

Endimione [‘Endymion’]. Libretto by PIETRO METASTASIO, first set by Domenico Sarro (1721, Naples)

The action takes place in Caria, on the lower slopes of Mount Latmus in Asia Minor. Here, according to legend, the youth and beauty of Endymion, either a king from Elis or a local hunter/shepherd, attracted the attention of Selene, goddess of the moon. In later mythology, Diana, goddess of the hunt, replaced Selene (and Luna) as moon goddess, and the events of Metastasio’s serenata are woven around her initial meeting with Endymion and Cupid’s machinations to gain power over them. The subsequent preservation of Endymion’s youth and beauty in perpetual sleep, and the nightly visits from Diana as moon goddess are of no concern.

PART I Diana rouses her nymphs, chastising Nysa, her favourite, for being tardy and accusing her of being in love. Love and Diana’s demands for the hunt are incompatible. It must be one or the other. Nysa objects to the accusation of tardiness and determines to prove her loyalty. Cupid, finding Diana alone, introduces himself as Alcestis, another young hunter. He would join her in the chase, but since his wishes to charm the nymphs are equal to his desire to hunt, she rejects him, thus giving him cause to view her as a challenge. Meanwhile, Nysa encounters Endymion, the object of her suspected love, who pursues a deer he has wounded. It soon becomes clear, however, that Nysa’s love is unrequited. Like Diana, Endymion’s heart is in the hunt, and with Nysa departed, he rests. Cupid/Alcestis, concealed nearby, observing the sleeping Endymion and the approaching Diana, seizes the opportunity to impose his superior powers. As Endymion awakens, both he and the goddess experience the pleasure and pain of love. The mortal youth, however, distresses the goddess with his incredulity at being the object of her love. Alone with Cupid/Alceste, he confesses that he has lost interest in the chase.

PART 2 Now in turn, Diana assures Endymion that her laws against love have been revoked. His departure to advise his companions of the termination of the hunt affords Cupid/Alcestis an opportunity to inform Diana that although he has abandoned all thoughts of love in order to follow her, Nysa and Endymion have not, and share a mutual love. Much to his delight, Diana is enraged by this seeming betrayal, and by the suggestion that jealousy may now be feeding her desire for revenge. Cupid’s next ploy is to hasten Nysa to Endymion’s side by telling her that, as his rival, he now seeks his death. From Endymion, Nysa learns that Diana is the object of his love, a fact she fails to reveal when her mistress confronts her. As a final taunt, Cupid throws both women into further consternation with news that Endymion has been mortally wounded by a wild boar, resulting in a euphoria when he appears unscathed soon afterwards. He and Diana are united, Nysa restored as Diana’s foremost nymph, and Cupid, with confession made and identity revealed, cavalier in his victory.

For the wedding of Anna Francesca Pinelli and Antonio Pignatelli, celebrated at the Pinelli residence on June 9, Metastasio, having already honoured the couple with an *epitalamio* (encomium) of one hundred octavos, simply provided in *L’Endimione* a parallel with Diana and Endymion. Mythology aside, the names of both bride and groom attest to a kinship with the most preeminent of Neapolitan nobility, with ancestry stretching back to the twelfth century and beyond. More immediately, the bride’s mother was Violante di Sangro, her father, Don Oronzo Ravaschieri Fieschi Pinelli, 5th Prince of Belmonte and 4th Duke of Acerenza. The groom was of the Pignatelli line that related him as a distant cousin to Pope Innocent XII (Pignatelli) and as a cousin once removed to Francesco Pignatelli, Archbishop of Naples, for whom Gravina had served as agent to the Roman Curia. Through Anna Francesca’s paternal inheritance, the couple became Prince and Princess of Belmonte in 1722, to which title was added Prince and Princess of the Holy Roman Empire with a title bestowed upon Antonio in 1726 by the Austrian Emperor, Charles VI. That Anna Francesca’s father had served the emperor as High Counsellor of State, and that Antonio’s sister, Marianna Pignatelli, was a lady-in-waiting to the Austrian Empress and was married to Johann Michael von Althan a personal assistant to the emperor, rather completes the picture of Metastasio’s social associations in Naples and the connection through Naples to the imperial throne. The links to Vienna became even stronger when Michael Friedrich Althann, a cousin of Johann Michael, became viceroy of Naples in 1722. Marianna Benti-Bulgarelli, Metastasio’s Angelica from the previous year’s serenata, played the role of Diana and Anna Francesca Pignatelli remained a regular correspondent. Marianna Pignatelli, to whom Metastasio lavishly dedicated *L’Endimione*, would play a vital part in his subsequent appointment in Vienna where she remained a close friend. The dedication date (30 May 1721) is, in some sources, confused with the wedding date given in the *Gazzetta di Napoli*.

Settings:

Sarro (Naples, 1721); Bioni (rev. F. Mazzarà – Breslau 1727); Giov. Mancini (Bologna 1729); Alberti (Venice 1737); Pescetti (as *Diana and Endymion* – London 1739); ? Treu (Hirschberg 1741); Bernasconi (Venice 1742, rev. Munich 1766); Hasse (?Naples 1743); Unknown (rev. Caldari as *Le gare fra gli dei* – Florence 1746); Mele (as *Endimion y Diana* – Madrid 1749); N. Conti (Naples 1752); Fiorillo (Brunswick 1754, rev. as *Diana ed Endimione* – Kassel 1763); Sbacchi (Palermo 1755); ?Herrando (as *Serenata de Indimión y Diana* – Madrid 1755); N. Sabatini (Dublin 1758); Jommelli (as *Endimione ovvero Il trionfo d'Amore* – Stuttgart 1759, rev. Verazi – Mannheim 1770; Queluz, 1780); Conforto (Madrid 1763); Sigismondo (Naples 1764-65, Vienna 1767); A. Rugarli (Parma 1769); Unknown (Koblenz 1769); M. Haydn (Salzburg c.1773); J.C. Bach (London 1772, rev. Giovanni Bottarelli – Mannheim 1773); Schmittbaur (Karlsruhe 1774); P. A. Guglielmi (rev. L. Serio as *Diana amante* – Naples 1781); Carvalho (Queluz 1783); G. Rugarli (Parma 1795)