

**Galatea.** Libretto by PIETRO METASTASIO, first set by Gioseffo Comito (1722, Naples).

Three of the characters in this serenata, Galtea, Glauce and Thetis were numbered among the mythological Nereids, the fifty sea nymphs (or goddesses), daughters of Nereus and Doris. Galatea attracted the attention of the Cyclops, Polyphemus, a relationship Theocritus explores in two of his *Idylls* (VI and XI) and Ovid, in book 13 of his *Metamorphoses*, places the story *in Sicilia, vicino alla marina* (by the sea in Sicily) and adds the nymph's involvement with Acis. Here, Galatea recounts in flashback how the jealous and enraged Polyphemus killed her young lover by hurling a massive rock at him, and how she responded by turning the victim into a river god. With recourse to the *Idylls*, and upon Ovid's basic plot, Metastasio wove a tribute to honour an aristocratic occasion of the highest order.

PART 1 Although Acis and Polyphemus are aware of each other as rivals, for the former, no danger can eclipse the misery of separation from Galatea. For her part, however, Galatea agonizes over the conflict she feels between her love for Acis and her fear for his safety. Polyphemus suddenly appears, the couple flee, and in a soliloquy that clearly reflects Theocritus's *Idyll* XI, Polyphemus bemoans Galatea's rejection of him.

PART 2 The reunion of Acis and Galatea is cut short by a warning from Glauce that Polyphemus approaches and must never see them together. With Acis hiding in the woods, Galatea turns upon the intruder, deriding the ugliness of his body and soul, his reliance upon brute force, and his fixation upon his own pleasure. Already warned by Glauce that she has gone too far, Galatea continues, spurning the gifts Polyphemus offers and finally declaiming that he is as odious to her as his rival is pleasing. Too late she realizes the folly of her derision, and no pleas on Glauce's part can calm the Cyclops's rage. Alone, and musing on the anger that is born of love, Glauce's thoughts are interrupted by the arrival of Thetis who brings news of a new child born to Diego and Margherita [Pignatelli]. A distraught Galatea interrupts the potential rejoicing with a halting description of Acis's death at the hands of Polyphemus. For Thetis, this cannot be on a day of such jubilation. From beneath the bolder that has crushed Acis, a river flows, from which Acis reappears, now transformed into a river god. Thetis bids them follow her to join the Neapolitan celebrations

The first performance of *La Galatea* on July 26 served as the culminating event of a Pignatelli occasion *par excellence*, surrounding as it did the baptism of two daughters born to Diago Pignatelli Aragona Cortés and his wife Margherita Pignatelli del Vaglio. Both Diego's parents were also Pignatellis from different family branches. His mother, Giovanna, of the Aragona Cortés line, brought the title of Duke and Duchess of Monteleone to her marriage with Nicola Pignatelli who was of the Princes of Noia and Marquises of Cerchiara as was his brother, Cardinal Francesco Pignatelli, Archbishop of Naples. From 1687 to 1690. Nicola had served as Viceroy of Sardinia, and across 1719-1720, as Viceroy of Sicily, his royal standing trumped on this occasion only by the Austrian Emperor and Empress who agreed (*in absentia*) to serve as godparents. The Princess of Cariati, Artemisa de Borgia, wife of Prince Carlo Filippo Spinelli, stood in for the Empress, and the newly appointed Viceroy of Naples, Michel Friedrich von Althann for the Emperor, his cousin, Johann Friedrich von Althann, being both a personal assistant to the Emperor and husband of Marianna Pignatelli, sister of Antonio Pignatelli for whose wedding Metastasio had written *Endimione*. In announcing the new birth to Glauce, Thetis acknowledges the key participants in the celebration, praising the beauty and nobility of the two infant daughters delivered to Naples by a soaring eagle that laid them on earth in the shadow of its wings, subsequently extending both the encomium and the Imperial allusion in a reference to the children, honoured by the Emperor who, with his consort, had graciously descended from the revered throne. Within this context, Galatea, before adding further tribute to the Emperor, also emphasizes the notion of new birth, paring the death of her heart with that of Acis, and its rebirth with his transformation. The performance took place in the palace of Diego's parents, with Marianna Benti-Bulgarelli in the role of Galatea and Domenico Gizzi, the Medoro from *Angelica*, as Acis. The composer, Gioseffo Comito, was *maestro di cappella* to the Duchess.

**Settings:**

Comito (Naples 1722); Alberti (Venice 1737); Nichelmann (?Berlin 1740); Schürer (Dresden 1746); Uttini (Drottningholm 1754); Zoppis (St. Petersburg 1760); Gius. Brunetti (Brunswick 1762); Schwanenberger (Brunswick 1763); J.C. Bach (London 1764); Mango (Eichstätt 1767); Ant. da Silva (Queluz 1779); B. Furlanetto (Venice 1780s); Lima (Lisbon ?1780s); Morosini (as *Polifemo* – Venice ?1780s); Santos (unperf., comp. 1780s); Bertoni (rev. Bartolomeo Cambi – Venice 1781); Sclart (Macerata 1789); Trento (rev. Bartolomeo Cambi – Venice 1791); L. Kozeluch (comp. 1802, perf. Prague 1806); Benincori (as *Galatée ou Le nouveau Pygmalion* – unperf., comp. 1804)