

Il Tempio dell'Eternità, ('The Temple of Eternity'). Libretto by PIETRO METASTASIO, first set by Johann Joseph Fux as *Enea negli Elisi* ('Aeneas in the Elysian Fields') *overo Il tempio dell'Eternità* (1731, Vienna).

Although this *fiesta teatrale* is not divided into acts, parts or scenes, its two titles, as they relate to the unfolding of the action, define an overall A-B-A format, where "A" centres upon *Enea negli Elisi* and "B" upon an encomium played out in front of *Il tempio dell'Eternità* situated there in Elysium. The "B" section divides further, resulting in a palindrome-like structure: A-B [b-c-b¹-c¹-b²] - A-Conclusion

A. *Enea negli Elisi*: Arriving with his fleet at Cumae (near Naples), Aeneas encounters the Sibyl, Deiphobe, who leads him into a small, dark forest where their pathway suddenly divides. At the fork stands a bushy but opaque elm in which monstrous forms – distorted, chimerical images encountered in sleep – appear among the branches. To one side of the tree, the path – dark, foggy, and guarded by humanity's oppressions, leads to *Dite* (i.e. the City of Dis – Dante's Lower Hell). On the other, a bright, clear pathway, overseen by Happiness, extends towards the Elysian Fields where, at the threshold, reside Pleasure, Rest, and the virtues of Honesty, Purity, and Innocence. It is beyond this portal, Diaphobe assures her companion, that he will encounter his father, a marvel for which he would risk all. To enter, he must sheathe his sword and lay a golden palm branch upon the elm tree as he offers up a prayer to Hekate, the triple-form goddess of crossroads and entrance ways. As he does so, a sudden darkness, violent wind and shaking of the earth gradually give way to daylight, harmonious sounds, and the vastness of the Elysian Fields.

B. *Il tempio dell'Eternità*: Here stands the Temple of Eternity where among the transparent columns are arranged the images of the most celebrated heroes and heroines of the past. Eternity sits at the centre of the temple with Virtue and Glory on each side and Time a little distance below. Further to the right and left, stand the shades of Linus and Orpheus whose task it is to immortalize heroes with song.

B/b. *Chorus*: With lyres in hand, Linus and Orpheus, accompanied by many followers, sing the praises of a beautiful soul that will descend from its star to take on a beautiful human form, thus initiating an encomium to the Empress Elisabeth who will one day grace the earth.

B/c. *Contest (part 1)*: Eternity becomes mediator when Time argues against the roles Glory and Virtue are to play in the life of this beautiful woman. Eternity has already placed a throne for her in his temple, Glory is to be her long-time companion, and Virtue is to bestow her every merit upon her. Time, anticipating the high distinction of one born after centuries of consultation among the divinities, becomes alarmed. Such preeminence will impede his primary task of committing all things to gradual oblivion, thus making way for the new. Against further argument, he reminds his opponents how often he has aided them by exposing such fraud as cruelty posing as piety, deceit as friendship. Eternity interrupts, and here, at the centre of the *fiesta*, gestures for the clouds to rise from above the temple to reveal Venus with her sea shell as a chariot drawn by doves tethered with ties of roses, this vision not only symbolizing the beauty and femininity of Elisabeth, but also providing a subtle first link between the encomium and the presence of Aeneas. As his mother, Venus, through Aeneas her son, is also honoured as the mother goddess of the Romans. Her handmaidens, the three Graces, stand opposite and Cupids are seen at play. Among the stars, one brighter than the others contains a veiled image of the empress.

B/b¹. *Chorus*: Linus, Orpheus and their followers contemplate the star and the identity of the assumed divinity whose image is partially concealed.

B/c¹. *Contest (part 2)*: Eternity challenges Time to dare conspire against one whose subsequent birth demands so much attention from the gods. Time's response ignites further dispute between himself and his two challengers as they consider the likely beneficiaries of this birth. Eternity cuts short all conjecture over the location of the birth with his approbation of a predestined land populated by people who will come to be called Germans, an acknowledgement of Elisabeth's birthplace and the Holy Roman Empire. Although this announcement incites further argument over which of the contestants will contribute the greatest benefit to these people, Eternity declares that most important of all, this woman is to wed the greatest of all heroes [the Emperor, Charles VI]. Such a prophesy unites the contestants and prompts general adulation.

B/b². *Chorus*: Linus and Orpheus, full chorus, part chorus, and eco chorus sing the praises of this imperial woman. As the eco chorus moves forward, the shade of Anchises appears among them.

A. *Enea negli Elisi*: Deiphobe identifies the choristers as an assembly of departed heroes, among whom Aeneas recognizes his father and hastens to greet him. Anchises downplays his son's self-reproach over his lost ships and events in Carthage, turning instead to prophesies regarding his descendants. As already mirrored in the vision of

Venus, from Aeneas will issue forth a long line of kings and heroes culminating in the undefeated Charles who will take as consort this sublime woman for whose birth the gods already make preparation.

Conclusion: With the link between Aeneas and the plaudits at the Temple of Eternity secured, all join in a chorus (a virtual *licenza*) anticipating that Elisabeth [Elisa] be born amid praise and adulation.

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Il tempio was first performed on 28 August 1731 in the gardens of the Favorita Palace in Vienna (now the Theresianum and Diplomatic Academy) in celebration of the fortieth birthday of the Empress Elisabeth. With this his first *fiesta teatrale* for the Imperial court, Metastasio set up ample opportunities for spectacle as provided by Giuseppe Galli-Bibiena, the court's First Theatrical Engineer, as well as taking advantage of the availability of choral forces, another first for the poet in works of this type. As probable source, Book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid* provides a full account of Aeneas's journey to Elysium although, by comparison, Metastasio offers an extremely curtailed and modified version. In addition, his portrayal of Eternity and his temple is vastly different from that which Claudian offers in his *Praises of Stilicho* (Book 2, lines 623-702) to which Metastasio refers in his *Argomento*. The composer was the *Hofkapellmeister* himself (J. J. Fux) who, between 1716 and 1726, had set six *fieste* for the Viennese court, five of which were to libretti by Pietro Pariati, and all with stage engineer, Giuseppe Galli-Bibiena. Thus for Fux, *Il tempio* was a final grand offering in an established succession. The singers, all members of the Hofkapelle, included the contralto castrato, Gaetano Orsini as Aeneas, the soprano castrato, Domenico Genovesi as Eternity, soprano Regina Schoonjans as Deifobe and the bass, Christoph Praun as Time. Sopranos Theresia Holtzhauser and Anna Schnautz sang the roles of Glory and Virtue, tenors Gaetano Borghi and Christian Peyer appeared as the shades of Anchises and Orpheus, and the contralto castrato, Giovanni Greco completed the cast as the shade of Linus. As for the other settings listed below, for which the text required specific adjustment, the performance in Oporto took place at the Teatro Público on 6 June 1768 and celebrated the birthday of José I of Portugal and Sarti's setting was given at the Kongelige Theatre as part of the birthday celebrations for Christian VII of Denmark in January 1771. Liverati's late rendition in Vienna took place at the Lobkowitz Palace.

Settings: Fux (also as *Enea negli Elisi* – Vienna 1731); Comp. unknown (Oporto [Portugal] 1768); Sarti (Copenhagen 1771); Comp. unknown (? 1772); Myslivecek (as *Enea negli Elisi* – Munich, 1777); Liverati (as *Il tempio d'eternità* – Vienna 1810)