’Ettore. The tenor had

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26 Gianturco, 76.
29 Ellen T. Harris, “Mozart’s Mitridate: Going beyond the text.” In Historical Musicology: Sources, Methods, Interpretations, ed.Stephen A. Crist, Roberta Montemorra Marvin, (University of Rochester Press, 2008), 100.
performed the title role in Gasparini’s *Mitridate*, and he requested rewrites for the aria *Se di Lauri* five times.\(^{30}\)

The rehearsals for the recitatives began in December.\(^{31}\) On December 15, 1770, the first instrumental rehearsal took place, with the copyists in attendance. According to Leopold, an ulterior motive for the rehearsal was to “confound those who had predicted the opera’s failure on the grounds of Wolfgang’s immaturity.”\(^{32}\) The copyists were pleased with the work upon hearing it, because if the show did well, they were paid for making copies of the arias, and could sometimes make more money than the composer.\(^{33}\)

The premiere of *Mitridate* took place on December 26, 1770, with Wolfgang conducting and playing the first harpsichord part (with Bernasconi’s coach, Lampugnani, playing the second). Bernasconi’s aria was encored, which was uncommon.\(^{34}\) “Astonishing clapping of hands and shouting ‘Evviva il Maestro, Evviva il Maestrino!’” ensued.\(^{35}\) After the first three performances, Wolfgang had completed his contractual obligation and was able to sit in the audience with his father. Lampugnani assumed the music direction of the following 22 performances, which lasted six hours with the inclusion of two hours of ballet written by Francesco Caselli.\(^{36}\)

The autograph score of Mozart’s *Mitridate* has not survived the 250-year journey into the 21st century, but extant drafts have been uncovered.\(^{37}\) The early copies of the final version in the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris and in the Biblioteca do Palácio

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30 Mann, 77.
31 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Mann, 76-77.
35 Gianturco, 80.
36 Mann, 77.
37 Abert, *W.A. Mozart*, 189.
Nacional da Ajuda, Lisbon are likely to have been made after rehearsals and the premiere and would ostensibly show the text as it was actually performed. The Lisbon score was copied for the court there in 1771, while two copies were made for Vienna, one copy was made for the Duchess of Parma, and another one for the Teatro Regio Ducale. One of the aforementioned scores could be the Paris copy, but it is unclear.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{38} Sadie, 221.
CHAPTER 2

OPERA SERIA

The process of composing an opera in the eighteenth-century was challenging for any composer, let alone for a fourteen-year-old. Mozart not only dealt with the egos and demands of his fellow musicians but was also expected to follow the strict guidelines which were required of an opera seria. Wolfgang was well aware of the conventions of his day. At its inception, opera seria dominated opera of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-centuries. Prominent composers included Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764), Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725), Reinhard Keiser (1674-1739), and George Frideric Handel (1685-1759). Opera seria grew out of “a literary reform led by the Arcadian Academy of Rome established in 1690.” The reform was a reaction against the French critics’ distaste for the current opera libretti. The aim was to model Aristotle’s Poetics. The works of the seventeenth-century French neo-classical dramatists Jean Racine (1639-1699) and Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) exemplified the structure. In 1719, the Royal Academy of Music was established during Handel’s residency at Cannons. Handel focused on presenting to the educated elite and established opera seria as a genre.

Opera seria was constructed in the French academic style: balanced and properly metered. The subject matter tended to be historical or classical myths which were required to reflect the virtue of the nobility with a lieto fine (“happy end”). Opera serie are often referred to as a “numbers” operas containing a series of arias one right after the

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41 Ibid.
other. The genre contains subcategories: Aristocratic and Democratic (one for courts and one for public), which evolved into the essential difference between Late Baroque and New Classical.\(^{42}\)

The Late Baroque was the era of *fare stupire*: to overwhelm and astonish with significant stage machinery and sensational plots. At this time, the orchestral writing was on the same footing with the singer, and they were often in dialogue with each other, including a complex harmonic structure. On the other hand, New Classical was more formal, refined and poetic, with restrained emotions. Also, the style of the overture changed from the French Overture in the Late Baroque to the Italian Symphony in the New Classical. Scarlatti established the tripartite Italian symphony in the seventeenth century.\(^{43}\)

Two poets, Metastasio (1698-1782) and Zeno (1668-1750), dominated the libretti of *opera seria*. They were both influenced by French drama, but they wanted the plots to make sense and, thus, they eliminated comic subplots and supernatural intervention. Metastasio was compared to Homer because his plays were considered to be well-mannered. He embraced the recitative-aria distinction and wrote the text with that in mind. He standardized the form: the recitative was where the dramatic action took place, while the aria was where the expression and sentiments were displayed. In other words, “the recitative loads the gun, and the aria fires it.”\(^{44}\)

Arias were the chief musical feature of *opera seria*. Five distinct aria styles emerged in the period: *cantabile, parlante, di portamento, di mezzo carattere, and*

\(^{42}\) Grout, “*Opera Seria: General Characteristics,*” 231.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 232-233.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 234-236.
bravura. The music was based on the formulaic structure of the scena beginning with the secco recitativo. There were two types of recitative: semplice (which became dry recitative) with the bare minimum of accompaniment and stromentato/accompagnato (which was later developed by Hasse, Jommelli, and Gluck). Arias were almost entirely in the da capo form; specific rules dominated how they were composed. The form was ABA’ with a key relationship between each. There was one emotion and one motivic element for each section with the B in a contrasting key, usually the relative minor. The return to the A would always contain embellishments. The 1770s saw a paradigm shift from the ABA’ da capo form to a more complex dal segno structure, which paralleled the early “bipartite sonata form.”

Further, every character was required to have one aria in each act (this convention was still used all the way through Mozart’s Le nozze di Figaro). No character could have two arias in succession; no aria could be followed immediately by another of the same type, even if they were performed by two different singers. The supporting roles had fewer arias than the leading roles. The most important arias tended to be at the end of the act, and the less important ones at the beginning. There had to be five acts. The performance practice of the day was a presentational “park and bark.”

The composers themselves followed a formulaic procedure. Antonio Salieri (1750-1825) chronicled his processes in this manner:

1. Comb through the libretto
2. Create a key structure for each aria
3. The prima donna’s “chief expressive aria” is written in E-flat
4. The love duets are written in A major

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45 Gianturco, 19.
46 Grout, 250-251.
47 Gianturco, 86-87.
48 Grout, 250-251.
5. The successive numbers would be related to the dramatic significance
6. Compose all of the recitatives, so they transitioned smoothly into the next key
7. Compose the choruses, ensembles, and the overture
8. The overture/finales are set in a key for trumpets: C, D, or E-flat

After writing the music, the composer would go to the city where the opera was being performed. The singers would arrive, generally in order from lowest paid to highest paid, to have their arias tailored to their individual voices.

A single-minded focus on the aria resulted in a fairly loose structure for opera seria. Depending on the cast, changes were often made, by “cutting and pasting,” which could make the plot very confusing. Additionally, composers would freely borrow an aria from another opera and simply insert it. This usually took place when an opera was migrating from city to city. This practice was known as pasticcio (“pie,” or “patchwork” today). Another effect of the emphasis on the aria was that singers dominated almost every facet of the productions. The music largely served as a vehicle to show off the virtuosity of the singers. The eighteenth-century opera singers had a bad reputation for being particularly demanding. The ‘cult of the singer’ started at the height of the castrato phase (1650-1750). Castrati were absolutely necessary since Rome would not allow women on stage. Therefore, if a treble voice was required, a castrato would have been used.

The relationship between composer and audience was such that audiences demanded to hear new music every season, but not necessarily new libretti. Therefore the score was often treated as a “memorandum of the composer’s intentions to be filled in by

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49 Sadie, 216.
50 Sadie, 217.
51 Grout, 238-239.
52 Ibid., 247.
the performers” upon which they would improvise. In many ways, Opera seria was an amusement rather than an entertainment: the spectator’s boxes were essentially party rooms. The use of choruses tended to be limited to providing festive conclusions. Choruses were only used extensively for feste teatrali (dramatic works performed on stage) on special occasions. The overture was only as important as the chorus because there would often be too much noise in the house for it to be heard. Also, ensembles were most often limited to “a perfunctory closing number for all the singers.”

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53 Ibid., 249.
54 Ibid., 250.
CHAPTER 3
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Musical Form and Maturity Level

Based on the way Bernasconi and d’Ettore treated young Mozart, the stereotype that singers reigned supreme seems true. Even Charles Osborne suggests if Mozart hadn’t been a slave to the singers, Mitridate would have been a more compelling dramatic work. Osborne argues Mozart aimed to please the singers above all else. At the same time, the composer uses the traditional form of opera seria and tweaks it for a better dramatic effect.55

Hermann Abert is highly critical of the young Mozart. He states that all of Mozart’s works for the stage starting with Mitridate all the way to Il re pastore not only “bear traces of Leopold’s influence” but also do not contain any “consistent dramatic characterization.”56 Abert argues that the teenager indulged in his “wealth of ideas,” so much that we miss “Mozart’s later and genuinely dramatic ability” to combine contrasting emotions into one aria.57 Also, Abert speculates that the suffering and romantic themes in the libretto were beyond the ken of a 14-year-old. Therefore, the young composer “had little choice but to fall back on the universal and frigid theatrical emotion of the neo-Neapolitans.” This is especially the case for the aria Al destin che la minaccia. The furious accompaniment could not be more mismatched to the meaning of the text.”58

56 Abert, W.A. Mozart, 190.
57 Ibid., 191.
58 Ibid., 190.
Osborne agrees with Abert stating that *Al destin che la minaccia* sets the tone for the entire work, yet it is still not indicative of all of the character's emotions.\(^{59}\) Carolyn Gianturco also recognizes that despite the vocal acrobatics exhibited in *Al destin che la minaccia*, and arias like it, the arias in which “Mozart followed tradition when expressing words and feelings,” are uninteresting dramatically.\(^{60}\) However, she mentions that the through-composed arias or arias with varied schemes, serve a greater dramatic purpose.\(^{61}\) For example, Aspasia’s *Nel grave tormento* and Sifare and Aspasia’s through-composed duet *Se viver non degg’io* are the most responsive to the drama.\(^{62}\)

Gianturco makes the case that Mozart makes changes in form with direct influences from *opera buffa*. She points out that Mozart gained experience in the realm of *opera buffa* while writing *La finta semplice* and he was able to apply the same form and style to *Mitridate*. Gianturco draws comparisons to the style of Aspasia’s “lyrical arias” including *Nel sen mi palpita* and *Nel grave tormento* to the “*cantabile style* for Rosina of *La finta semplice*.” Regarding form, Gianturco mentions “Wolfgang introduced the ABAB form of *opera buffa* into his *opera seria* and wrote arias similarly without *fiorature.*”\(^{63}\)

Osborne also acknowledges that Aspasia’s second aria *Nel sen mi palpita*, “in its expressive simplicity … is worthy of mature Mozart.” He continues, that in this “dramatically gripping aria, Mozart communicates Aspasia’s feeling tersely and directly with the key, but especially the vocal line, which is used dramatically rather than purely

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\(^{60}\) Gianturco, 87.

\(^{61}\) Ibid.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 89.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 92.
musically." On the other hand, Abert insists that though “Mitridate represents a considerable advance on its predecessors in purely technical terms … it falls short of its Italian models in respect of its command of the Italian vocal style.”

On the other hand, Abert admits that the secco recitatives are “a striking feature” of the opera. Here, Mozart surpasses the Italians by utilizing elements of the German declamatory style. Also, the composer indicates the latent pathos, “at least to the extent that Mozart was capable of feeling such emotions.” Gianturco takes Abert’s reasoning a step further. She states that the recitatives in Mitridate were affected by opera buffa in that, Mozart “makes use of the different dramatic powers of secco recitative, accompanied recitative and aria to build an entire continuous scene.”

Osborne also states “likewise at the service of the text and drama,” is Mitridate’s Gia di pieta. In the same vein, Sifare’s aria Lunga te would not be “out of place if uttered by Fiordiligi 20 years later… proving that the 14-year-old Mozart would have provided a much better opera if he hadn’t been enslaved by the singers,” However, Osborne contends the full breadth of Mozart’s genius does not culminate until Idomeneo.

William Mann would agree with Osborne, that Mitridate is “no Idomeneo,” but he would also suggest there are too many problems with the score and there is no way a modern day singer could sing the castrato roles convincingly. Mann explains there is a dichotomy between the “galant or even old baroque music” and the unrestricted da capo structure of the later arias in Mitridate. He continues, stating “the score is uneven, the

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64 Osborne, 59-60.  
65 Abert, 191-192.  
66 Ibid.  
67 Gianturco, 92.  
68 Osborne, 60-61.
characterization spasmodic, and the music incomplete...no wonder *Mitridate* lacks performance in an age that busily exhumes the neglected works of great and lesser composers.”

Abert affirms Mann’s point that Mozart lags behind the Italians in his early operas on a dramatic and musical level:

Although he successfully and skillfully imitates their contemporary aria forms: *dal segno*, condensed ternary, and binary cavatina, there is still a curious sense of unease about their internal structure: clearly he has yet to fathom the principal secret of Italian music, namely the organic unity of its melodic writing, a unity that is preserved in spite of all its breadth and wealth of detail.

Regarding the libretto, Abert speaks highly of it as “one of the better examples of its kind: skillfully constructed, it would have provided opportunities for genuine dramatic effects if only its composer had not been a 14-year-old German boy… Mozart was confronted by a challenge to which he was not yet emotionally equal.”

Thomas Glasgow contradicts Abert’s statement arguing Mozart exhibited “intense concentration on the serious themes of the text he was working with.” Despite criticisms from experts like Alfred Einstein and Edward J. Dent, who said “Mozart was not yet temperamentally equal to the subject [matter included in the libretto]” Glasgow explains “certain moments of the text touched a remarkably responsive chord in the young composer.” Further, the death of Mozart’s friend from Salzburg, Maria Martha Hagenauer, directly influenced his composition of *Pallid’ombre*. Glasgow asserts this aria “is the best example of Mozart’s personal connection to the libretto.” Mozart voiced

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69 Mann, 92.
70 Abert, 191.
71 Ibid., 190.
concern about Martha in his letters to Salzburg while he was writing *Mitridate*. This shows Wolfgang was “an adolescent already keenly aware of his own mortality and capable of expressing his thoughts on the subject in writing.”

**Inspiration and Musical Sources**

Stanley Sadie argues the similarities between Mozart’s *Mitridate* and Gasparini’s is limited to the fact that the two composers were working in the same tradition and setting the same text. Sadie asserts Mozart’s version is better all around, especially Aspasia’s music.

Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini vehemently opposes Sadie. Tagliavini argues the similarities between Gasparini’s and Mozart’s *Mitridate* “cannot be explained away because the same libretto was set by the two composers.” Tagliavini argues Mozart had Gasparini’s opera in mind when he composed many of the pieces, especially *Pallid’ ombre*. For example, both composers set the aria in a “recitative-cavatina-recitative” structure which follows an ABA’B’ form. Tagliavini goes further to say the relationship between the two operas “is more than a coincidence.” He asserts Leopold and Wolfgang had seen the music by Gasparini which was “to have been substituted.” In addition, it is “quite probable that Mozart had studied those pieces, since he was literally in a rather risky competition with them.”

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74 Sadie, 216.
76 Tagliavini, 165.
Sadie agrees there are similarities to Gasparini’s score regarding Mozart’s implementation of the orchestral recitatives. He says this would be expected because both composers were working in the prescriptive and formulaic medium of *opera seria* and setting the same text. However, in more significant ways, Mozart did distinguish himself from Gasparini’s work. For instance, Gasparini was still using the *da capo* convention, while Mozart had adopted the *dal segno* structure. Further, Sadie implies Mozart’s score is more inventive because it demonstrates richer textures and a more expansive harmonic vocabulary than Gasparini’s. Specifically, Aspasia’s aria *Nel sen mi palpita* is the culmination of Mozart’s ability to marry music and text to the dramatic situation. “The aria’s urgent opening, string tremolandos, chromaticism, and expression of breathlessness in the vocal line, represent something more than a gifted boy’s clever imitation of his models.”

Tagliavini disagrees by saying “even though Mozart’s arias generally follow a structure different from those of Gasparini, there are also numbers in each version which show certain structural affinities that cannot be explained away because the same libretto was set by the two composers.” According to Tagliavini, Mozart’s first version of *Se vivere non degg’io* showed similarities in the form and music to Gasparini’s which were altered in the final version. Mozart was also inspired by Gasparini’s setting of the text “barbare stelle ingrate” which includes “strong dynamic contrasts and tremolos in the violins.” In Mozart’s first version of the duet, both he and Gasparini do not set the text “ah che tu sol tu sei che mi dividi il cor,” but it is set in Mozart’s final version.

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77 Sadie, 227.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 228.
80 Tagliavini, 167.
in Act I scene 10, the libretto calls for a joyous *sinfonia* and both composers write a march in D major.\(^{81}\)

Daniel Freeman argues “Mozart’s use of musical motives from Gasparini’s *Mitridate* should not be discounted.” However, “there is no mistaking the orientation of Mozart’s opera towards Mysliveček’s compositional procedures.” Moreover, “Mozart’s *Mitridate* could certainly be described as a Myslivečekian work.” Freeman points out there is “a significant stylistic shift” apparent in *Mitridate*’s arias compared to the composer’s first operas. For starters, “the *Mitridate* arias are laid out on much broader lines.”\(^{82}\) Also, *Mitridate* is rife with syncopation which was “so typical of Mysliveček.”\(^{83}\)

Freeman concludes it is not a coincidence that Mozart’s *Al destin che la minaccia* is modeled after Mysliveček’s *Sono in Mar*. Also, Mozart’s *Lungi da te* is based on Mysliveček’s *Se la cagion saprete*.\(^{84}\) An explanation for the similarities is that Mysliveček often visited the Mozarts while he was writing *La Nitetti*. Young Mozart was under the impression he would be writing an opera to the same libretto for Milan, so he most assuredly looked to his older friend and role model for guidance.\(^{85}\) For example, “the stylistic signals set by *Al destin che la minaccia* indicate an opera dominated by elaborate *dal segno* arias with strongly articulated amalgamations of sonata form, just like the arias in Mysliveček’s operas of the same period.”\(^{86}\)

Freeman explains that the most obvious similarities between Mozart’s *Mitridate* and Mysliveček’s *La Nitetti* are exhibited in the two overtures:

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\(^{81}\) Tagliavini, 168.
\(^{82}\) Freeman, 229.
\(^{83}\) Ibid., 230.
\(^{84}\) Ibid.
\(^{85}\) Ibid., 225-226.
\(^{86}\) Freeman, 230.
Mozart’s ‘second theme’ in the first movement [of the overture] appears to be an adaptation of the second theme of the third movement of Mysliveček’s overture. The form of both of the second movements is sonata form without a development (whereas Gasparini chose rhyming binary form for his Mitridate overture). Similarities in the third movement include a shared sonata-form structure (Gasparini’s third movement is a rondeau), and ‘second themes’ in both that begin with an accompaniment fugue followed by a leading tone motive.\footnote{Freeman, 230.}

Harrison James Wignall makes the case that Mozart was influenced by both Gasparini and Mysliveček. However, he claims the most influential element in Mitridate’s conception was that Mozart had to rewrite the arias for the singers up until the last minute. Wignall explains Rita Peiretti was the first scholar to uncover Gasparini’s Mitridate in Turin, the score that Tagliavini was unable to obtain while he was editing the Neue Mozart Ausgabe. In it, Peiretti discovered that Mozart’s Vado incontro was the exact same aria which Gasparini had written for his Mitridate in 1767. This leads to the conclusion that Gasparini’s aria was adopted and included with the other music for Mozart’s Mitridate, and was falsely attributed to him. However, Wignall explains this gives us a better idea of “Mozart’s compositional processes [which] included reorganizing musical material as well as reordering and recycling melodic and rhythmical elements.”\footnote{Wignall, 521-522.} Such examples include a rewrite for Nel grave tormento in which Mozart “added a more active second violin part,” as an homage to Sammartini.\footnote{Ibid., 131-132.}

Wignall also points out Mozart’s first attempts at writing Mitridate’s arias were probably rejected because of the singers “individual tastes” rather than for the “intrinsic aesthetic qualities of the music itself.”\footnote{Ibid., 133.} For example, it appears Bernasconi rejected...
certain coloratura passages in favor of ones which were more scale-like.\(^91\) Also, the final version of *Al destin che la minaccia* has way more in common with Gasparini’s setting. Similarities include the key, melodic contour, and “an identical harmonic plan in the B section.”\(^92\) Wignall further speculates “Mozart absorbed more and more elements of Gasparini’s setting, probably to please the singer.” This could also explain why there would be “five versions of d’Ettore’s entrance aria.”\(^93\)

Wignall also supports Freeman’s conclusions that *Mitridate* “was prepared with reference to Mysliveček’s *La Nitteti*.” This is because of specific aspects of *Lungi da te*, which Mozart was required to rewrite twice for Benedetti.\(^94\) To begin with, *Lungi da te* and *Se la cagion saprete* are both in D major.\(^95\) Both arias contain a similar accompaniment\(^96\), instrumentation, and tempo, and they were both written for the same voice type. Also, the second version of Mozart’s aria for Benedetti has an added “fragment” in the “opening melody, which is again similar to Mysliveček’s aria.”\(^97\)

Wignall also suggests the first version of the duet should be resurrected and performed today, rather than the second version. He argues “if Benedetti’s difficulty in learning this exceptional work in a limited time was the primary reason it was rejected, then there are equally compelling aesthetic arguments to perform it in present-day performances.”\(^98\)

\(^91\) Wignall, 135-136.
\(^92\) Ibid., 137.
\(^93\) Ibid., 138.
\(^94\) Ibid., 173-174.
\(^95\) Ibid., 174.
\(^96\) Ibid., 183.
\(^97\) Ibid., 204
\(^98\) Ibid., 211.
CHAPTER 4

MITHRIDATES

Mithridates as a Historical Figure

Plutarch (45-127 CE) described Mithridates VI, King of Pontus (135-63 BCE) as an enemy of Rome who massacred 150,000 civilians in just one day.\(^9^9\) He ruled over the Hellenistic kingdom of Pontus, which is now in modern-day Turkey. Over several decades, he was in constant battle with the Republic in order to secure his own empire. He fought three Mithridatic wars against Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Lucius Licinius Lucullus, and Gnaeus Pompey Magnus.\(^1^0^0\)

The king was perpetually paranoid about being assassinated because his father was murdered when Mithridates was only 13 years old. When he ascended the throne, his mother took over the rule of the kingdom. He was suspicious his mother was a conspirator in his father’s death, so he went into hiding. Several years later he emerged from hiding to confront his mother, and he was able to imprison her along with his brother.\(^1^0^1\)

Today, Mithridates is most remembered for his fascination with creating antidotes to poisons. He attempted to inoculate himself against fatal toxins by experimenting on prisoners. Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) reported Mithridates successfully created a “universal antidote,” under the name Mithridate. Though these claims are debated, Mithridates did attempt suicide by poison after his son betrayed him. The king fed poison

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\(^1^0^1\) Ibid.
to himself and his daughters. The toxins killed the princesses, but Mithridates lived. Eventually, he did take his own life by his own sword.  

Racine’s play

In 1673, Jean Racine wrote his epic tragedy *Mithridate* based loosely on the life of the ancient king. In Racine’s telling, the play begins after Mithridates had been in wars against the Romans for half a century. After a significant defeat, Xiphares, his eldest son, is informed that Mithridate has died in battle. Xiphares is afraid his brother Pharnaces, who supports the Romans, is going to betray him. Xiphares meets Mithridates’s fiancé, Monime, and spontaneously professes his undying love for her. However, Pharnaces inherits the throne and Monime with it. Unexpectedly, Mithridates is declared alive.

At the same time, Monime is torn between Mithridates and Xiphares. Mithridates is informed that his own son has plotted against him, so Pharnaces plans to flee the kingdom to escape his father’s wrath. Monime is forced into a marriage with Mithridates, and accepts her fate, even though she confesses her love to Xiphares. Mithridates is called into another battle with the Romans, and Xiphares agrees to go with him. Before they depart, Mithridates decrees a royal order in which Pharnaces is required to marry the Parthian princess. Pharnaces refuses the order, so Mithridates has him taken into custody. All the while, Mithridates is paranoid Xiphares will betray him, so he devises a scheme in which he gets Monime to confess she is in love with Xiphares.

Mithridates tells Monime to marry him in exchange for his forgiveness, but he is still torn. Pharnaces is still secretly colluding with the Romans, and he abets their attack.

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102 Marc Hyden, ““Mithridates.””
on the royal palace. A servant brings a vile of poison to Mithridates and Monime so they might die together. The servant also brings news Xiphares has died in the battle.

Mithridates accepts defeat and falls on his own sword while pardoning Monime. All the while, Xiphares prevailed against the Romans and saved the army. With his dying breath, Mithridates congratulates his son’s victory and blesses the union between Xiphares and Monime.

**Changes made by Cigna-Santi to create the libretto**

For the opera, Cigna-Santi deviated from the constructs of *opera seria* and reduced the original play from five acts to three, and introduced two new characters: Ismene, daughter of the King of Parthians, and Marzio, a Roman Tribune. Adrianna de Feo makes the point that Cigna-Santi not only used Racine’s original work to create his opera libretto, but he also turned to Benedetto Pasqualigo’s libretto entitled *Mitridate ré di Ponto, vincitor di sé stesso* (1723) for inspiration. In his version, Cigna-Santi imitated Pasqualigo by adding a scene to Act III, in which Marzio frees Farnace from the tower. Other alterations Cigna-Santi made to Racine’s play were changing Monime’s name to Aspasia, eliminating Phoedime, Monime’s lady in waiting, and Arcas, Mithridate’s valet. Ismene was added to the work to create a “second pair of lovers, the element necessary to respect the conventions of *opera seria*.” Marzio was added to incite hatred in Farnace against his father. Also, Marzio is added to Farnace’s role as the antithetical character to the loyal Sifare.104

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103 Osborne, 56.
According to De Feo, in the first half of the libretto, Cigna-Santi followed Racine’s outline to the letter. Cigna-Santi combined the recitatives into larger sections, incorporating several scenes to summarize the French text. He also maintained the important points in the speech but cut large sections of the second and fourth acts. The most significant cut made to the French text was Act I scene iii. In the scene, Mithridate tells his sons of his plan to attack Rome to test their loyalty. De Feo suggests this is one of the most important scenes in Racine’s play. In a long soliloquy, “Mithridate expresses his fierce hatred towards the Romans and the indomitable will to fight.” In Cigna-Santi’s libretto, this scene was reduced to a few lines of recitative. Even so, the cuts are compensated by the arias which express the character's emotions.105

Cigna-Santi added the text for Aspasia's aria, *Nel sen mi palpita* to the libretto. In Racine’s play there is no matching text, so “Monime's feelings in the face of the news of the coming king's return remain unexpressed.”106 According to De Feo, the main difference between Cigna-Santi and Racine’s texts is Farnace’s remorse. Racine characterizes Farnace as a traitor, so he is gone by the end of Act III.107 Cigna-Santi on the other hand, adds a moment of reconciliation between the two brothers in keeping with the *lieto fine*. Other minor changes include a scene in which Mitridate expresses his desire to be reunited with Siface. Siface overhears his father while in hiding, but he emerges to confess his love to Aspasia in a duet. In Act III, instead of Arbate, Siface stops Aspasia from drinking the poison. In Act IV of Racine’s play, Mitridate grapples with pardoning Siface’s death sentence and reuniting with Monime. Cigna-Santi added the

105 De Feo, 191.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid, 192.
words which Ismene states to Mitridate asking for his forgiveness in order to save
Aspasia.\textsuperscript{108}

**Opera Plot**

**Table 1.** List of opera characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Singer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mitridate</td>
<td>King of Pontus</td>
<td>tenor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guglielmo d’Ettore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspasia (prima donna)</td>
<td>the declared Queen</td>
<td>soprano</td>
<td></td>
<td>Antonia Bernasconi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sifare (primo uomo)</td>
<td>Mitridate’s son</td>
<td>soprano</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pietro Benedetti (Sartorino)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farnace</td>
<td>Mitridate’s eldest son</td>
<td>contralto</td>
<td></td>
<td>Giuseppe Cicognani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ismene (seconda donna)</td>
<td>Parthian Princess</td>
<td>soprano</td>
<td></td>
<td>Anna Francesca Varese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marzio</td>
<td>Roman tribune</td>
<td>tenor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gaspare Bassano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbate</td>
<td>Governor of Nymphæa</td>
<td>soprano</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pietro Muschietti</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Around 88 BCE, Mitridate is defeated in a battle against the Romans. The Governor, Arbate, travels to Nymphæa to report Mitridate had died. Arbate explains to Sifare the city of Nymphæa is happy that he has safely returned and asks him if he and his brother are at odds because of the throne. Sifare tells him they have an innocent brotherly rivalry because they are both in love with the father’s fiancé, Aspasia. Arbate reassures Sifare he is on his side regarding politics.

When Arbate leaves, Aspasia enters begging for Sifare’s help. Farnace has demanded love from her, and she hates him for it. Sifare confesses he is in love with her and says that if he protects her from his brother, he hopes she will one day come to love him as well. Aspasia asks Sifare how he expects her to respond to that and exits. Sifare is

\textsuperscript{108} De Feo, 192.
left conflicted and works himself into a rage over his brother’s actions.

In the Temple of Venus, Farnace asks Aspasia to run away with him and become the queen of Pontus. She refuses, saying it would offend Mitridate’s honor to marry someone who is allied with the Romans. Farnace lashes out at her, and she cries out for Sifare who appears just in the nick of time. Sifare tells him to stop, and Farnace comes to the conclusion Aspasia is refusing him because of his brother. The two brothers begin to argue and almost launch into a sword fight when Aspasia yells “stop!”

Arbate rushes in and announces Mitridate is on his way, arriving by ship at Nymphaea. He tells the brothers to put their feelings aside because their father will not take kindly to their behavior. Aspasia says goodbye to Sifare and explains that she is heartbroken, but she must leave. Farnace turns to his brother and asks him if he will join him in attempting to defeat Mitridate before he even enters the city. Sifare refuses, and Farnace warns him they both better hide their love for Aspasia and not betray each other. Sifare pledges his loyalty to his brother and father and leaves with his soldiers. Farnace is furious his plans have been stymied, when his confidant, Marzio, arrives and reminds him he will have a great destiny if he fights for Rome. Farnace agrees and decides to stick with his plan to defeat his father.

At the port of Nymphaea, Mitridate and Ismene are greeted by Arbate as they disembark from the ship. Mitridate is devastated he was defeated by Pompey and Ismene tries to distract him by asking where his sons are. The brothers arrive to greet Mitridate, but he scolds them for leaving their posts at Clochis and Pontus. Farnace explains that after they heard about Mitridate’s death, they came immediately, but that they are now overjoyed their father is alive and well. Ismene asks Farnace why he isn’t happy to see
her, and Mitridate continues that he has brought Ismene along, specifically so Farnace can marry her. Before everyone leaves, Ismene says she should feel happy, but for some reason, she can tell something is wrong with Farnace after the way he reacted to her arrival.

Mitridate believes Ismene’s assertion that something is wrong, but Mitridate confesses to Arbate that he is outraged by his ungrateful sons. Mitridate asks Arbate if he knows if Sifare or Farnace are trying to steal Aspasia from him. Arbate explains Farnace made advances on Aspasia as soon as he heard about Mitridate’s death, but Sifare has been focused on defeating the Romans. Mitridate tells Arbate to keep a close watch on Farnace. Mitridate declares he will not only disown Farnace if Aspasia goes with him, but also he will murder him.

Back in the royal apartments, Ismene questions Farnace as to why he has rejected her, since she traveled so far and waited so long to be united with him, and she threatens to go to Mitridate. Farnace says he doesn’t care, and that if something happens to him, she will be to blame. Mitridate appears and tells Ismene he knows all about Farnace and she will be better off marrying Sifare instead.

When Aspasia arrives, Mitridate tells Aspasia they will leave on one of the ships. He sees she is upset. Sifare enters the room, and Mitridate accuses Aspasia of being Farnace’s lover. Mitridate asks Sifare to protect him and tells Aspasia she will face his wrath. After this encounter, Sifare is extremely confused and asks Aspasia if this is true. She explains to him that he, Sifare, is the one she loves. Arbate barges in and lets the two know Sifare, Farnace, Aspasia, and Ismene are all summoned to Mitridate’s camp. Aspasia tells Sifare the only way they can get over each other is never to see each other
again. They are both heartbroken, but Aspasia knows she must fulfill her duty, and Sifare knows he must remain loyal to his father.

At Mitridate’s camp, he tells Ismene the only reason Farnace is still alive is that she begged for his life. The two brothers come in, and Mitridate tells them his plan of action for a battle. Farnace tries to convince him this is not a good strategy and in doing so, he reveals himself as a traitor. All of a sudden, Marzio appears on the scene, infuriating Mitridate. For the king, this is the last straw, and he sends Farnace to imprisonment in the tower.

Mitridate turns to Ismene since this is such an embarrassing situation for her. However, she tells Mitridate to remain calm. Farnace believes it is all over for him, so he implicates Sifare and tells everyone Sifare is in love with Aspasia. Sifare tries to explain himself, but Aspasia is heard approaching in the distance. Mitridate tells Sifare to hide so he can reveal the truth. Mitridate tricks Aspasia into confessing her love for Sifare and because of this, Mitridate decides to slaughter them all. Unaware of Mitridate’s plan, Aspasia asks Sifare to kill her right then and there because she cannot fathom having to marry Mitridate. Sifare says if she dies, he must die too.

In the hanging gardens, Ismene tells Mitridate that Aspasia tried to hang herself with the bands of the royal diadem. Ismene asks Mitridate to reconsider his anger. Mitridate tells Aspasia if she marries him, she can save Sifare’s life. She refuses, and Mitridate tells her he will seek revenge on them both. They are interrupted when Arbate enters and tells Mitridate the Romans have landed on the beach. Mitridate rushes off to battle and Aspasia seizes this opportunity to kill herself by ingesting a cup of poison. Right before she downs the drink, Sifare throws the poison on the ground explaining it
was Ismene who let him out of the chains. He tells Aspasia he has brought soldiers for her protection and that he is going to help his father in battle.

In the tower, Farnace is chained, but Marzio climbs up and frees him. Marzio explains there is a boat waiting for him and all he has to do is fight on the side of Rome to get everything he ever wanted. Farnace is so distraught by this so he decides to rejoin his father and fight against the Romans. A wounded Mitridate is brought into the grand hall. Sifare and Aspasia rush to his side when Ismene bursts in explaining that Farnace set the Roman fleet on fire. Mitridate forgives everyone with his dying breath.
CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS

Al destin che la minaccia, no. 1

*Al destin che la minaccia* occurs in the second scene of Act I. At this point in the drama, Aspasia has just been told that Mitridate is dead and Farnace has propositioned her to become his bride. When Aspasia runs to ask Sifare for help, he confesses that he also is in love with her. Sifare has no idea that Aspasia loves him in return, which propels her into a flurry of emotions. Aspasia begins a two-part monologue, the first half of which is an entreaty to God. She asks God to free her soul from the “threat” of Farnace. The latter half of Aspasia’s speech is directed towards Sifare. She asks him how he could possibly expect her to come up with a response to his confession.

**Table 2.** Translation of *Al destin che la minaccia*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Al destin che la minaccia,</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>Oh God, Free my oppressed soul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Togli, oh Dio! quest’ alma oppressa,</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>From the fate that threatens it!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima rendimi a me stessa,</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>First give me back to myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E poi sdegnati con me.</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>And then get angry with me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come vuoi d’un rischio in faccia</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>How do you expect in the face of danger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch’io risponda a’ detti tuoi?</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>That I answer to your words?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah conoscermi tu puoi</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>You will get to know me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E ‘l mio cor ben sai qual è</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Since you already know my heart so well(^{109})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hermann Abert contends in the final setting of this aria that Mozart did not do justice to the text. For example, Abert believes that Mozart catches his listeners off-guard by introducing too many new motives, which ends up being “too much of a good thing.”110 Also, Abert states that the theme is “weighed down with fioriture” and “the coloratura writing … is set to wholly inappropriate words.”111 However, Mozart came up with a solution to transform Aspasia from a whimpering victim, into a robust woman of character. From the opening scene of the libretto, Aspasia is painted as an extremely vulnerable person, put in a weak position by the men who surround her. Seemingly, Aspasia goes through a more devastating scenario with every turn of the page, appearing weaker and weaker until she decides to kill herself. It is difficult for an audience to empathize with a character who bemoans her situation throughout a performance. Therefore, by setting Aspasia’s opening aria in a heroic nature, Mozart elevates the character’s status. Even though the first half of the text is a prayer, Aspasia shows strength by not cowering, and that is evidenced by Mozart’s use of punctuated rhythms and key of C major.

Phillip Adlung and Mann both claim that the aria is in “sonata-form (double exposition).”112 However, the aria does not need to be recategorized from a dal segno in AA’BA’ form. Adlung and Mann point out that there is a double exposition: the first exposition is the A and the second is the A’, while the B section is the development and the repeated A’ is the recapitulation. Even though the return to the A’ and the frequent modulations in the B section give the aria a sonata-form feel, limiting the aria to this form

110 Abert, 191.
111 Ibid.
112 Mann, 80.
would not necessarily account for the opening orchestral *ritornello* which has its own recurring themes.

Abert points out that “the relationship between voice and orchestra still remains to be clarified,” which may lead to confusion regarding the aria’s structure.\(^{113}\) The outline of sonata form may indeed be there, but Mozart’s prime directive in this aria is to display Aspasia’s character. Mozart was beginning to push the boundaries of classical form and *dal segno* aria, so this piece’s structure could be a result of his experimentation.

The opening *ritornello* (mm. 1-18) is a 16-bar period with two added measures of cadential material. Just as the two brothers represent two opposing fates, the orchestral *ritornello* provides two contrasting themes. The antecedent contains what Adlung calls the “strings” theme and the consequent contains the contrasting “horns” theme.\(^{114}\) Abert describes the opening *ritornello* as “generally broadly structured...adopt[ing] the Bachian model [with] two contrasting themes divided by a sharply delineated imperfect cadence, designed as a solo in contradistinction to the preceding tutti.”\(^{115}\)

Mozart sets up the aria perfectly by putting two distinct themes in the orchestral *ritornello*. When the voice appears in the A section, two conflicting ideas emerge: internally, Aspasia struggles with anxiety and attempting to stay calm. In her opening line (m. 1) we hear her ubiquitous dotted half-note (or two-\(8\)ths) rhythm (Figure 1). This rhythm represents the majority of the legato sections in the aria. With this rhythm, Aspasia attempts to calm herself or to suppress her emotions until the coloratura passages interrupt and her emotions bubble up in florid excitement.

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\(^{113}\) Mann, 80.


\(^{115}\) Ibid., 191.
The coloratura often alternates between her excitement about Sifare loving her and her fear that she may have to go with Farnace. An additional layer to this emotional contrast is that she is under the impression that her fiancé, Mitridate, is dead. There is also a guilt component as she finds pleasure in the fact that she does not have to marry the old man, and in the possibility she could be with Mitridate’s son, Sifare. At the same time, she cannot publicly express joy over the king’s death, and there is the looming possibility Farnace will make her his bride.

The A section of the aria, in which she calls to God, could be considered a joyous declamation of Aspasia’s love for Sifare. Here, Mozart does a few interesting things regarding the periodic structure. The first four bars (mm. 19-22) can be considered the Main Theme, though the melody is convoluted with coloratura in m. 21 (Figure 1). Mozart constructs a full period with a half cadence (HC) on m. 26, which dovetails into the Consequent ending on m. 33 with a perfect authentic cadence (PAC) in the home key of C major. Since m. 26 is evenly situated between the antecedent and consequent the period feels symmetrical. This period marks Aspasia’s first full statement. She asks “Oh God, free my soul from the fate that threatens it.”

![Figure 1. Main theme of Al destin che la minaccia](image-url)
This line is a prayer, yet the music is linear and heroic. It seems as though Aspasia is attempting to show herself as strong, cool, and collected in the face of the difficulties bestowed upon her. At the same time, Aspasia is tasked with keeping her own emotions in check. In a reaffirmation of her plea, there is an indication of doubt as the melody leaps in 10\textsuperscript{th}s and 9\textsuperscript{th}s in mm. 27-28 (Figure 2). The leaps exhibit the stress Aspasia is going through as if she is crying out. Aspasia’s anger over her oppression is revealed in m. 29 with a furious octave scale from A\textsubscript{4} to A\textsubscript{5} (Figure 2). To add to this effect, Mozart cleverly thins out the accompaniment and places emphasis on the final beats of mm. 29-30 in a downward motion to showcase this oppression.

![Figure 2. Melodic leaps in 10\textsuperscript{th}s and 9\textsuperscript{th}s](image)

In a call and response manner, Aspasia takes over the downward motive from the orchestra in m. 29 (Figure 2). The raging coloratura of m. 29 combined with a cascading sequence from mm. 31-32 culminates in the highest note of the piece, C\textsubscript{6}, and the height of Aspasia’s emotions (m. 33) (Figure 2).
The antecedent for the next period dovetails out of m. 33 and Mozart takes us into the dominant key of G major. Aspasia makes her second full statement with the text to God saying “first give me back to myself, and then you can be angry with me.” Here, Aspasia tries to convince herself to stay on track and not to let her emotions get the better of her. The first eight bars of the period (mm. 33-40) are a short break of legato in which she fully states her second sentence, punctuated by a HC in G. Again, Mozart dovetails m. 40 to create symmetry in the period and begins the consequent with a repetition of the text “Al destin che la minaccia.” This time when Aspasia prays about her fate, she is extremely declamatory, singing the “horns” theme in mm. 40-44, which echoes her in the orchestra (mm. 41 and 43).

In m. 45-47, Aspasia repeats the texts “prima rendimi a me stessa.” We get the feeling that there should be a PAC in G in m. 47 to round off the period, but instead, Mozart adds eight bars of coloratura. In m. 54, there seems to be another opportunity for a cadence, but the text repeats once again. In another effort to define Aspasia as a heroic woman, it is this author’s interpretation the soft and tapered “sdegnati con me” on 8th notes in m. 53 (Figure 4) is a representation of Aspasia’s thoughts.
As the phrase is repeated from mm. 54-59, the initial G in m. 54 rises in a flurry of 16th notes to an octave above and then manifests itself in another flurry of 16th notes in m. 55. An invigorated return of the previous phrase culminates in similar 8th note figures in m. 56 on the words “e poi sdegnati.” Rather than repeating the third leaps and tapered phrasing of m. 53, Aspasia sings a definitive descending scale which is accentuated by the orchestra (Figure 5). Aspasia’s bold statement is re-energized by her determination, and decorated by a trill on the dominant chord in m. 58 before the final PAC resolution in m. 59.
Figure 5. Final statement leading to a PAC

The additional coloratura may well have been incorporated to show off Bernasconi’s abilities, but Mozart probably also had dramatic motives in mind. With these additional 12 bars, Aspasia loses her mind with excitement and finally gets a break with the eight bars of orchestral ritornello in mm. 59-66. In m. 66 the orchestra plays a broken diminished chord to lead us into the A’ section in D minor. Mozart begins this more somber section on the dominant. The A’ epitomizes Aspasia’s fear of Farnace. There are few cadential moments here, so there is a feeling of two substantial musical sentences.

The section begins with Aspasia’s rhythmic motive, but it only occurs four times, while it occurs 10 times in the A section. As Mozart begins to modulate to the dominant on m. 71, Aspasia sings a high B5 on the text “togli, oh Dio!” as if she is reaching up to God asking for help. Mm. 67-74 are a variation on the original theme in mm. 19-26, but
in m. 27, Mozart adds a new mini theme as a transition to lead Aspasia into the horns theme (mm. 80-84). Mm. 85-101 feel like a written-out cadenza, modulating several times until Mozart actually calls for a cadenza in m. 102.

Mozart consistently writes Aspasia’s melodic statements beginning with a downward arc, to show her sadness and defeat, only to change the melody to an upward rising scalar cascade with coloratura to promote her dramatic and heroic nature.

Likewise, this is the way this author thinks the cadenzas should progress. Here are some examples of cadenzas as performed by prominent artists:

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**Figure 6.** Diana Damrau A section cadenza

**Figure 7.** Yvonne Kenny A section cadenza

**Figure 8.** Patricia Petibon A section cadenza

**Figure 9.** Arleen Auger A section cadenza

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116 In several of her performances, Yvonne Kenny does not sing the A’ the first time. She skips ahead to the B section then sings the A’, turning the form into a written-out da capo
Of course, these artists have created their own cadenzas to highlight their own vocal abilities, which must be taken into consideration. However, eighteenth-century performance practice for cadenzas should be followed. In 1757, Johann Friedrich Agricola published a translation and a “running commentary” on Pier Francesco Tosi’s indispensable treatise on singing, *Opinioni de’ cantori antichi e moderni* (1723). According to Julianne Baird, by Agricola’s time, Tosi’s treatise was considered old-fashioned. Therefore, Agricola’s rules for cadenzas may offer insights into performance practice closer to Mozart’s time.

Baird explains Agricola’s views were that the cadenza should not be too long; should be varied; should be related to the primary affect of the aria; and should not be rushed through. Although some chromaticism is allowed, it is preferred in pathetic or-flattering arias. Agricola also indicated that a cadenza should not travel to remote keys; should have an element of surprise, by introducing notes outside the range of the aria (especially in one of a fiery nature) and; should at least *sound* improvised. Agricola suggests different figures should be interchanged to avoid cadenzas “that sound overly repetitive.” In addition, Agricola specified that if possible, a cadenza should include skillful weaving of the thematic material from the aria. However, it was only in the late

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118 Ibid., 31.
119 Tosi, 31.
eighteenth-century that composers of cadenzas regularly began to use thematic material to their advantage.\textsuperscript{120}

A performance practice which also took place in Italy in the eighteenth-century was that singers attempted to sing their cadenzas in one breath. Singers were compared to one another in a competitive manner. Therefore, breath capacity was one of the ways to showcase vocal virtuosity. In order to take advantage of the fullest breath, singers would often change “the underlay of the text.” Agricola states it is better for the singer to breathe “in the middle of the word,” rather than “changing the text underlay or repositioning the syllables.”\textsuperscript{121}

In 1789 Daniel Gottlob Türk published his piano treatise, \textit{Clavierschule, oder Anweisung zum Clavierspielen}, which echoes many of Agricola’s sentiments about the voice. In his study on cadenzas for Mozart’s piano concertos, Robert D. Levin summarizes Türk’s rules for cadenzas: Türk suggests the cadenza should reinforce the impression composition in a brief summary and maintain the character of the piece; modulations to remote keys should only be used in passing, and the cadenza should not contain keys which do not already exist in the piece. However, “as much of the unexpected and the surprising” should be added, and “no thought should be often repeated in the same key or in another, no matter how beautiful it may be.” Türk also urges that “every dissonance...must be properly resolved,” while “novelty, wit, and an abundance of ideas” are preferred. However, the same tempo and meter should not be maintained throughout.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{120} Tosi, 31.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 24.
Another interesting source for this material comes from the work of Ellen T. Harris. Harris wrote cadenzas for a relatively recent production of *Mitridate* at the Santa Fe Opera. Harris explains that “the most comprehensive sources for vocal ornamentation in the late eighteenth century are the volumes of examples published by the composer Domenico Corri between 1780 and 1810.”\(^{123}\) Harris states that Corri’s work is invaluable. However, Mozart’s own examples are “of even more importance to vocal ornamentation in [his] early works in the opera seria form.”\(^{124}\)

Harris justifies her cadenzas based on Will Crutchfield’s “The Classical Era: Voices” (1989). Harris states “surviving examples from the period indicate that cadenzas typically begin and end in the register notated in the score; further, they do not remain on a single chord, but touch on a variety of harmonies; they contain striking rhythmic variety, often ranging from the 16\(^{th}\) to the half note; and, although they may include sequential patterns, these are limited and are rarely related to figuration from the aria.”\(^{125}\) Therefore, the classical cadenzas should be conceived as a single, coherent phrase without extensive patterning.”\(^{126}\)

Harris was inspired heavily by comparable works of Johann Christian Bach. According to Harris, “Mozart prepared ornamentation and cadenzas for the da capo [aria] ‘*Cara, la dolce fiamma*’ from Adriano in Siria (1765) by J.C. Bach. Mozart wrote six cadenzas for “*Cara, la dolce fiamma*,” and “four alternative fermata embellishments for the opening motto.”\(^{127}\) Harris suggests the cadenzas “be strong and tempest-
tossed...because the text depicts stormy emotion.” 128 Harris proposes the first cadenza contain “disjunct angularity,” while the B section cadenza can contrast in a rapid plunge. Harris advises that the da capo cadenza should “be the most spectacular.” 129

This author thinks that an appropriate cadenza - which borrows from the successes of those above, respects the established guidelines of Mr. Tosi, uses some of the same inspiration of Ms. Harris’ work, and, of course, the inspirational purpose of Aspasia’s character at this moment - should be similar to Ms. Damrau’s first cadenza (Figure 6).

Following the A’ section, the orchestral ritornello continues in the key of C major until the B section in A minor. Here, Aspasia changes her focus from God to Sifare. She asks Sifare how he expects her to respond to his words. This development-like section underscores Aspasia’s emotions. Just as she experiences many different feelings, Mozart takes us through different tonal centers to eventually arrive at E minor. The section is much more chromatic, and similarly to the A’, there is little cadential motion. In m. 128, Aspasia has another opportunity for a cadenza. The following figures are examples from prominent artists:

\[\text{Figure 11. Natalie Dessay B section cadenza}\]

11 Dessay 2nd Cadenza

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\[128\:\text{Ibid., 113.}\]
\[129\:\text{Ibid.}\]
The return of the A’ is extremely important dramatically. If Aspasia is dreading the suit from Farnace in the first go around, then she could be searching emotionally inward the second time. According to Baird, Tosi “urges that the da capo ornamentation be varied at every performance,” as many patrons returned “night after night … for the
sake of the contest-like conditions."\textsuperscript{130} However, the circumstances were different for Agricola in Berlin, where operas were only performed twice a week, so he “makes little reference performance conditions requiring such virtuosic variation.”\textsuperscript{131} Though the aria is already extremely florid, there are opportunities for embellishments. Here are this author’s suggestions:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure17.png}
\caption{A’ Ornamentation m. 77}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure18.png}
\caption{A’ Ornamentation m. 79}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{130} Tosi, \textit{Introduction to the art of singing}, 30.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
Figure 19. A’ Ornamentation m. 82 and m. 84

Figure 20. A’ Ornamentation m. 93-95
Leading up to the third and final cadenza, the text is still directed toward God, but Aspasia’s cadenza could conceivably take on an entirely different character. Here are the examples from the sopranos:

Figure 21. Diana Damrau A’ cadenza

Figure 22. Yvonne Kenny A’ cadenza

Figure 23. Patricia Petibon A’ cadenza

Figure 24. Arleen Auger A’ cadenza
This author has written the following example because it borrows from the themes heard in mm. 49-51 (Figure 27), while adding a pianistic quality in mm. 100-101 of Figure 26. This quick figure seems appropriate because it ties in the pianistic qualities heard in the later arias, especially the duet Se viver non degg’io. As previously stated, cadenzas of the eighteenth-century served to showcase the soloist’s virtuosity. Although this cadenza does not fit into the tessitura set by Mozart, this cadenza fits better with my particular fach. I am extremely comfortable with notes above the staff, and not as much below the staff. Putting the cadenza in the most powerful part of my voice adds to Aspasia’s power as a character. Rather than attempting to “beef up” the middle or lower part of my range, I have the opportunity to descend almost two octaves, and still achieve the desired affect. This Author’s suggestion:
Nel sen mi palpita, no. 4

Aspasia’s second aria, *Nel sen mi palpita*, occurs in Act I, scene seven, right after Arbate tells everyone Mitridate is not dead, but on his way back. This means there is no hope for a relationship between Aspasia and Sifare, which leaves the queen utterly heartbroken.

Table 3. Translation of *Nel sen mi palpita*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Italian</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nel sen mi palpita dolente il core;</td>
<td>My pained heart beats in my bosom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi chiama a piangere il mio dolore;</td>
<td>My grief calls me to weep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non so resistere, non so restar.</td>
<td>I cannot resist, I cannot remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma se di lagrime umido ho il ciglio,</td>
<td>But my eyes are wet with tears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>È solo, credimi, il tuo periglio</td>
<td>Believe me, your danger is the only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La cagion barbara del mio penar.</td>
<td>Reason for my cruel suffering(^\text{132})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{132}\) Castel, “Mitridate, re di Ponto,” 204-205.
Nel sen mi palpita is a written-out da capo in G minor, and a stark contrast from Al destin because it contains no ritornelli and no coloratura. In addition, G minor is a significant key for Mozart. According to William Mann, the key represents “melancholy or pathos” as in “Pamina’s Ach ich fühl’s … [and] … Ilia’s Padre, germani. Mann continues that in Mitridate, Mozart “expresses the dolorous possibilities which were to be emotionally extended whenever he used this key.” The scholars agree that Mozart successfully combines the text, music, and drama in this aria. Even Abert admits Nel sen mi palpita “is entirely typical of the later composer in terms of his modulatory procedures.” Charles Osborne adds “in its expressive simplicity, [this aria] is worthy of mature Mozart.” Mann goes so far to say “for these couple of minutes, at least opera seria is not a dead duck and Idomeneo is within earshot … [as] … Aspasia voices her grief in Mozart’s characteristic agitato … vein as anguished as Illia’s Padre Germani.

Another prima donna role comes to mind with this aria. Nel sen mi palpita is reminiscent of Euridice’s Che Fiero momento from Gluck’s Orfeo ed Euridice. Gluck’s opera premiered in 1762. Mozart had certainly seen at least one of Gluck’s operas, so he was probably aware of the composer’s reformations. In addition, Bernasconi had sung Alceste with Gluck in 1767, so she may have given some ideas to young Mozart. Even Berlioz accused Mozart of quoting music from Alceste in Don Giovanni. The similarities between Euridice and Aspasia could possibly be another example of how

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133 Mann, 23.
134 Abert, 90.
135 Osborne, 59-60.
136 Mann, 82.
Mozart ingeniously used an idea from another composer and spun it out into a “bigger and better” version with his unique flavor.

The melodic contour and accompaniment are incredibly similar to each other in both of the arias. The accompaniment mirrors the text and adds to its turbulent nature. This effect allows the drama and music to match, which is the touchstone in Gluck’s reforms for opera. However, Che fiero momento has a feeling of being stripped down in comparison to Nel sen mi palpita. This is due to the simple chords, repeated notes, and frequent unison accompaniment with the singer. In addition, in Nel sen mi palpita Mozart seamlessly blends the B section with the A and A’, while Gluck clearly differentiates between the sections with a place for a cadenza.

Nevertheless, Aspasia’s aria is full of word painting, which adds to the drama. The first two bars provide a short introduction leading out of the recitative. The chords give the feeling Aspasia’s heart is broken. In her first line she states “nel sen mi palpita,” and Mozart gives us a dotted rhythm on “palpita,” (m. 4) as though her heart is literally palpitating (Figure 28). This rhythm is repeated on the words “core,” “piangere,” and “resistere.” In m. 5 Aspasia’s dotted half note rhythm appears, and we hear it nine more times thereafter.
In this aria, word painting also occurs in the descending lines. For example, in mm. 15-19 the line descends more than an octave starting on E-flat. In mm. 16-17 “piangere” has a particularly chromatic descent in which we genuinely hear Aspasia’s pain.

In mm. 23-24 Mozart adds another rhythmic indication with descending eight notes on the off-beats, which sound like a high-pitched sob in which Aspasia is
attempting to catch her breath. There is no rest for Aspasia’s sorrow until the legato B section, starting on m. 36.

Regarding form, the aria begins with an eight-bar period ending on a PAC in G minor. Between mm. 11-23 Mozart gives a HC in m. 19, which gives the feeling that the phrase should end on a PAC in G minor in m. 23. However, Mozart continues the phrase for 11 more bars (mm. 24-34) until we get the PAC in m. 34. Mozart could have ended the phrase on m. 29, but he repeats the same four bars mm. 24-29. Dramatically, a repetition of that nature is essential to take into consideration.

In the B section, Mozart colors the line “ma se di lagrime” as Aspasia’s tears fall in a descending line in the orchestra (Figure 31). With the text “il tuo periglio” the
accompaniment alters with rhythmic changes and leaps. The text “e solo credimi” is repeated, and the stepwise accompaniment returns. In m. 52 on the word “barbara” the accompaniment changes to unison and contains an octave leap, which falls with the melody (Figure 32). Mozart uses a breathless characteristic by separating the syllables of the words with rests during the line “del mio penar.” At m. 56, the accompaniment bursts in and summarizes the way Aspasia has been feeling in these last statements.

![Figure 32. Octave leap in m. 52](image)

With the return of the A section, Mozart alters the original opening statement as Aspasia sings “nel sen mi palpita” on a repeated D in m. 59. In mm. 76-79 Mozart alters the descending motive on the text “non so resistere,” where Aspasia is resisting the downward descent and takes the melody up in an octave leap (m. 78). With the text “mi chiama a piangere,” Mozart introduces a new ascending motive which reaches an A5-flat, a non-chord tone, which is in unison with the orchestra, to add dramatic emphasis (Figure 33). The attack of the accompaniment is more agitated due to the 16th notes during “non son resistere,” which Mozart continually references until the end of the aria.
Mozart brings back the breathless motive with repetition on the words in mm. 90-92 and only brings the 8th note and tremolo accompaniment in mm. 93-95, where the text finally comes to a close. In m. 95, an explosion of accentuated octaves in the orchestra takes over. The unison statement of the orchestra begins with the chromatic melody which appeared in m. 59, recalling a piece heard earlier in the aria, and ends on a G minor chord to seal Aspasia’s fate (Figure 34).
**Nel grave tormento, no. 14**

Just before Aspasia’s third aria, *Nel grave tormento*, she admits to Sifare that she is in love with him, but explains to him in order to keep her honor, she can never see him again. The heartbroken Sifare bids Aspasia farewell. The aria is preceded by an accompanied recitative in which Aspasia admits to herself that she is deceiving her own heart. She realizes she may not be able to get over Sifare and that would result in grave consequences for them both. In *Nel grave tormento*, Aspasia alternates between love (Sifare) and duty (Mitridate). Fittingly, Mozart set the text in ABA’B’ form which switches between *adagio* and *allegro* tempi. Adlung praises the composition, stating Aspasia’s “conflict becomes the actual driving force for a moving piece of music.”

Table 4. Translation of Accompanied Recitative *Grazie ai Numi Parti*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grazie ai Numi partì.</th>
<th>Thanks to the Gods, he left.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ma tu qual resti, sventurato mio cor!</td>
<td>But what will become of my unhappy heart?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah giacchè fosti di pronunziar capace</td>
<td>Ah, since you were able to pronounce the cruel sentence,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La sentenza cruel,</td>
<td>follow the course which virtue dictated to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siegui l’impresa che ti detto virtù.</td>
<td>forget the fatal object,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scorda un oggetto per te fatal,</td>
<td>think of your own honor,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifletti alla tua gloria,</td>
<td>to assure your victory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E assicura così la tua vittoria.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingannata ch’io son!</td>
<td>But I am only deceiving myself!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tentar lo posso, e il tenterò</td>
<td>I can try to do it, and I will try,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poichè ‘l prescrive, ahi lassa,</td>
<td>for duty, alas,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanto giusto il dover, quanto inumano;</td>
<td>as just as it is inhuman, demands it;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma lo sperar di conseguirlo è vano.</td>
<td>but hoping to succeed is useless.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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138 Adlung, 72.
139 Castel, 234-235.
Table 5. Translation of *Nel grave tormento*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nel grave tormento</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>In the grave torment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Che il seno m’opprime,</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>which oppresses my bosom,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mancare già sento</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>I already feel fading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La pace del cor.</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>The peace in my heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al fiero contrasto</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>The fierce struggle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resister non basto:</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>I am not able to resist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E strazia quest’alma</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>And my soul is torn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dovere ed amor.</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>between duty and love.140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The recitative of the aria *Nel grave tormento* offers even more insight into the dramatic and heroic nature of Aspasia. Despite Mozart’s youth, the composer wrote this opera with a clear understanding of the nature of human drama, and how to use the orchestra to express the emotions of the characters. At the onset of the recitative, Mozart uses the dominant of G major and resolves to the tonic in m.1 to represent Aspasia’s relief during her line “grazie ai numi parti” (Figure 35).

![Figure 35. Dominant of G major resolves to the tonic](image)

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140 Castel, 235.
The dramatic shift to E minor in mm. 2-3 directly represents Aspasia’s thoughts returning inward to her torn and unfortunate heart. Mozart sets up a beautiful moment in the accompaniment from mm. 3-4 which descends stepwise in the bass clef and is accentuated by a repeated 16\textsuperscript{th} note figure in the treble clef (Figure 36). The entire andante section gives the impression of a beating or fluttering heart. The orchestral interjection in mm. 3-4 not only serves as a musical transition into the following key of D minor but also it dramatically fuels Aspasia’s following line “Ah giacche fosti di pronunziar capace la sentenza crudel.”

![Figure 36. Dramatic shift to E minor](image)

Mozart does not make any harmonic change under this important text. Instead, he lets the vocal line propel the drama by rising to a climax on an F in m. 6, on the word “crudel.” After the text is sung, Mozart engages Aspasia’s emotions in a dramatic rhythmic statement of the new tonic, D minor (Figure 37). The new key suggests a large release in Aspasia which enables her to unleash her thoughts and emotions in the following text “Siegui l’impresa che ti detto’ virtu. Scorda un oggetto per te fatal, Rifletti alla tua gloria. E assicura così la tua vittoria.”
Figure 37. Mozart engages the emotions of Aspasia in a dramatic rhythmic statement of the new tonic, D minor

These words furiously flow in a cascade of 8th notes (mm. 9-13), which culminate in the same rhythmic pattern which was used in m. 6. This time the figure appears in the relative major of D minor, followed by a rushing scalar ascension in thirds. To represent her thoughts and feelings, Mozart slows down the accompaniment to repeated descending quarter and 8th note figures which include the leap of a 6th in mm. 13-15 (Figure 38).
Figure 38. Mozart slows down the accompaniment to repeated descending quarter and 8\textsuperscript{th} note figures

The nature of Aspasia’s true thoughts is revealed in m. 16. She exclaims “Ingannata ch’io son!” and the accompaniment descends in rapid arpeggios to the raised 7\textsuperscript{th} of D minor. Aspasia hesitates to accept her own conclusions, which is aptly represented by the 16\textsuperscript{th} notes used for the vocal line, and by Mozart’s constant interruption of her phrases by the orchestra in mm.17-19. As Aspasia accepts her thoughts and slowly works through them in mm. 20-23, the text “Tanto giusto il dover, quanto inumano; Ma lo sprar di conseguirlo e vano” is set to slower 8\textsuperscript{th} notes and moves in a careful stepwise motion (Figure 39). Mozart carefully emphasizes the dramatic nature of this section by setting long chords with few harmonic shifts under the text.
In the aria proper, the orchestral *ritornello* (mm. 1-7) quotes the first vocal entry, which becomes the most important line of the piece (Figure 40). It is interesting that Mozart includes an octave leap at the beginning of the main theme of the piece. The leap occurs on the word “seno” in m. 10; the two octave Gs can represent how Aspasia is torn between the contrasting ideas of duty, “dovere,” and love, “amor” (Figure 40). In m. 12 “seno” is set with two 16ths, which represent the two feelings of love and duty.
Figure 40. Octave Gs can represent how Aspasia is torn between the contrasting ideas of duty

“M’opprime” is written lower, in a downward motion, as if Aspasia is literally being oppressed. Mozart sets “m’opprime” in a similar fashion, both times it occurs.

Mozart sets “mancare” in a two-bar pattern, descending by a semitone. On the word “pace,” there is no peace. Mozart paints the tension of the situation in broken-up 16th notes (Figure 41).
The opening theme which moves from G to G is seemingly repeated in m. 19, but from A to A. From mm. 18-20 many different variations of interrupting the line, including triplets and 16\textsuperscript{th} notes, represent agitation and distress. Another way Mozart enhances the tension is the way he sets the word “pace.” In mm. 17-21, rather than setting “pace” with notes which have a long duration, and are culminating in a tonal resolution, Mozart sets fast-paced 8\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} notes which extend into the extremities of the soprano voice. This is clearly a dramatic indication Aspasia has no peace in her soul, and she is incredibly distressed (Figure 42).
Figure 42. Mozart sets fast-paced 8\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} notes which extend into the extremities of the soprano voice.

There is only one measure which transitions the aria into the Allegro B section. The B section is in G minor, but it begins ambiguously in m. 23 on an open C# and an A, which foreshadows the upcoming tension. All of a sudden, the aria changes to blocked arpeggios, directly related to the text, whose rhythm is now in quarter notes and half notes. The Allegro is not as florid as the Adagio, as if Aspasia’s strength deteriorates from a G\textsuperscript{5}, in m. 26, down to a D\textsuperscript{5} and down an octave to a D\textsuperscript{4} in m. 29 (Figure 43). The large arpeggiated leaps represent Aspasia’s struggle in “al fiero contrasto.” This is the first aria in which Aspasia actually names “duty” and “love.” However, Aspasia is not discovering these emotions for the first time. Therefore, Mozart tactfully sets the accompaniment in a stagnant manner.

Figure 43. Aspasia’s strength deteriorates from a G\textsuperscript{5}, in m. 26, down to a D\textsuperscript{5} and down an octave to a D\textsuperscript{4} in m. 29.
In mm. 33-35 Aspasia sings “*al fiero contrasto*” between the anguished heartbeat motives in the orchestra. Aspasia cannot even finish the full sentence, but she completes her thought in mm. 36-38 “*resister non basto*” in an upward motion. The orchestra is marked *forte* on the word “basto” (m. 37) as if Aspasia is literally breaking down (Figure 44).

*Figure 44. Text “resister non basto” in an upward motion, the orchestra is marked *forte* on the word “basto” (m. 37)*

On the word “*alma*” (m. 40) Aspasia has the 16th figure and the 8th figure broken up by rests which shifts up a tone, leaping up by thirds. This schizophrenic action depicts the struggle in Aspasia’s soul. In direct contrast, the words “*dovere*” and “*amor*” are set in a much calmer way (Figure 45).
In mm. 46-51, Aspasia has a repeated staccato figure, ascending all the way to C6. Aspasia repeats the text “e strazia quest’alma” the first time, she is expressing her thoughts of duty, and the second time, she is tormented by the thought of love. This author feels the first iteration should be sung dutifully or regally, while the second time, the thought of love should come through. Either way, the two phrases need to be sung with the contrasting ideas in mind (Figure 46).
In mm. 53-57 Aspasia repeats “dovere ed amor” twice, weighing love more than duty or vice-versa; trying to decide which one is more important. When “nel grave tormento” returns in the A’, the melody moves upwards, with more harmonic discontentment, including many F-sharps, implying the dominant of G. The repeat contains more fluid movement. Even so, Aspasia is still stuck in the dichotomy between love and duty. When Aspasia sings the word “seno” again, rather than a leap from G to G, she sings a leap from B-flat to B-flat, which is more urgent and erratic. The high B5-flat plummets to a low F4 in the next measure (Figure 47).
“Mancare” is the equivalent of Aspasia’s heart flashing brightly as it runs up in 16\textsuperscript{th} notes in a scalar fashion to a B-flat, then with an octave leap from G to G. In this passage, Aspasia leaps in 3rds and octaves, struggling not to burn out. (Figure 48).

In mm. 74-75 Mozart sets the word “pace” differently than he did in the A section. Now, Aspasia’s “pace” is even more interrupted with a trill on a dotted 8\textsuperscript{th} and 32\textsuperscript{nd} notes; the destruction of her peace is more eminent and violent. Aspasia’s lack of peace is also demonstrated in mm. 76-78, where “pace” returns with a flurry of 16\textsuperscript{th} notes culminating an arpeggiated descent on an A5. The 8\textsuperscript{th} note descent to a half note on C4, the lowest note in the aria, indicates Aspasia’s total loss of peace (Figure 49).
Aspasia fights even more between duty and love in the return of the B section.

The vocal line is written in a similar way to the B, with arpeggiated quarter and half notes and a downward sloping melody. Aspasia cannot resist the fiery conflict. Her intensity has risen because of the rapid 16th notes in the accompaniment. The accompaniment also contains more tension with the half notes, because the harmonies are being held longer. Once again, Aspasia’s resistance breaks down in mm. 85-86, just as it did in the B section. The heartbeat motive appears again in mm. 89-92. When the heartbeat motive interrupts Aspasia the first time, she thinks about her duty. When her heart beats again, she thinks about love (Figure 50). In the return section, Aspasia thinks about both of the heartbeats and which one she wants to choose.

Figure 49. 8th note descent to a half note on C4, the lowest note in the aria
When Aspasia repeats “quest’alma” in the B’, the torment in her soul starts a tone higher than in the B section (mm. 97-98). Aspasia repeats “dovere,” in mm. 100-101, so she is starting to favor duty over love (Figure 51). For this one section, Aspasia thinks she should follow her duty. Aspasia’s thought process and decisions begin to break down in mm. 102-109, because Mozart writes the staccato passage a step down from the B section. Aspasia cannot fight the torment any longer. The repetition of the staccato passage presents an acting choice: the actor must choose which scale represents love and which one is duty.

Aspasia does not come to a conclusion in the end because she keeps repeating “dovere” and “amor.” The fact she chooses duty is hinted at because she repeats the word twice in m. 100-101. In the postlude, the music is broken up by 8th rests; it does not contain lush harmonies and sounds bureaucratic with arpeggiation and no melodies. This is regal writing from Mozart, who insinuates that Aspasia chooses duty.
Se viver non degg’io, no. 18

In an emotional recitative, Aspasia asks Sifare to stab her to death with his sword. Horrified, Sifare attempts to explain to her that fate has brought his father’s wrath against them. Aspasia insists Sifare take her life, but he tells her to try to pretend to love his father, to spare them both. Aspasia tells Sifare that since she is now aware of Mitridate’s true nature, she would rather die than marry the brute. Sifare begins the duet by telling Aspasia that if she dies, he will die with her. Aspasia is overcome with grief because she will do anything to spare Sifare’s life. They come to the conclusion that the only way they can be together is if they die together.
### Table 6. Translation of *Io sposa di quel mostro* Accompanied Recitative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPASIA:</th>
<th>ASPASIA:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Io sposa di quel mostro,</td>
<td>I, the bride of that monster,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il cui spietato amore ci divide per sempre?</td>
<td>whose merciless love divides us forever?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIFARE:</td>
<td>SIFARE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E pur poc’anzi non parlavi così.</td>
<td>And yet a short while ago you did not speak like this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPASIA:</td>
<td>ASPASIA:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutta non m’era la sua barbarie ancor ben nota.</td>
<td>I was not yet fully aware then of his barbarity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or come un tale sposo all’ara potrei seguir:</td>
<td>How could I now follow such a husband to the altar?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come accoppiar la destra</td>
<td>How could I clasp with my hand,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A una destra potrei tutta fumante</td>
<td>the hand of the man whose hand is still</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Del sangue, aimè, del trucidato amante?</td>
<td>steaming with the blood of my murdered lover?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, Sifare, perdona, io più nol posso,</td>
<td>No, Sifare, forgive me, I cannot do it,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E invan mel chiedi.</td>
<td>and it is useless to ask me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIFARE:</td>
<td>SIFARE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E vuoi...</td>
<td>And you wish to...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPASIA:</td>
<td>ASPASIA:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sì, precederti a Dite.</td>
<td>Yes, to precede you to Hades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A me non manca per valicar quel passo</td>
<td>To cross that stream I lack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E coraggio, ed ardir; ma non l’avrei</td>
<td>neither courage nor daring; but I do not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per mirar del mio ben le angosce estreme.</td>
<td>have the courage to see the death agonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIFARE:</td>
<td>SIFARE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, mio bel cor,</td>
<td>No, my lovely heart,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noi moriremo insieme.</td>
<td>we shall die together(^{141})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{141}\) Castel, 252-254
Table 7. Translation of *Se viver non degg’io* Duet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIFARE:</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>SIFARE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Se viver non degg’io,</td>
<td></td>
<td>If I cannot live,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Se tu morir pur dei,</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>if you, too, must die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lascia, bell’idol mio</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>my beautiful idol, let me at least</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch’io mora almen con te</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>die with you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPASIA:</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>ASPASIA:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con questi accenti, oh Dio!</td>
<td></td>
<td>With these words, Oh God,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cresci gli affanni miei,</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>you worsen my suffering!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troppo tu vuoi, ben mio,</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>You want too much, my love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troppo tu chiedi a me.</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>you ask too much of me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIFARE: Dunque...</th>
<th></th>
<th>SIFARE: Then…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASPASIA: Deh taci.</td>
<td></td>
<td>ASPASIA: Please keep silent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIFARE: Oh Dei!</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>SIFARE: Oh, Gods!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASPASIA, SIFARE:</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>ASPASIA, SIFARE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah, che tu sol, tu sei,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ah, you alone are the one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Che mi dividi il cor.</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>who shares your heart with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbarre stelle ingrate,</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>Cruel, ungrateful stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah, m’uccidesse adesso</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>if only this excess of grief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’eccesso del dolor!</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>would kill me now!(^{142})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{142}\) Castel, 254-255.
The duet between Aspasia and Sifare is the climax of Act II. The original duet was composed in E-flat major, but the revised version, here, is in the “traditional love-duet key of A major.” The duet is composed in an AABC structure. Aspasia’s opening statement of the accompanied recitative (mm. 1-3) is on the dominant 7th of A major, which adds to the suspenseful quality of the text (Figure 52). The resolution of Aspasia’s line is a rhythmic flurry of arpeggiated chords in the orchestra on the tonic. Starting in m. 4, a 32nd-8th note motive repeats throughout the following two lines (Figure 1-4). The 32nd-8th note motive corresponds with Sifare’s response in two different octaves. The octave repetition of the motive could possibly be interpreted as the two characters sharing the same emotion because they both want to be together.

Figure 52. The accompanied recitative (mm. 1-3) is on the dominant 7th of A major, which adds to the suspenseful quality of the text

Sadie, 220.
When Aspasia says “barbare” (m. 8), the orchestra demonstrates Mitridate’s barbarity with a rapid ascending scale of 32nd notes with leaping accented 16th notes ending on C-sharp (m. 9) (Figure 53).

Aspasia’s line is interrupted by the orchestra twice: at “seguir” (m. 11) (Figure 54) and “amante” (m. 15) (Figure 55). Both of the interruptions refer to the barbaric motive, with the same rhythmic motion, but slower.
In m. 21-22 Mozart builds tension in stepwise chordal motion which colors the text “per valicar quel passo e coraggio, ed ardir” (Figure 56). Mozart ends the accompanied recitative in a simple IV-V-I manner to lead into the duet proper.
The duet’s opening orchestral ritornello begins with 16th notes in harmony, to signify a duet is approaching. The ritornello alternates between a solo line and a melody joined in thirds (m. 6), which is sets a romantic mood for the lover’s farewell. The farewell is signified by the moments when busy 16th notes are eliminated (m. 7) (Figure 57). The ritornello is composed entirely of falling motives until Sifare enters, and the busy 16ths return.

![Figure 57](image)

**Figure 57.** The farewell is signified by the moments when busy 16th notes are eliminated.

The voice begins in the same formal fashion as the ritornello, with double 16ths in the accompaniment; however, Sifare’s melody is not doubled. The vocal line is composed in a stepwise manner, representing the resolve of the text, but there is a brief hesitation in the octave leap on the text “non degg’io” in m. 17 (Figure 58).

![Figure 58](image)

**Figure 58.** The vocal line is composed in a stepwise manner, but there is a brief hesitation in the octave leap on the text “non degg’io” in m. 17.
The accompaniment changes to an *Alberti* bass in m. 23 with arpeggiated 8th notes broken up by rests, just as the text is broken up by rests on the words “lascia,” and “idol mio” (*Figure 59*).

*Figure 59*. The accompaniment changes to an *Alberti* bass in m. 23 with arpeggiated 8th notes broken up by rests

In m. 26 the accompaniment returns to quarter and 8th notes in the left hand and chordal 16th notes in the right. The repeated stepwise 32nd motion from the *ritornello* returns in the vocal line in m. 29, and is the culminating point of Sifare’s emotions (*Figure 60*). Immediately following Sifare’s declaration, Aspasia repeats the same music with a different set of text.
Figure 60. The repeated stepwise 32\textsuperscript{nd} motion from the ritornello returns in the vocal line in m. 29

In the Allegro B section, the accompaniment becomes simple and sparse, containing 8\textsuperscript{th} notes with few decorated 16\textsuperscript{th} notes. The accompaniment is arranged with arpeggiation and repeated notes, which occasionally imitate the vocal melody.

Throughout the section, the accompaniment is broken up by rests which mirrors the sigh-like statements of “deh taci” and “oh dei” from the A section. In mm. 69-75, Aspasia and Sifare trade lines back and forth. Mozart contrasts the call and response lines in mm. 82-83, when the characters sing the 16\textsuperscript{th} notes together. Similarly, in mm. 113-118, Mozart combines the two phrases in a variation to create one giant phrase (Figure 61).
Figure 61. Mozart contrasts the call and response lines in mm. 82-83, when the characters sing the 16th notes together. Similarly, in mm. 113-118, Mozart combines the two phrases in a variation to create one giant phrase.

The C section seamlessly transitions from the B section, maintaining in the same tempo in m. 94. Although Aspasia and Sifare sing in harmony throughout the section, Aspasia betrays that she is overcome with emotions. For example, in m. 98 Aspasia sings
“ah” ahead of Sifare, since she is feeling more of the anguish (Figure 62). Furthermore, Aspasia expresses her grief more than Sifare in mm. 106-107; with the repeated text, “ah mucci desso adesso,” Aspasia leaps up an octave on B-flat.

![Figure 62. Aspasia sings “ah” ahead of Sifare](image)

The duet closes with a cadenza on the text “dolor.” According to Baird:

> double cadenzas consist of either two voices or a voice and an instrument. They are less restrictive than the solo cadenza in that they do not have to be performed in one breath (although breaths must be concealed) and in that the meter (which is totally free in the solo cadenza) must be maintained during the imitation of those figures that the other singer must perform. They are more restrictive in that they should be composed beforehand. Agricola advises performers to adhere faithfully to what the composer has written. He recommends listening to other good singers, reading Quantz’s treatise carefully, and following the dictates of good taste.\(^{144}\) Harris suggests that the cadenza “begin...with a solo ‘call and response’ for the two lovers to express their longing...then the voices come together.”\(^{145}\) The following figures are examples from prominent artists:

\(^{144}\) Tosi, 32.
\(^{145}\) Harris, 113-115.
Figure 63. Yvonne Kenny and Anne Murray Cadenza

Figure 64. Natalie Dessay and Cecilia Bartoli Cadenza
Figure 65. Patricia Petibon and Myrto Papatanasiu Cadenza

Figure 66. Arleen Auger and Edda Moser Cadenza
Following Harris’s advice, the following is this author’s suggestion:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure67.png}
\caption{Melissa McCann Duet Cadenza}
\end{figure}

\textit{Pallid’ ombre, no. 21}

Before her final aria, Aspasia confronts Mitridate. She demands Mitridate tell her what happened to Sifare. Mitridate brushes Aspasia off and tells her all sins will be forgiven if she marries him. Aspasia refuses the king’s offer, and Mitridate tells her both she and Sifare will fall victim to his vengeance. Arbate interrupts them, telling Mitridate the Romans have landed at the beach. Mitridate says goodbye to the “faithless” Aspasia and heads off to fight.
Table 8. Translation of Recitative *Lagrimi intempestive*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recitative</th>
<th>Accompanied Recitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Lagrimi intempestive, a che dal ciglio</em></td>
<td><em>Ah ben ne fui presaga!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Malgrado mi scendete ad inondarmi il sen?</em></td>
<td><em>Il dono estremo di Mitridate ecco recato.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Di debolezza tempo or non è.</em></td>
<td><em>O destra, temerai d’appressarti al fatal nappo tu,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Con più coraggio attenda il termine de’ mali un infelice:</em></td>
<td><em>Che ardita al collo mi porgesti le funi?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Già quell’ultimo addio tutto mi dice.</em></td>
<td><em>Eh no, si prenda,</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Untimely tears, for what reason do you, in spite of myself, fall from my eyes and flood my breast?
Now is not the time for weakness.
An unhappy woman must await the end of her torments with more courage:
already that last farewell tells me all.

(a Moor enters, and presents to Aspasia a cup of poison on a tray)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accompanied Recitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ah ben ne fui presaga!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Il dono estremo di Mitridate ecco recato.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>O destra, temerai d’appressarti al fatal nappo tu,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Che ardita al collo mi porgesti le funi?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eh no, si prenda,</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ah, my foreboding was justified!
Here is Mitridate’s final gift.
O right hand, will you be afraid to approach the fatal cup, having so boldly placed the noose around my neck?
Ah, no, let me take it,
and give thanks to the donor.
Through him I regain my liberty;
through him I can decide my own fate,
and at the end of my life find in the grave the peace that was stolen from me.

Table 9. Translation of Cavatina *Pallid’ombre*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cavatina</th>
<th>Pale shadows, who see</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Pallid’ombre, che scorgete</em></td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dagli Elisi i mali miei,</em></td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Deh pietose a me rendete</em></td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tutto il ben che già perdei.</em></td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pale shadows, who see
from Elysium my misery
ah, take pity and restore to me
all the happiness which I have now lost.
Table 10. Translation of Accompanied Recitative Bevasi...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accompanied Recitative</th>
<th>Let me drink...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bevasi...</td>
<td>Alas, what icy chill is holding back my hand?...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahimè, qual gelo trattien la man?...</td>
<td>What cruel thought confuses my mind?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qual barbara conturba idea la mente?</td>
<td>At this moment, perhaps Sifare too is drinking his death!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In questo punto ah forse beve la morte sua</td>
<td>Oh, what fear consumes me!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sifare ancora.</td>
<td>Oh tragic vision! Can it be true then?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oh timor, che mi accora!</td>
<td>No, innocence always has the Gods on its side.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oh immagine funesta! Fia dunque ver?</td>
<td>They will all be vigilant in defending so great a hero, and if there is anyone in Heaven who might take arms against him, such anger will be quelled by this deadly poison which I now pour into me in honor of Nemesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, l’innocenza i Numi ha sempre in suo favor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’Eroe si grande veglian tutti in difesa,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E se v’è in cielo chi pur s’armi in suo danno,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’ire n’estinguerà questo, che in seno Sacro a Nemesi or verso atro veleno</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the beginning of the secco recitative, Mozart paints Asapsia’s “untimely tears” with a tension-filled diminished 7th chord of G minor. When Aspasia says “this is not the time for weakness,” Mozart switches to the dominant, D minor. Further, Mozart hints at Aspasia’s courage by setting a strong C major chord beneath the text “con piu...” As soon as Aspasia sings “infelice,” her courage is undermined by a dreary dominant 7th chord of F minor. As Aspasia utters her final line, “that last farewell was a bad outcome,” Mozart gives a brief glimmer of hope by setting a dominant 7th chord of C major, only to leave us still anticipating a resolution once the recitative is over (Figure 68). Mozart plays with the expectations of the drama by setting up a half resolution, but the accompanied recitative begins in C minor.
Mozart gives a brief glimmer of hope by setting a dominant 7\textsuperscript{th} chord of C major. Mozart creates an ominous and foreboding quality in mm. 1-5 by using the key of C minor coupled with a flurry of arpeggiated 16\textsuperscript{th} notes and a sustained rising melody which culminates in octaves. The unresolved tension is further accentuated by the orchestra resting on a unison B-flat (Figure 69).
Figure 69. The unresolved tension is further accentuated by the orchestra resting on a unison B-flat.

The text which follows, “ah ben ne fui presaga,” is justified by an E-flat major chord, followed by a suspenseful dominant chord which completes Aspasia’s thought: “il dono estremo di Mitridate ecco recato.” This statement is colored perfectly by sextuplets and dotted 16th figures which leap beyond the staff (mm. 8-10) (Figure 70).
As Aspasia challenges her right hand to grab the cup, the same right hand which has sealed her fate, the falling dotted 16th notes symbolize hesitation. The text “Eh no, si prenda” affirms that Aspasia will take the poison, and is followed by a rapid ascent in 32nd notes, creating dramatic tension as she grabs the goblet. “E si ringrazi il donator” is a sly flash of Aspasia’s wit as she thanks Mitridate for offering her an alternative way out (Figure 71).
Figure 71. A rapid ascent in $32^{nd}$ notes creates dramatic tension as Aspasia grabs the goblet.

Aspasia’s wit is portrayed by a playful trill figure which leaps across the staff in dotted $16^{th}$ notes (m. 17). The trill figure is repeated up a fourth in m. 19 as Aspasia thanks Mitridate for her chance to regain her liberty (Figure 72).

Figure 72. The trill figure is repeated up a fourth in m. 19

Aspasia concludes her thoughts by appreciating the fact that she can control her own fate and retain some semblance of peace. Aspasia’s final thoughts are all sung over a dominant $7^{th}$ of E-flat, and ascend to a climax on the word “vita.” Another way Mozart
uses the music to create drama is by coloring the word “pace” in m. 23. The 8\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} notes of the recitative slow down to a quarter note on the word “pace,” and the accompaniment slowly comes to a close on an A-flat major chord (Figure 73).

Mozart sets a melancholic mood in the cavatina. The composer’s accompaniment through the aria is based around quarter notes, which provide the bass rhythm, while steady 8\textsuperscript{th} notes fill the texture above. A striking feature of the introduction is how Mozart alternates from piano to forte in each bar (Figure 74).

In the first line of the aria proper, Aspasia speaks of pale shadows of Elysium. The vocal melody starts low on the staff with long rhythms of half notes and dotted half notes moving in stepwise motion. The alternating dynamics Mozart sets up in the
introduction (mm. 29-35) create a feeling of light and dark shadows, and add to the atmosphere of Elysium (Figure 75).

The following section of the aria changes subjects from Aspasia’s surroundings to herself. As the drama shifts, Mozart simultaneously alters the music to accurately reflect Aspasia’s cry for forgiveness. “Deh pietose a me rendete” is split into two repeated statements. The words “deh” and “me” are accentuated by a double-dotted 8th note which leaps down a fifth to complete the phrase (Figure 76).
The following sentence “tutto il ben che gia perdei,” is characterized by a descending, weeping vocal line, defined by long dotted half notes which start each measure. This descent ultimately signifies Aspasia’s loss of happiness, while the rising accompaniment in thirds (m. 44) leads her to a cry of pity. Aspasia’s initial cries of pity are repeated, but a third higher with more emphasis on the word “pietose” and “rendete,” by the addition of an extra 8th note (Figure 77). By simply adding an extra 8th note, Mozart shifts the dramatic intention of the text “deh pietose a me rendete.” In the first iteration of the text, the focus is on “deh” and “me,” signifying Aspasia would still be immersed in the despair of her own death. The second time she utters the text, the dramatic emphasis is placed on the words “pietose” and “rendete,” implying that Aspasia focuses beyond her own grief and trying to find resolution.
Aspasia’s initial cries of pity are repeated, but a third higher with more emphasis on the word “pietose” and “rendete,” by the addition of an extra 8th note. As the text “tutto il ben…” is repeated once more, Mozart sets the vocal line in a completely different way, on these first few words. “Che gia perdei” is set almost exactly the same way. However, the initial part of the sentence is more stagnant and has a leap of a 7th down to the word “ben,” the lowest note in the entire aria. The dramatic impetus of this section is made very clear by Mozart: this is the lowest point Aspasia reaches in her cavatina--literally. After the second repetition, Aspasia begins to wither as she repeats “che gia perdei” with more leaping 8th notes, and alternates between piano to forte (Figure 78).
The return of Aspasia’s text “pallid’ ombre” in m. 63 suggests a massive shift in her dramatic intention. Mozart sets this opening text a fifth higher, yet the melody becomes listless and contains the familiar lurching leap of a 7th in the first two phrases. The shadows that Aspasia sees become darker and more real as her death approaches. As Aspasia speaks of Elysium, Mozart uses a falling chromatic-like motive which falls from a C-flat to a G-flat signifying her impending end (Figure 79).
Aspasia’s cry for pity begins in the same way it did in the original statement, only one note higher, which indicates the urgency is increasing as her time nears. The following statement in mm. 77-80 of “all which is good is lost,” reveals how removed Aspasia becomes from her past. Only the present and what is approaching matters to her. Mozart conveys this exact point with Aspasia’s reprisal of the text “deh pietose a me rendete,” beginning on an A5-flat and descending to a B4-flat (mm. 81-84). In her final moments, Aspasia’s desperation is reaffirmed by her melodic line constantly flying to the high A5-flats and descending as low as C4 (m. 88) (Figure 80). Aspasia’s dramatic leap from C4 to the A5-flat in this same bar illustrates her final utterance of strength before she exclaims “bevasi” in m. 95 (Figure 81).
The rushing scalar ascent of 32\textsuperscript{nd} notes to a unison D sets up a dramatic expectation that Aspasia did, in fact, drink the poison, when she did not (Figure 81).

The recitative in mm. 96-102 alternates between D major, E major, and a diminished 7\textsuperscript{th} of G major, which culminates on a diminished 7\textsuperscript{th} of C major in m. 101. Following the text “bevi la morte Sifare ancora,” the orchestra projects Aspasia’s imagination of Sifare drinking a cup of poison (m. 103), where the top line moves back and forth from G to A-flat with tremolo 32\textsuperscript{nd} notes underneath (Figure 82). M. 104 settles into a more even rhythm at the text “oh timor.” The steady 16\textsuperscript{th} note accompaniment acts as a driving force giving direction to Aspasia’s text “oh imagine funesta.” With the line “fia dunque ver?,” the accompaniment becomes uneven again, answering Aspasia’s question, to which she utters “no,” at the downbeat of m. 109.
The orchestra follows Aspasia’s line “l’innocenza i numi...” with rushing 16th notes and a scalar motive with decorative 32nd notes. The orchestra’s line inspires Aspasia to have faith (Figure 83). The recitative closes in a stepwise descent to a resolution where Aspasia states “e se v’è in cielo.” The scalar descent of the recitative ends on a C major chord, showing the purity of her spirit (no sharps or flats), and the same key as her first aria Al destin che la minaccia, which harkens back to Aspasia’s first statements in the opera.

Figure 82. The top line moves back and forth from G to A-flat with tremolo 32nd notes underneath

Figure 83. The orchestra follows Aspasia’s line “l’innocenza i numi...” with rushing 16th notes and a scalar motive with decorated 32nd notes
CONCLUSION

Though Mozart was young at the time of this composition, he demonstrated technical ability well beyond his age. The composer followed opera seria’s formulaic structure while composing *Mitridate, ré di Ponto*, but he put his own spin on it, using influences from all of the composers he met while on his travels. However, differing views that affect the interpretation of this opera include discussion of Mozart’s maturity level. Edward J. Dent and Hermann Abert criticized Mozart for being “confronted by a challenge to which he was not emotionally equal,”146 along with William Mann who stated, “the score is uneven, the characterization spasmodic, and the music incomplete.”147 Further, Charles Osborne argues *Mitridate* would be a more compelling work if Mozart had not been a slave to the singers. On the other hand, Thomas Glasow states Mozart’s reaction to his young friend’s death during the composition process of *Mitridate* shows that he was “keenly aware of his own mortality and capable of expressing his thoughts on the subject in his writing.”148

The other point of contention is that Mozart had borrowed from, or used extensively, the work of other composers to the point where music from Quirino Gasparini’s *Mitridate* was mistakenly incorporated into Mozart’s manuscript. Carolyn Gianturco believes Mozart was influenced by the tutelage of Padre Martini and musical forms from opera buffa. Luigi Tagliavini argues Mozart plagiarized Gasparini’s *Mitridate*, but Stanley Sadie speculates the resemblance of Mozart’s *Mitridate* to Gasparini’s occurs because the two composers were working in the same tradition and

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146 Abert, *W.A. Mozart*, 190.
147 Mann, *The Operas of Mozart*, 92.
setting the same text. Daniel Freeman makes the case that Mozart copied his friend Joseph Mysliveček’s compositional procedures, especially those found in the opera La Nitetti.

This DMA document is in alignment with those scholars who agree that Mozart was more than capable of understanding the dramatic and emotional nature of Mitridate’s libretto. By examining Aspasia’s arias and duet in terms of the formal structure, key relationships, and the text in relation to both the vocal line and the accompaniment, it is evident that Mozart was emotionally capable of writing the music for Mitridate. In contrast to other scholar’s theoretical evaluations of the score, this DMA document has a unique focus, specific to the role of Aspasia.

This DMA document evaluated the opera’s musical complexity in conjunction with Aspasia’s character development. Aspasia has an abundance of self-worth, which we hear in Mozart’s setting. Even though Racine paints a tragic picture of this character, Mozart enlivens Aspasia’s anguished text by matching the music to the drama. With the arias Al destin che la minaccia and Nel grave tormento, Mozart uses the musical themes and structures to pit opposing forces against one another, including the brothers Sifare and Farnace, and love versus duty. The composer added dimension to the character’s human emotional experience especially in Nel sen mi palpita; Mozart used word painting where the orchestra represents Aspasia’s heartbeat, and the descending lines paired with increased chromaticism represent Aspasia’s falling tears.

At the same time, Mozart tailor-made the arias to suit Antonia Bernasconi’s individual tastes, which included intricate coloratura and use of the vocal extremes. That in itself proves that Mozart was no ordinary fourteen-year-old and that he had the ability
to appease a very demanding and knowledgeable individual. All of the roles in *Mitridate* are challenging. Even by today’s standards, the vocal demands contained in all of the roles in *Mitridate* are exceptional. What Mozart wrote shows Bernasconi was a phenomenal artist with an extensive range and flexibility. Bernasconi not only thrived on vocal challenges, she demanded them, while Mozart conformed to them.

Further research should be conducted into the life and voice of soprano Antonia Bernasconi. Although little information exists about her, it is known that Bernasconi sang the title roles in Gluck’s *Alceste* and *Iphigenie en Tauride*. Even Mozart tailored Ninetta in *La finta semplice* and Ilia in *Idomeneo* to fit her voice. However, in examining the roles she sang and the roles which were written for her, it is obvious that in the twenty-first-century, these roles would not be sung by the same singer. Perhaps, since this woman was able to sing all of these roles, a reconsideration of the *fachs* can give additional insights into specific abilities and contemporary performance practices.

Other avenues for further research may include a “key coding chart” to show the correlations between keys and affects in *Mitridate*, which could be based on William Mann’s chapter “Mozart’s Choice of Keys.” Also, a similar type of character analysis for Ismene or Marzio, the two roles which were added in by Cigna-Santi (not part of Racine’s play), could be conducted in a similar fashion as the one presented above.

Beyond the fact that Mozart became one of the most prolific opera composers of the eighteenth century, his version of *Mitridate* survives the test of time. The fourteen-year-old composer was able to breathe enough vitality into the composition and the characters so that the opera is still performed today. Mozart’s maturity level was

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advanced enough to weather the multiple storms with singers and to understand the grand
ccepts of Racine’s tragedy. It is clear through the analysis of Aspasia’s role that this is
a work of high quality. *Mitridate* has not received as many performances and as much
acclaim as Mozart’s more celebrated operas due to questions pertaining to the genesis of
the work. *Mitridate* should not be overlooked because the music is too virtuosic or
because Mozart borrowed too much from other composers. This DMA document
provides the conventions necessary to remain true to the stylistic structures of eighteenth-
century opera and offers options for cadenzas and ornamentation, which enhance the
character’s depth. This performer’s guide enables sopranos to tackle the challenging role
of Aspasia with greater confidence.
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