

PIETRO METASTASIO'S L'OLIMPIADE A TEXTUAL EXEGESIS AND AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF L'OLIMPIADE IN OLYMPIC GAMES HISTORY*

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One of the more significant, yet previously unidentified, figures in the history of the Olympic Games is the famed Italian poet and dramatist, Pietro METASTASIO, whose libretto, *L'Olimpiade*,² set to music by as many as 50 composers, including VIVALDI, PERGOLESI,⁴ and HASSE, proclaimed and celebrated the name, heritage, and prestige of the ancient Olympic games throughout 18th and 19th century Europe.⁵ First performed on August 28th, 1733, in the garden of the Imperial Favorita to celebrate the birthday of the Empress ELISABETH CHRISTINE, consort of the Austrian emperor, CHARLES VI, *L'Olimpiade* was repeated in all the leading theaters of Europe. Exceeded in popularity only by *Artaserse* and *Alessandro nell'Indie*, and as highly acclaimed as *Demofonte* and *Didone abbandonata*, it is still considered one of METASTASIO'S best works. Joseph FUCILLA, one of METASTASIO'S most credible translators, calls *L'Olimpiade* "a little masterpiece,"⁶ and Bruno BRUNELLI, the editor of the complete works of METASTASIO, remarks that "many have considered it the most perfect of Metastasio's dramas."⁷ Translated as *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia oder die Freunde*, *L'Olimpiade* was last set to music in the 19th century by the German composer, Johann Nepomuk POISSL, and performed at the Munich Court Opera on April 21, 1815.

While I have previously identified METASTASIO'S *L'Olimpiade* and placed it within the context of the history of opera, most especially the history of *opera seria*,⁸ I have not offered a textual analysis of METASTASIO'S famed libretto. Furthermore, while I have evaluated the role of *L'Olimpiade* in the story of the Olympic games and sought to determine the influence of *L'Olimpiade* on Pierre de COUBERTIN, my analysis was not based on a textual exegesis or on grounded in a deeper appreciation for the moral principles that undergirded METASTASIO'S work.⁹ The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to offer a textual exegesis of Pietro METASTASIO'S *L'Olimpiade* and on the basis of that analysis further add to my previous examination of the role and place of *L'Olimpiade* in Olympic games history. In particular, I want to argue that METASTASIO'S descriptions and depictions of Olympic practices and protocol were more the function of poetic license than his-

torical accuracy, more a response to the dictates of the Arcadian reform, the conventions of *opera seria*, and the dictates of a *Settecento* European audience than an effort to provide accurate details about the ancient games, and that the significance of METASTASIO'S *L'Olimpiade* resides less in the work's historical precision than in its underlying moral philosophy, a metaphysics grounded firmly in the principle of *utile et dulce* and shaped by a Cartesian rationalism that impacted Jesuit teachings and helped frame COUBERTIN'S own moral cosmology as well as his own particular Olympic philosophical formulation, what he called Olympism.

L'Olimpiade: A Textual Exegesis¹⁰

L'Olimpiade is set in the country of Elis, close to the city of Olympia, on the banks of the Alpheus. The greater part of Act I, Scene I is dedicated to a descriptive evocation of the Olympic atmosphere, the religious rituals and the mass excitement. Act III, Scene I opens at the ruins of the ancient hippodrome and Act III, Scene VI is held in front of the majestic Temple of Jove. The story of *L'Olimpiade* unfolds to the backdrop of the prestigious Olympic Games.

In the *argomento*, we learn that Clisthenes, King of Sicyon, has traveled from Sicyon to Elis to preside over the Olympic Games and that he has decided to offer his daughter, Aristeia, as the prize to the victor. Aristeia, "a beautiful young lady," is loved by "the noble and brave" Megacles, who has been "a winner a number of times at the Olympic Games,"¹¹ but, because Clisthenes hates Athenians, Megacles has left in despair for Crete. Lycidas, the King's forsaken and long lost and forgotten son, has also traveled to Elis - unbeknownst to his father - to witness the games. Lycidas sees Aristeia and immediately falls passionately in love with her; but because he is not skilled in Greek athletics, and remembering that Megacles, whose life he once saved, is, asks Megacles, now his great friend and confidante, to compete in the games under the assumed name of Lycidas and win Aristeia's hand in marriage for him.

Act I opens with Lycidas and his tutor, Amyntas, bewailing the fact that Megacles has yet to arrive in Elis. "Be patient," Amyntas says; "he will arrive

* The article was published originally in the Proceedings of the 8th International Symposium for Olympic Research, "Cultural Imperialism in Action: Critiques in the Global Olympic Trust" edited by N. Crowther, R.K. Barney and M. Heine. With kind permission by the editors.

in good time." Fretting Megacles' tardiness, Lycidas responds:

"You must know that everyone competing for the Olympic prize is to appear at the temple in the morning to announce his rank, name, and native province, and to swear before the altar of Jupiter that he will not resort to fraud during the contest

*You must know that whoever arrives late for this solemn ceremony is barred from the contest."*¹²

Megacles, of course, arrives in time and agrees to compete in the games under Lycidas' name: "Using your name," Megacles declares, "I have already appeared at the temple and soon I shall take part in the competition."¹³

Act II opens with Aristeia and her unstintingly faithful escort, Argene, awaiting news of the games. "Is the outcome of the games yet known?" Argene asks. "No, beautiful Argene," Aristeia replies. "The regulations forbidding us women from being spectators are unnecessarily harsh." "Nevertheless," Argene continues, "it would perhaps be a severer punishment to see one's love in such great danger, and, without being able to help him, be present."¹⁴ In Scene II, "joyful news" arrives: "Lycidas has won."¹⁵

The news of Lycidas', actually Megacles', triumph further complicates an already contorted narrative that features, like so many of METASTASIO'S dramas, a fascinating array of disguises, ruses, mistaken identities, and last minute revelations. As the drama heightens, we learn that, as a result of his perfidy, Lycidas is condemned to death at the hands of Cleisthenes: "You must learn what it means to lie about your name, to violate your trust, and to deceive a king," Alcander, the king's confidant, declares.¹⁶ (Lycidas, unbeknownst to both Cleisthenes and Lycidas himself, is really Philinthus, Cleisthenes' long lost son.) Constrained to uphold justice as well as the dignity of his office, Cleisthenes prepares for the ritual sacrifice of Lycidas at Jove's burning altar. In the end, all is revealed - lives are spared, identities revealed, friendships consummated, families reunited, love requited, virtue affirmed, and stability restored.

While the Olympic venue provides a powerful setting and context for *L'Olimpiade*, METASTASIO'S account of the festival is replete with inaccuracies, imprecision, distortion, and vagueness. First, and perhaps most obviously, kings did not routinely traverse the ancient world to preside over celebrations of the Olympic Games. Certainly, there is no record that Cleisthenes, tyrant of Sicyon, winner of the four-horse chariot race, ever enjoyed executive jurisdiction over the Olympic Games. The only rulers to exercise sole autocratic power over the games after 776 B.C.—PHEIDON of Argos, PANTALEON, King of Pisa, and NERO - did so at the hands of *force majeure*. For most of their history the Olympic festival



Pietro Metastasio (STRUCK-SCHLOEN, M., *L'Olimpiade*. Baroque Festival, Brühl 1988, p. 8)

was administered by the Eleans, whose competence and conscientious neutrality were widely acknowledged and universally respected, and whose jurisdictional power was variously vested in the hands of the judges, the Olympic Council, and the Bureau of Control.¹⁷

Nor did presiding kings, or anyone else, including the priests of Olympia, sacrifice human lives during the festivities at Olympia. Animal sacrifices were common during the celebrations at Olympia - at the funeral rites for Pelops and during the obsequies to Zeus¹⁸ - and sacrifices at the various altars of Zeus at Olympia were held daily, monthly, and annually,¹⁹ but at no time were humans offered as victims.

Second, while fathers may well have brought their daughters to Olympia with the intension of securing a suitable wedding match - perhaps even with an Olympic champion - women were most certainly not offered as prizes in the Games. As in the other crown games, the prizes at Olympia were largely symbolic, of little intrinsic worth or importance. At home, at the hands of their city states, athletes received all sorts of material benefits - cash rewards, civic honors including free board and lodging, even theater seats, perhaps even the service of women²⁰ - but at Olympia athletes traditionally received only the "olive beautiful for its crowns."²¹ Even the historical figure, Cleisthenes, upon whom METASTASIO modeled his own character, does not offer his daughter as an Olympic prize; rather, according to Herodotus,²² Cleisthenes "had a public announcement made, to the effect that any Greek who thought himself good enough to become Cleisthenes'

son-in-law should present himself in Sicyon within sixty days - or sooner if he wished - because he intended, within the year ... to betroth his daughter to her future husband."²³ But, in *L'Olimpiade*, Cleisthenes specifically arranges to substitute "Aristea, the royal daughter of the indomitable Clisthenes and the most attractive of Greek damsels" for "the usual wreath of wild olive leaves."²⁴ Perhaps METASTASIO intended Aristea as a sort of personification of Hippodamia, the female figure in the fertility cult of Hera-Hippodamia and Zeus-Pelops and daughter of the legendary king, Oenomaus, who offered Hippodamia as a prize in a ritual suitors' chariot race, but at no point does METASTASIO make any such reference or offer any such intimation and at no point in Olympic history is there even a hint that women were offered as prizes at the Olympic festival. The idea that ancient Olympic athletes competed to win the hand of a king's daughter in matrimony, rather than the traditional olive wreath, is, in fact, quite preposterous.

METASTASIO is also wrong with regard to women's presence at the Olympic Games. The ban on women applied only to married women - with the noted exception of the priestess of Demeter Chamyne. Unmarried girls, like Aristea and Argene, could attend the games. So while METASTASIO depicts Aristea and Argene as *persona non grata* at the Olympic site, two *femmes fatale* anxiously waiting the news of Lycidas' performance, the truth is, as PAUSANIAS writes, that "virgin girls" were "not barred from watching;" or, as Dio CHRYSOSTOMUS records, "even women of dubious character" were permitted at the panhellenic games.²⁵ Women were certainly not allowed to compete at the Olympic Games,²⁶ but no doubt METASTASIO was simply following the conventional thinking of his era, a thinking predicated on PAUSANIAS' famous passage that read:

*"On the way to Olympia [...] the traveler comes to a high mountain with steep cliffs called Typaeum. There is an Elean law which provides that married women who come to the Olympic festival or even cross the Alpheus on days when they are forbidden to do so, are to be cast down from this mountain."*²⁷

But where METASTASIO is even more confused and confusing, where he really obfuscates, maybe even willfully ignores the record of antiquity is in his characterization, or lack of characterization, of the Olympic training and registration protocol. The idea that Megacles could easily substitute himself, even if in disguise, for Lycidas defies imagination. There may indeed have been no rigorous process by which city states selected their athletes²⁸ - athletes were free to enter the Olympic Games by their own initiative (as long as they were Greek, of course) - but there was a well-defined protocol that would have made it virtually impossible for an im-

poster, in the sense that Megacles was an imposter, to join the ranks of Olympic hopefuls, a protocol that was certainly well-established by the time that Cleisthenes lived, circa 600-570 BC, and a protocol that submitted athletes to the constant surveillance of the Olympic judges. Athletes were subject to the attention of the judges during the compulsory 30-day training period in Elis that immediately preceded the festival at Olympia; while there, Elean officials investigated the parentage and descent of each athlete; before leaving Elis athletes were classified by the judges according to age and the events in which they had chosen to compete; athletes, as well as their trainers, were constantly in the presence of the Olympic officials during the procession from Elis to Olympia; and, along with their fathers, brothers, and trainers, athletes also had to swear an oath in the Council Chamber that they would not violate the rules of the games and that they had been training for ten consecutive months in preparation for the festival. As DREES rightly notes, the athletes were "under the relentless supervision of the judges."²⁹ It is hard to imagine under the weight of such intense scrutiny that judges could not personally identify all of the athletes competing for Olympic glory. "But aren't you known in Elis by now?" Megacles sensibly asks Lycidas. "No," responds Lycidas - incredibly!³⁰

Likewise, given the fame and notoriety that assuredly accompanied Olympic success, surely the judges, not to mention the other athletes and their various entourages, would have immediately recognized an athlete of Megacles' stature and reputation: "I am not a stranger to the arena of Elis," Megacles proudly proclaims. "I have strenuously fought in it many times, and the wild olive is not an unaccustomed ornament around my forehead."³¹ An athlete this accomplished could not have remained anonymous at Olympia, a mere unobtrusive substitute for yet another anonymous entrant; and it is even harder to imagine that an athlete of Megacles' fame and distinction would be party to the sort of fraud engineered by Lycidas, a fraud that if exposed at the most hallowed, sacred, and solemn festival in antiquity would have carried serious consequences.

METASTASIO is equally vague with regard to identifying the event in which Megacles' is to compete, and, therefore, the event in which Aristea is to be awarded as the prize; and, ultimately, as a result, the sequence of events of the sacred celebration is reductively problematized and mystified. Presumably, Megacles registers for boxing, wrestling, or the pentathlon: He substitutes for Lycidas because Lycidas knows "how to wield a sword," but not how to compete in "games we know nothing about - cestus, discus, wrestling."³² Both Lycidas as well as Alcander, Cleisthenes' confidant, specifically use

the term "fight"³³ to describe Megacles' intensions, and since neither of them refer to any corollary skills or other events in their dialogue, one is left with the impression that Megacles competes in either boxing or wrestling, a conclusion supported by Megacles' proclamation that his "hair and face" will be "covered with dust."³⁴ But boxing and wrestling were conducted on day four of the Olympic calendar, and at no point does METASTASIO indicate a timeline for the events that constitute *L'Olimpiade's* specifically Olympic narrative. In the only declaration that suggests a time frame, Amyntas intones in Act I, Scene I, that the "hour for the Olympic games is set for late afternoon, and it is still morning,"³⁵ thereby effectively eviscerating the Olympic celebration of any lengthy and sequenced schedule of events, a schedule that integrated both athletic and religious rituals into one of the most compelling and highly acclaimed holy and cultural moments of the ancient Hellenic calendar. By METASTASIO'S unclear and nebulous account, Megacles simply wins the Olympic Games, and Aristeia - no sport or event or day or other ritual specified!

Nor is METASTASIO'S description of the Temple of Zeus accurate. Act III, Scene 6, begins with the setting:

*"An exterior view of the great temple of Olympian Jove, from which one can descend a long and magnificent staircase divided into different planes. A clearing in front of the same with a burning altar in the center. A woods of sacred wild olives all around, from which the wreaths of the victorious athletes have been gathered."*³⁶

The description contradicts the archeological evidence. Not only does METASTASIO refer to the Temple of Zeus as the temple of the Olympian Jove - an interesting slip of the temporal tongue - but the Temple of Zeus did not boast a staircase, but rather a ramp. According to DREES, the blocks, which served as the foundation for the temple, "rose only three meters above the general level of the surrounding terrain," and since the "high steps of the base were ill-suited to ceremonial needs a wide ramp was built to facilitate access to the antechamber at the eastern end of the temple."³⁷ Nor was there a burning altar in front of the Temple of Zeus, but rather statues, among them the Nike of PAEONIUS. The closest altar, the Altar of Zeus, was located approximately 50 meters north of the Temple of Zeus, closer in fact to both the Temple of Hera as well as the Temple of Rhea.³⁸ And, lastly, although there was a grove of wild olives at Olympia, called the *pantheon*, the wreaths bestowed upon Olympic victors were traditionally cut from the sacred olive tree, the Crown Olive, which was located at the southwest corner at the rear, not in the front, of the Temple of Zeus.³⁹

Metastasio's Historicity

The question now arises: Why is METASTASIO'S account of the Olympic Games in *L'Olimpiade* so full of vagueness, ambiguity, and imprecision? The question becomes even more poignant when we realize that for METASTASIO, like his mentor, the famed Gian Vincenzo GRAVINA, the Arcadian reform movement presumed first-hand knowledge of the ancient philosophers and historians. Unlike many of his contemporaries who substituted mimicry and superficial judgments for any real knowledge about the ancient sources, METASTASIO drew upon his first-hand knowledge of the classics for both his general classical imagery, as well as for his occasional pieces and prose works, and most especially for the plots for his dramas.⁴⁰

First, and foremost, we must recognize that METASTASIO did not have the luxury of our own historical hindsight, and certainly not the hindsight I have employed here. In other words, we cannot hold METASTASIO accountable to the standards of contemporary scholarship. By his own admission, in creating *L'Olimpiade* METASTASIO was informed by the works of HERODOTUS, PAUSANIAS, and Natale CONTI.⁴¹ Beyond the story of the Trial of the Suitors, which clearly provides the basis for METASTASIO'S narrative, HERODOTUS only mentions the games in passing, usually in reference to an historical figure who had enjoyed Olympic success, and Natale CONTI not at all; so presumably METASTASIO took most of his historical information about the Olympic games from PAUSANIAS, whose account is both limited and wanting with regard to the Olympic festival. PAUSANIAS wrote during the second century A.D., so he was far removed from the events of the classic celebration. He is selective in his descriptions and while he is a wealth of information he does not always exercise a fully critical eye for Greek religious, architectural, cultural, and sport history. In the end, PAUSANIAS is a secondary, not a primary, source, and his reliability varies.⁴² But that said, assuming METASTASIO read PAUSANIAS carefully, METASTASIO would certainly have known that women were not offered as prizes at the Olympic Games,⁴³ that kings did not routinely preside over the games,⁴⁴ that humans were not sacrificed at the games, that unmarried women were not refused admission to the games,⁴⁵ that athletes trained at Elis prior to the competition itself,⁴⁶ that athletes were subject to the authority and discipline of "Greek arbiters,"⁴⁷ and that there were severe penalties for cheating at the games.⁴⁸ He would also have known about the legendary chariot race in which Pelops won the hand of Oenomaus's daughter, Hippodamia.⁴⁹ METASTASIO would likely not have known about the intricate bureaucracy that governed the staging of the games or even the

daily calendar that organized the Olympic festival.⁵⁰ Nor would he have had at his disposal an accurate geographical depiction of the Olympic site or a complete architectural description of the Temple of Zeus.⁵¹

It is also possible that METASTASIO never read PAUSANIAS at all and simply lifted the entire plot of *L'Olimpiade* from Apostolo ZENO'S *Gl'Ingannifelici*.⁵² First staged on November 25th, 1695, at the Teatro di Sant'Angelo, Venice,⁵³ and set to music by Carlo Francesco POLAROLO,⁵⁴ ZENO'S drama devolves from the same basic pivot of HERODOTUS' narrative of the Trial of the Suitors and features an identical cast of characters.⁵⁵ The relationship between *Gl'Ingannifelici* and *L'Olimpiade* can hardly have been incidental and surely METASTASIO must have read ZENO'S work and been aware of his master's treatment of the Olympic theme, but without any feeling of apparent obligation or without any admission of plagiarism, in fact without even an acknowledgement, METASTASIO simply uses the same basic plot and the same characters as ZENO.

It is equally possible that METASTASIO relied heavily on Ludovico ARIOSTO'S well-known epic, *Orlando Furioso*.⁵⁶ As LEE recognizes,⁵⁷ the story of *L'Olimpiade* is only a slightly modified version of ARIOSTO'S narrative: the scene is Elis rather than Paris, the Olympic Games substitute for the tournament, Charlemagne becomes Cleisthenes, Bradamante, his daughter, is Artistea, beloved by Roger, rather than Megacles, and Lycidas, Roger's friend and benefactor, is made Prince of Constantinople rather than Prince of Crete. Indeed, as LEE recognizes, the chivalric tone of METASTASIO'S story is never entirely lost and the games, despite the descriptive evocation of the Olympic atmosphere, are somewhat reminiscent of a medieval tournament. In fact, at one point in the text of *L'Olimpiade*, METASTASIO even refers to the games as "the tournament."⁵⁸ "Antiquity and chivalry, Ariosto and Herodotus, are fused," to use LEE'S words.⁵⁹ As I have argued before, "Metastasio's characters are courtiers, not ancients, chivalric figures chiseled more out of the traditions of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* than Pausanias' prose."⁶⁰ It is conceivable therefore, although unlikely, and certainly contradictory to the acknowledgment in his own *argomento* to *L'Olimpiade*, that METASTASIO never actually relied on PAUSANIAS at all and relied entirely on some sort of synthesis or reading of ARIOSTO'S and ZENO'S antecedent works. In either case, perhaps METASTASIO drew his plagiaristic justification from Giuseppe Gaetano SALVADORI whose book on writing Italian poetry advocated that "a librettist pressed for time should not hesitate to purloin the ideas of others whenever he finds them."⁶¹

There are other reasons why METASTASIO'S account of the Olympic Games lacks historical ac-

curacy. Despite its title, *L'Olimpiade* is not about the Olympic Games. Rather the Olympics simply provide a fittingly heroic and appropriately historical setting for an eighteenth century *opera seria* in which the conflicts, tensions, and passions that defined the culture of an eighteenth century Italian, and even European, nobility were played out within the context of a dignified, sentimental formalism. *L'Olimpiade* is not about athletics, or even about the values, ethics, and organization of athletics, or about the behaviors, dispositions, and characters of athletes. *L'Olimpiade* is an operatic morality play about the values salient to the daily lives of the nobility—patriotism, love, loyalty, friendship, and honor. Reminiscent of TASSO'S *Torrismondo* and *Aminta*, and in the dénouement, of GUARINI'S *Pastor fido*, *L'Olimpiade* transports us to a typically METASTASIAN idillico-romantic world in which heroic and noble behavior are validated through invented scenarios drawn from an ancient historical background that a contemporary audience could easily relate to. METASTASIO'S characters in *L'Olimpiade*, as they are in most of his works, are highly stylized prototypes rather than well-defined personalities, the embodiment and personification of a wide variety of human proclivities - from villainy to virtue, from suffering to statesmanship - "the gentle not extravagant affections and dispositions of emotion," as DOWNES nicely puts it.⁶² Just as in *La clemenza di Tito*, Tito embodies the virtues of devotion and magnanimity, so in *L'Olimpiade*, Argene becomes the model of unstinting compassion and Megacles, "a divine picture of human friendship," as HOGARTH describes him.⁶³ METASTASIO draws his characters from the highest level of society to heighten the moral discourse and he uses a historical figure, like Megacles, not as a model of athleticism, but to add plausibility and *gravitas* to his high-minded, moral didacticism.

To put it succinctly, METASTASIO wrote literary moral dramas,⁶⁴ not historical dramas. His purpose in *L'Olimpiade* was never to relay accurate information about the Olympic Games but to use the Olympic setting as a context for providing moral instruction through staged entertainment. As NEVILLE writes, METASTASIO'S aim was to "instruct under the guise of giving pleasure and to move the emotions of his listeners in favor of the moral purpose,"⁶⁵ to contribute to the enhancement of what CRESCEMBENI called "internal beauty" and MORATORI "incorporeal beauty,"⁶⁶ to what many of his era considered the progress of civilization. Unlike other librettists and poets who often drew from classical mythology and fables, established epics, or even their imaginations, METASTASIO drew upon Greek, Roman, and Oriental history and legends for his plots and dramas.⁶⁷ METASTASIO'S moral inten-

sions caused him only to draw upon history, not to portray it. To emphasize his originality and to disclaim any pretence of historicism, he commonly acknowledged in his *argomenti* that he treated his sources with a great deal of latitude and freedom. As he might well have written about *L'Olimpiade*, he wrote of *Catone in Utica* that the general outline of the action "has been taken from the historians, the remainder has the semblance of reality."⁶⁸ Bowing to the dictates of a rational moral system, poets were expected to depict what should have happened rather than what actually had happened.⁶⁹ Just as Dido was not VIRGIL'S venerable figure, but rather TASSO'S *Armida* set to music, so also was Megacles not HERODOTUS' governor son of Alcmaeon⁷⁰ but rather METASTASIO'S sublime paradigm of loyalty and constancy.

The pretext for subverting historical accuracy for the sake of moral action was provided by none other than ARISTOTLE, whose ideas along with those of Horace and Longinus in particular, served as the intellectual infrastructure and philosophical guidepost for the Arcadian reform movement.⁷¹ "The poet, unlike the historian," wrote Aristotle, "does not tell what has happened but what can happen according to probability and necessity [...] One cannot utterly undo the transmitted stories [i.e. Clytemnestra was killed by Orestes], but such facts must be incorporated artistically."⁷² So, as NEVILLE writes:

"Let the action be moral action, and into this stream place characters of the highest social position who can illustrate the most admirable incidents which are contained in Greek and Latin history. Record this element of historical fact in the argomente of the printed libretto, as it will enhance the believability of the plot. Define the dominant moral virtues, moral failings, and dominant passions of the chosen characters according to the moral aims of the plot, which can then unfold with probability by ensuring that the passions and virtues respond according to the expectations laid down by a pre-existing familiar code [e.g. DESCARTES' Passions]. Moral conflicts between and within the several characters will not only enhance the dramatic intensity of the work but will grant further dimension to the chosen moral types. The historical hero, however, in order to embrace the stature of an 'image of the divine' will require considerable enhancement of his commendatory virtues, and the beauty of his moral aspiration will be marred and its power diminished if the antagonists are not drawn to moral truth [along with the audience] by the example."

At heart, METASTASIO'S *L'Olimpiade* was a reflection of an age and the poet himself was held accountable more to the dictates of a contemporary audi-

ence than to the requisites of historical precision. METASTASIO lived in a courtly society, a hedonistic, voluptuous, even languid, culture that craved intense moral catharsis through melodrama unencumbered by the need for depth of thought or reflection. While METASTASIO'S audience may well have reveled in the heroic, it did so only on the condition that heroism was reduced to the proportions of an idyll, or an elegy, or even a romance, and certainly not presented as a real tragedy or a real history. If his plots were improbable, his stories contrived, his settings artificial, and his historical detail lacking,⁷⁴ if his narrative did not correspond to what DOWNES calls "any ascertained reality,"⁷⁵ it was because of the needs of the *Settecento*, and because as SALVADORI suggests, "exaggerations, hyperbole, the falsification of history, unintegrated episodes, and the use of improbable incidents are all justified if the audience approves." It is pointless for librettists "to try to develop plots that are verisimilar," SALVADORI continues, "for the public will believe what it chooses to believe."⁷⁶ Ultimately, the moral action of METASTASIO'S *L'Olimpiade* mirrored the agonetic philosophy of the Age of Enlightenment - characters striving to overcome selfish human desires and longings in order to achieve stability and greatness in a world in which monarch and subject alike were constrained to adhere to the highest moral principles.⁷⁷ From a political perspective, the triumph of virtue in METASTASIO'S works recruited support for the status quo; the image of majesty essential to the welfare of the Hapsburg monarchy was better served by the moral principles extolled by METASTASIO than by any effort to promote historical accuracy.⁷⁸

There is, perhaps, one other factor that accounts for the less than accurate portrayal of the Olympic Games in *L'Olimpiade*; namely, the requirements of verse, music, and stage. Strict literary conventions, obdurate theatrical conventions, powerful composers, and whimsical and fanciful singers, especially the best of the castratos, inevitably compromised and constrained the work of librettists. As MCCLYMONDS and HEARTZ note, "Often little remains of a historical plot once the librettist has altered events to avoid offense."⁷⁹ Individual performers in particular became increasingly difficult to handle as the practice of tailoring arias to suit *prima uomos* and *prima donnas* gave individual performers extraordinary control and influence. Scenes and airs were often abridged and changed to humor the caprice of singers who themselves commonly disregarded character, place, history, and even propriety.⁸⁰ Even METASTASIO, who enjoyed singularly close and cordial relationships with composers, musicians, and singers, found himself chagrined by "the injuries" which his dramas daily suffered in the theaters of Europe "from those ignorant and vain vocal heroes and

heroines."⁸¹ History invariably took a back seat to the injunctions of the *Settecento* theatre.

As LEE notes, METASTASIO'S dramas were neither pseudo-classic works like those of VOLTAIRE, nor eclectic pieces of classical imitation like those of ALFIERI. Rather, they were "something quite apart, horn neither of contemporary manners nor of classical study, but of preemptory necessities, the irresistible suggestions, of a great and living art;" they were "the offspring of the music of the eighteenth century."⁸² The popularity and longevity of METASTASIO'S *L'Olimpiade* was based on the beauty of the poetry, the strength of the story, the adaptability of the dramatic structure, and the practicality of the character groupings for musical purposes, not on the appeal of the competitive Hellenic athletic model, the historical accuracy with which METASTASIO describes the games, or the political salience of the ancient ceremonies at Olympia. Historical detail was sacrificed to the expediency of dramatic necessity: How much more captivating for an audience to have Lycidas' life at stake? Even Megacles' life at risk? To see Aristeia's amorous frenzy excluded from the Olympic arena? To watch Cleisthenes enter the stage regally from atop a glorious flight of steps?

In the final analysis, METASTASIO was a creative artist, a poet, a dramatist, not a historian, and while he may well have borrowed from the world of antiquity, and in the case of *L'Olimpiade* from the ancient celebrations at Olympia, including most especially the games, his primary purpose was moral not factual or historical instruction, a goal he was to share a century later with another prominent European aristocrat, Pierre de COUBERTIN, the *renovateur* of the modern Olympic Games Movement.

From Metastasio to Coubertin: The Survival of Olympism

Even though *L'Olimpiade* did not transmit a particularly accurate report about the ancient Olympic Games - although it was, to some extent, faithful to PAUSANIAS, albeit limited, account - it was still an important ingredient in the survival and the transmission of the Olympic mythos. Perhaps most obviously, *L'Olimpiade* sustained and dignified the name and fame of the Olympic Games throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries. It was performed in all the leading cities of Europe - from London to Prague, from Moscow to Lisbon - and it was set to music by virtually all of Europe's leading composers, including CALDARA, VIVALDI, HASSE, PAISIELLO, TRAIETTA, PERGOLES, and GALUPPI; some of the most striking set pieces of *L'Olimpiade* received the attention of composers such as GLUCK, Johann Sebastian BACH, MOZART, and BEETHOVEN, and numerous pasticcini thrived on the basis of excerpts taken from the famed *L'Olimpiade*. It was also performed in honor

of many of Europe's royalty including PHILIP V, CATHERINE II, Queen MARIANA VITTORIA, CHARLES III, the Emperor JOSEPH II, and the Empress ELIZABETH, and because of the enormous success and appeal of the work, not to mention the aristocratic patronage it enjoyed, *L'Olimpiade* showcased the most prestigious virtuosi of the day - Luigi MARCHESI, Faustina HASSE, Maria MARCHETTI, Teresa COLONNA, Belardi D' ANCONA, and Felice SALIMBENI. Even the music itself in the hands of composers as diverse as PERGOLES and VIVALDI, CALDARA and HASSE, enhanced the reputation of the Olympic Games as a noble and dignified tradition through scores that featured martial processions, heroic fanfares, stately anthems, grandiose choruses, and touching arias. METASTASIO'S *L'Olimpiade* also joined the ranks of other works in the arts that incorporated and publicized the Olympic idea. Numerous 18th century ballets and opera-ballets featured the Olympic Games, including, *Les Jeux Olympiques*, *Les Fêtes grecques et romaines*, and Jean-Georges NOVERRE'S heroic ballet, *La Mort d'Hercule* which specifically choreographed wrestlers competing for the Olympic wreath. In literature, PINDAR and PAUSANIAS served as inspiration to a wide variety of poets who embraced the Olympic allusion including KEATS and MILTON in England, RONSARD and Du BELLAY in France, KOCHANOWSKI and SZYMONOWIC in Poland, and HÖLDERLIN and GOETHE in Germany. Collectively, work in the arts created a living tradition of the Olympic idea and proselytized a widespread European audience to the grandeur, nobility, and sacredness of the ancient Olympic Games.

But *L'Olimpiade* did more than just keep the name and prestige of the Olympic Games alive in the consciousness of a European audience; in its values and ethics, even in its conceits and affections, *L'Olimpiade* instantiated a positive and progressive moral cosmology that would ultimately pave the way for the ruminations of COUBERTIN. First, *L'Olimpiade* is a chivalric story in which noble values and ideals are validated and extolled. Megacles, like numerous other METASTASIAN heroes, offers his human emotions as a holocaust to individual virtue and communal harmony: "Brave young man, standing humbly amid so much glory, allow me to kiss your honored brow and to press you to my heart."⁸³ In keeping with the lofty ideals and noble principles of *opera seria*, *L'Olimpiade* ends in the universal acclaim of honorable behavior and communal stability: "Everyone here has displayed courage," the king declares; "must I be the only exemplar of weakness? The world shall not hear about me. Priests, stir up the fire on the altar."⁸⁴

COUBERTIN'S Olympism was likewise grounded in exalted ambitions and noble intentions. In *L'Olimpiade*'s ultimate victory of virtue and the re-

establishment of communal harmony the ground is laid for COUBERTIN'S later progressive rationalistic morality in which the individual hero, in COUBERTIN'S case the individual athlete, was to instantiate the "sentiment of honor" and embody heroic qualities which spoke to the "physical, moral, and social"⁸⁵ role of sport in the service of individual and societal equilibrium. Both METASTASIO and COUBERTIN validated "the efficacy of virtue producing stupendous results."⁸⁶ Just as METASTASIO'S 18th century *dramma musicale* affirmed a moral code rooted in the values of honor, loyalty, devotion, and chivalry, so COUBERTIN'S *fin de siècle* Olympism preached the virtues of "initiative, daring, decisiveness, the habit of self-reliance, and of taking responsibility for one's own failure."⁸⁷ COUBERTIN'S athlete is no less chivalric or heroic than METASTASIO'S Megacles, and no less ascetic, or Hellenic, just more modern. "We must uphold the noble and chivalrous character of athleticism which has distinguished it in the past," COUBERTIN wrote, "so that it may continue effectively to play the admirable role in the education of modern peoples that was attributed to it by the Greek masters."⁸⁸

Like METASTASIO, COUBERTIN too was a doctrinaire moralist, an idealistic didact striving, through an altruistic disposition, to enhance the quality of human life. The role of sport in the service of moral education and social good resonates throughout COUBERTIN'S entire *oeuvre*: In COUBERTIN'S *pedagogie sportive*,⁸⁹ sport becomes "a very powerful and sensitive instrument of moral training,"⁹⁰ a source of "moral hygiene,"⁹¹ a "school of moral nobility and purity," a moral enterprise dedicated to "progressive work done with judicious boldness, an ever-vigilant concern for ideals and selflessness, and finally, daily adaptation to the common good, to the service of all."⁹³ No doubt, like METASTASIO, for whom the power of achievement would have been marred if the antagonists in his dramas were not brought, along with the audience, to moral truth, so too would COUBERTIN have been chagrined if in the end his ideation of Olympism as a moral crusade did not induce in athlete and spectator alike a vision of social peace, international magnanimity, and cosmopolitan harmony

Encoded in the *lieto fine* of METASTASIO'S *L'Olympiade* resides another ideal embraced by COUBERTIN, the notion of the cumulative advancement of humanity. To METASTASIO and many of his contemporaries, the happy ending represented a rationalistic morality more civilized and evolutionary than the devastating catastrophes of classical drama. As PLANELLI wrote at the time, the "evolution of the Drama from sad ends to the happy end is a certain proof of the progress of civilization and the development of human attitudes, whatever our misanthropes may say."⁹⁴ Likewise, COUBERTIN subscribed to an ideology of unilinear progress, to a view that his-

tory was an evolutionary process in the progressive revelation and self-realization of the human spirit.⁹⁵ He believed, like so many other Victorian modernists, in the infinite development of knowledge and the inevitable advancement towards social and moral betterment.⁹⁶ In METASTASIO'S *dramma per musica*, the triumph of human virtues embodied Enlightenment ideals; in Coubertin's rhetoric, the promise of sport reflected the agonetic ideology of an incipient capitalism - human betterment through athletic struggle. And so, in keeping with FRUGONI'S 17th century mandate that the arts serve "the ethical betterment of mankind,"⁹⁷ COUBERTIN wrote of the Stockholm Olympiad: "May it contribute like its illustrious predecessors to the general welfare and to the betterment of humanity."⁹⁸ Ultimately, both METASTASIO'S and COUBERTIN'S *oeuvres* evinced an optimistic faith in the rational perfectibility of the sovereign individual:⁹⁹ "O Sport," wrote Coubertin in his pseudonymous *Ode to Sport*, "You are Fecundity, you tend by straight and noble paths toward a more perfect race [...] O Sport, You are Progress."¹⁰⁰

COUBERTIN'S notions of progress lay in an appeal to history and in a conception of history as an evolutionary process which in COUBERTIN'S mind devolved from "the laws of humanity itself,"¹⁰¹ laws which harkened back to an emergent Cartesianism and to METASTASIO'S own aesthetic moralism grounded as it was in the principle of *utile dulci dilectando*, "pleasurable instruction."¹⁰² Sounding remarkably Coubertinesque in fact, METASTASIO once wrote that he had "wasted his entire life in order to instruct mankind in a pleasing way."¹⁰³ "Pleasures," he argued "that do not succeed in making impressions on the mind and on the heart are of short duration."¹⁰⁴ It was through his poetry that METASTASIO sought to morally instruct his audience, "inducing, by way of pleasure, the love of virtue so necessary for general human happiness."¹⁰ And so, as NEVILLE states,

"Metastasian drama became a drama of moral forces personified by specified characters who are differentiated by emotionally charged actions and reactions that drive them towards either personal moral victory or moral self-defeat. At the center is a moral hero or heroine [...] who must not only triumph over his or her own spontaneous desires but also uphold a moral vision against the onslaughts of the morally weak who fall victim to their personal desires."¹⁰⁶

As such METASTASIO'S moral dramas in general and *L'Olimpiade* in particular realize on stage the principles set forth in DESCARTES moral philosophy, a rationalist system that establishes a close ontological relationship between human passion and moral behavior at the heart of which lay the charge that individuals are morally obliged to control through moral reasoning the actions which their passions

incite. It is through the triumph of virtue, through moral endurance, fortitude, and commitment, that ultimately morality and hence social stability and progress endures.

While in the course of fulfilling his aesthetic ambitions METASTASIO committed to a Cartesian morality that played out in the form of idealized and stylized characters who personified various moral principles and proclivities, COUBERTIN realized his moralist doctrine through the resurrection of an ancient ritual tradition, the Olympic Games, which became, in his hands, an internationalist sporting institution whose ideological rationale was drawn from an ancient Hellenic philosophy, what COUBERTIN himself called the "marriage of muscle and mind."¹⁰⁷ Within COUBERTIN'S humanistic ideology, the muscles were "made to do the work of a moral educator."¹⁰⁸ "It is the application to modern requirements of one of the most characteristic principles of Greek civilization," he said, "to make the muscles the chief factor in the work of moral education."¹⁰⁹ Like DESCARTES, COUBERTIN too saw passions as intrinsically good, necessary and inevitable corollaries to physical activity: "The body must enjoy a certain measure of sensual enjoyment. Sensual enjoyment is not well-being, it is intense physical pleasure [...] Sport produces physical enjoyment, i.e. intense physical pleasure."¹¹⁰ But like DESCARTES, COUBERTIN too realized that with regard to passions "we have nothing to avoid but their evil uses or their excesses:"¹¹¹ The "intense physical pleasure" of sport, he realized, could also take on the "disturbing character of sensual passion;"¹¹² it could, he wrote,

*"put into play the most noble as well as the most vile passions; it can develop vile passions; it can develop disinterestedness and the sentiment of honor as well as the love of gain; it can be chivalrous or corrupt, virile or festival; finally, it can be used to consolidate peace or to prepare for war."*¹¹³

And so COUBERTIN adumbrated a moralist agenda grounded in a progressive athleticism circumscribed by esthetic and moral imperatives. By stimulating the qualities of "courage, will, perseverance, poise, and stamina" sport tamed the passions, and fostered "a happy equilibrium in the moral domain. *Mens sana in corpore sano* say the ancients."¹¹⁴ To COUBERTIN, sport calmed the senses not only through fatigue but through satisfaction as well. Sport "does more than just neutralize the senses," he wrote, "it satisfies them."¹¹⁵ The basis is of his entire *pedagogie sportive* was grounded in the transposition from the muscular to the moral realm. "It is the duty and the essence of the athlete," COUBERTIN preached, "to know, to lead, and to conquer himself [...] *Athletae proprium est se ipsum noscere, ducere, et vincere.*"¹¹⁶ Echoing DESCARTES moral philosophy, as well as

his own Philhellenism, COUBERTIN summed up his doctrinaire Olympism as follows:

*"I imagine modern Olympism as consisting at its center of a sort of moral Altis, a sacred keep wherein the confrontation of strengths unites the competitors in the manly sports par excellence, the sports which aim at the defense of man and at his mastery over himself, over danger, over the elements, over animal nature, over life, over his passions [...]"*¹¹⁷

Unlike METASTASIO who focused on harnessing the passions primarily through the acquisition of certain virtues, certain attitudes of mind, gained in the course of a pre-conceived and invariably contorted dramatic narratives, COUBERTIN dwelled on the power of the body, of competitive sport to engender qualities of character in the quest to inculcate moral behavior. In Olympism, he wrote, "the union of muscle and thought may be finally sealed for the sake of progress and human dignity."¹¹⁸ While DESCARTES argued that all passions registered within the thinking self, he recognized that they also impelled the body "because these passions cannot lead us to perform any action except by means of the desire they produce, it is this desire which we should take particular care to control; and here lies the chief utility of morality."¹¹⁹ In keeping with DESCARTES' rational discourse, COUBERTIN acknowledged that the body must be subjugated to the dictates of the mind - "No doubt the mind dominates," he argued, and "muscle must remain its subject"¹²⁰ - and that the moral lesson in sport ultimately emerged from reasonings that restrain bodily action even though the body was of significance in the moral battle. As he wrote:

*"The moral fight is actually independent of the physical fight [...] Some elite souls have not needed the second to triumph in the first, but that is the exception to the rule. In fact, one must be endowed with an exceptional character to reach the will directly, without first acting on the envelope that contains it, whereas it is possible for everyone to strengthen the one by the other."*¹²¹

Character, the critical factor in COUBERTIN'S moral cosmology, in the search for personal and communal morality, in the search for "proper human balance,"¹²² was strengthened by the body and therein resided the power of sport and the wellspring of his Olympic Movement, and the feature that distinguished him most from METASTASIO.

Echoes in History¹²³

While I have argued that METASTASIO and COUBERTIN shared a similar moral cosmology and that *L'Olimpiade*, as the instantiation of METASTASIO'S moral code, prefigured and foregrounded COUBERTIN'S Olympic philosophy, I have not demonstrated an historical connection per se between *L'Olimpiade*

and Olympism. In fact, in all of COUBERTIN'S voluminous writings I can find no reference to METASTASIO or to METASTASIO'S *L'Olimpiade*, nor do COUBERTIN or any of his biographers reference DESCARTES as an influence on COUBERTIN'S doctrinal formulations. However, I would like to suggest that the Arcadian principle of *utile et dulci*, as well as DESCARTES' rationalist thinking, migrated into Jesuit teachings that in some hard to define way influenced COUBERTIN and his incipient Olympic ideology

Drawn from antiquity, especially HORACE and PLATO, the principle of pleasurable instruction found favor not only among the leading proponents of the Arcadian literary movement who sought to reform poetry and poetic drama in favor of a lofty, dignified humanism¹²⁴ but also among pulpit orators who sought to reformulate the principles of religious eloquence and enhance the preaching of the day.¹²⁵ Both groups were comprised of moral didacts seeking to enhance the moral tone of society. One of the most influential pulpit orators, FÉNELON, for example, argued that the true aim of eloquence was to instruct the intelligence and improve the morals of the audience: "*Eloquence is the art of instructing and persuading men, by moving their passions.*"¹²⁶ Concerned more with persuasion than pure eloquence, he further argued that "*We must distinguish here between such ornaments as only please; and those that both please and persuade. That which serves to please in order to persuade is good and solid.*"¹²⁷ Likewise the Jesuit theologian, NADAL, believed that the "*properly Christian*" art of oratory should draw on the parts of the classical tracts that dealt with "*moving the affections.*"¹²⁸ In the end, "*The whole of eloquence,*" Blaise GISBERT wrote, "*may be reduced to these three particulars, to instruct, to please, and move.*"¹²⁹ To FÉNELON, "*Every brilliant thought which does not drive towards one of these three things is only a conceit.*"¹³⁰

To instruct, to please, to move - *prouver, peindre, toucher* - these were the principles that energized pulpit oratory. "*Every sermon,*" GISBERT wrote, "*should be composed with a design of reforming the manners of mankind, of moderating the passions, of making vice hateful, and virtue lovely.*"¹³¹ Reflecting a strong Caresian influence, GISBERT further describes a "*divine*" preacher as one who must "*confute all errors, and discover the nature and essence of all vices and virtues,*" and refers to "*the motion [...] of the blood and animal spirits*" and the preachers need to "*represent constantly the disorders of the human passions*" and to "*prevail upon the will.*"¹³² As NEVILLE has noted, "*What seems to be assumed by Arcadians and preachers alike is the close relationship between passion and moral behavior so fundamental to Descartes' procedures.*"¹³³

The principle of pleasurable instruction resonated throughout Jesuit treatises on classical oratory and patristic homiletics recapitulating not only the basic thrust of Descartes moral philosophy but also the moral resolve of the Arcadian reform project, including METASTASIO'S own particular moral purpose in dramas like *L'Olimpiade*. The lessons would not have been lost on a young COUBERTIN, a student as he was at the newly established College Saint-Ignace where "*moral formulation [...] after faith and piety*" were "*the first concern of a Christian educational establishment.*"¹³⁴ Reflecting what LOCKE called "*the old Catholic bourgeoisie,*"¹³⁵ Saint Ignace provided both ritual training and pious devotion as well formal instruction on the heritage of the Jesuits. Saint Ignace also reflected a traditional Cartesian rationalistic metaphysics. As MACALOON acknowledges, "*The Coubertins delivered their sons to the Jesuits not only for the suppression of their passions, but also for the acquisition of that inner circumspection and subtle, logical reasoning that would allow them to resist the ideological blandishments of radicals, republicans, and 'freethinkers.'*"¹³⁶ And sounding especially Arcadian, even if somewhat cynical, PROST described Saint Ignace's class in rhetoric as follows:

*"To write a discours is to place noble words into the mouths of great personages. The subject who speaks is always a great man: king, emperor, saint, scientist, or poet. What could such personages be made to say? Nothing, assuredly, that one could draw from daily life, but only mighty sentences [...] lofty sentiments [...] These princes ignored reasons of state, jealousy, cunning tricks. It is politics minus Machiavelli. Honor, dignity, virtue, nobility, courage, sacrifice, renunciation of the world: one breathes a bountiful air on these heroic summits."*¹³⁷

In the end, Prost argued, echoing the moral ambitions of the Arcadians, that "*the students would end by resembling the heroes they made speak.*"¹³⁸

In due course, COUBERTIN would reject the pedagogy and scholastic organization of schools like Saint Ignace and join the liberal, republican classicists and establish his own particular brand of educational reform. His platform was to proselytize the French educational establishment to the value of athletics in what he construed as a suffocating and restrictive curriculum, even though, as he wrote about his own educational tradition, "*the non possumus was absolute. The Jesuits had the pretension, precious little justified, of giving a complete physical culture in their schools.*"¹³⁹ But while he may have rejected certain aspects of the Jesuit curriculum and pedagogy, he forever retained fundamental Jesuit, and Cartesian, misgivings about the power of the passions and the need to confront them: "*The flesh,*

the senses, and the instinct," he wrote as late as 1929, "have the upper hand at times, the will and the conscience at other times. There are two despots fighting for primacy in us, a conflict that often tears us apart savagely. We must achieve balance."¹⁴⁰ The balance he advocated was expressed in his notion of Olympism, a distinctive admixture of Philhellenism, Anglophilism, chivalry, and, what DURKHEIM called, "constitutional cosmopolitanism,"¹⁴¹ that sought to integrate mind, body, and spirit in a joyful internationalist athletic festival that aimed at no less than the advancement and betterment of humanity. Like FÉNELON, whose fundamental purpose was to base his theory of preaching on the theory of art, so COUBERTIN too expanded his own thinking to everywhere keep in mind the relations between sport, art, and life. Consequently, while COUBERTIN'S ideology was derivative of a wide variety of experiences and influences, he was not without debt to his own educational background, one immersed in a Jesuit tradition that owed much to the principles and metaphysics encoded in the Metastasian and Arcadian moral code and undergirded by DESCARTES' moral philosophy.

A Final Thought

In his essay on Charles DARWIN, George ORWELL identifies one of man's most perplexing problems - the origins of evil and injustice in society. On the one hand there are those who maintain that evil and injustice are a product of society. MARX, as perhaps the leading proponent of this environmentalist position, believed that man's ideals and values were class-based, that greed, selfishness, materialism, and inhumanity were characteristics of the modern bourgeoisie, that humans were simply alienated from their authentic humanity, their humaneness, by a class-based, private property system. Similar views were expressed by numerous Enlightenment thinkers, including ROUSSEAU and VOLTAIRE. The opposite perspective is that evil and injustice exist in the world because they are part of our fundamental nature, and that because evil and injustice are irremediable they will exist in all societies regardless of socio-economic relations. This viewpoint is embodied in Christian, and especially Jesuit, theology which holds that avarice, lust, and sin have resided in the human soul from the very beginning.

Even though METASTASIO and COUBERTIN may well have conceived of evil as inherent in humans, both actually had more in common with Marxists and Voltairians than one might think, since like them, both the Abate and the Renovateur were probably closer to what LOCKE called "disgruntled environmentalists."¹⁴² Their criticisms of society - in METASTASIO'S case a more covert critique than

COUBERTIN'S - suggest that both men saw human behavior as the result of a complex dynamic of socio-psychological experiences encountered in life's course. Neither man believed that a change in environment would make humans "good," but they clearly did think that it would lessen the influence of "evil." And perhaps here is the enduring message of Olympism - that the games will not necessarily ensure peace and international harmony but that they can mitigate the evils in the world and therefore contribute to the welfare of humanity.

Notes

- 1 Pietro Bonaventura TRAPASSI, born of humble Roman origin, became known by his Hellenized name of METASTASIO, bestowed on him by his mentor and adoptive father, the well known Roman Abbott, Gian Vincenza GRAVINA. For a succinct sketch of his life and work see LEE, Vernon, *Studies of the eighteenth century in Italy*, New York 1978 (Originally printed in London 1887), pp. 141-230; NEVILLE, Don, "Pietro Metastasio", in: SADIE, Stanley (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of the Opera*, New York 1992, pp. 351-361.
- 2 For a thorough analysis of *L'Olimpiade* see WILSON, J. Kenneth, *L'Olimpiade: Selected Eighteenth-Century Settings of Metastasio's Libretto*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1982. For prefaces to facsimile editions of *L'Olimpiade* scores, see MEYER BROWN, Howard (ed.), *Italian opera librettos, 1640-1770*, New York 1978, vols. XXXII (Caldara), XXXIV (Pergolesi), XXXVI (Leo), XLI (Galuppi) and XLVI (Jommelli).
- 3 For a CD recording of VIVALDI'S *L'Olimpiade*, see *L'Olimpiade*, by Antonio Vivaldi, Concerto Italiano, Director Rinaldo Alessandrini, 3 CDs, Opus 111, 2000 Regione Piedmonte.
- 4 For a CD recording of PERGOLESI'S symphony, *Olympiad*, see *Pergolesi Symphonies*, Orchestra da Camera di Santa Cecilia, Conductor Alession Vlad, 1996 Arts Music, Track 1.
- 5 The full text of METASTASIO'S *L'Olimpiade*, and all his other librettos, are published in HOOLE, John (trans.), *Dramas and other poems of the Abbe Pietro Metastasio* (2 vols., London 1800). The text of *L'Olimpiade* appears on pp. 81-158. An excellent modern translation of *L'Olimpiade* is provided in FUCILLA, Joseph G. (trans.), *Three Melodramas by Pietro Metastasio*, Lexington 1981, pp. 113-155. Let me also note that I have chosen to use the Italian spelling of *L'Olimpiade* throughout this manuscript, i.e., *L'Olimpiade* with an "i", not with a "y", as is commonly employed.
- 6 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 3.
- 7 BRUNELLI, Bruno, *I teatri di Padova dalla origini alla fine del secolo XIX*, Milano 1921, p. 112.
- 8 SEGRAVE, Jeffrey O., "Pietro Metastasio's *L'Olimpiade* and the survival of the Olympic idea in 18th century Europe." in: *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies* 14(2005), pp. 1-28.
- 9 SEGRAVE, "L'Olimpiade".
- 10 All textual references are taken from FUCILLA, Melodramas.
- 11 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 113.
- 12 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 115.
- 13 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 123.
- 14 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 128.
- 15 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 129.
- 16 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 142.
- 17 CROWTHER, Nigel B., "Elis and Olympia", in: PHILLIPS, David J./PRITCHARD, David (eds.), *Sport and festival in the ancient world*, Swansea 2003, pp. 61-73.
- 18 During the full five-day calendar, which was established in 472 B.C., the funeral rites for Pelops were held on the second day and in the morning of the third day, a hecatomb of bulls

- were sacrificed to Zeus. See DREES, Ludwig, *Olympia: Gods, Artists, Athletes*, New York 1968, pp. 77-18.
- 19 DREES, *Olympia*, pp. 21-25.
 - 20 YOUNG, David C, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletic*, Chicago 1985.
 - 21 DREES, *Olympia*, p. 35.
 - 22 Although the existence of Cleisthenes is secure historically, and dated to circa 600-570 BC, the story of the wooing of his daughter, Agariste, is probably historical in only the most general sense. By marrying a member of the Athenian Alkmaeonid clan, HERODOTUS could historically connect the founder of Athenian democracy, Cleisthenes of Athens, with the later leader of Athens in the golden age of Pericles. The details of the Trial of the Suitors is however most likely fictitious (See HOW, Walter W./WELLS, Joseph, *A Commentary on Herodotus*, 2 vols, Oxford 1990, vol. 1, p. 117) and drawn from an existing genre of story-telling. GROTE, for example, (GROTE, George, *A History of Greece*, 12 vols., London 1869, vol. 3, 38 n.) suggests that the tale is an imitation of the epic wooing of Helen and Stein (STEIN, H., *Summary of the dialect of Herodotus*, Boston 1882, p. 130, 1 n) argues that it may also come from one of PINDAR'S Odes.
 - 23 HERODOTUS, VI, 126. All references to HERODOTUS are taken from *The histories*, trans. Aubrey de Séincourt, London 1996.
 - 24 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 116.
 - 25 Quoted in SWADDLING Judith, *The Ancient Olympic Games*, Austin 1999, pp. 40-41.
 - 26 Women did, of course, did hold a festival of their own at Olympia, the Heraia, games held in honor of Hera.
 - 27 PAUSANIAS, V 6, 6-7.
 - 28 CROWTHER, Nigel B., "Athletes and state: Qualifying for the Olympic Games in ancient Greece", in: *Journal of Sport History* 23(1996)1, pp. 34-43.
 - 29 DREES, *Olympia*, p. 43.
 - 30 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 117.
 - 31 FUCILLA, Melodramas, pp. 123-124.
 - 32 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 116.
 - 33 FUCILLA, Melodramas, pp. 117, 127.
 - 34 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 124.
 - 35 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 115.
 - 36 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 149.
 - 37 DREES, *Olympia*, p. 117. DREES also notes that "Originally this ramp, which was faced with marble in Roman times, had been decorated with a mosaic representing a boy riding on a triton and surrounded by fishes and seabirds" (p. 117). For a good visual picture of the Temple of Zeus, see SWADDLING, *Games*, p. 17.
 - 38 It is worth noting that by Roman times the festival had grown so much that the sacred grove was littered with as many as 70 altars. See ZIEHEN, Ludwig, "Olympia: Olympische Spiele." *RE*, vol. 28, 1939, col. 49.
 - 39 For a full discussion of the origin, significance, and use of the olive tree at Olympia see DREES, *Olympia*, pp. 34-36.
 - 40 Neville, "Metastasio", p. 353.
 - 41 See METASTASIO'S *argomento* in FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 114.
 - 42 HORNBLOWER, Simon/SPAWFORTH, Antony, *The Oxford classical dictionary*, Oxford 31996), s.u. Pausanias (3), p. 1129.
 - 43 PAUSANIAS, V, 15, 3.
 - 44 PAUSANIAS, V, 9, 4-6.
 - 45 PAUSANIAS, VI, 20, 9.
 - 46 PAUSANIAS, VI, 23, 1-2.
 - 47 PAUSANIAS, V, 9, 6: VI, 23, 2.
 - 48 PAUSANIAS, V, 21, 1-18.
 - 49 PAUSANIAS, V, 10, 6-7.
 - 50 At no time does PAUSANIAS offer a full description of either the regimen to which Olympic athletes were submitted under the watchful eyes of the judges, nor does he ever offer a precise daily calendar for the five-day Olympic festival.
 - 51 Although PAUSANIAS identifies buildings, statues, and sites, he does not give a fully detailed geography of the Altis. Likewise, although he describes the Temple of Zeus in considerable detail (V, 10, 2-10; VI, 11, 1-11), nowhere does he actually describe the frontal entrance to the building.
 - 52 ZENO was one of the chief exponents of Arcadian principles and preceded METASTASIO as court poet of Austria. ZENO, in fact, volunteered a recommendation for METASTASIO'S appointment.
 - 53 The opera was staged four more times, twice to music by Alessandro SCARLATTI, in Naples in 1699 and in Florence in 1705.
 - 54 POLAROLO also set DAVID'S *La Forza del Virtù*
 - 55 For a comparison of the cast as well as an analysis of both ZENO'S *Gl'Innamati felici* and METASTASIO'S *L'Olimpiade* see BURT, Nathaniel, "Plus ça change: Or, the progress of reform in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century opera as illustrated in the books of three operas", in: POWERS, Harold (ed.), *Studies in music history: Essays for Oliver Strunk*. Princeton 1968, pp. 325-339.
 - 56 ARIOSTO, Ludovico, *Orlando Furioso*, Pisa 1809.
 - 57 LEE, *Studies*, p. 196.
 - 58 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 121.
 - 59 LEE, *Studies*, p. 196.
 - 60 SEGRAVE, "L'Olimpiade", p.8.
 - 61 SALVADORI, Giuseppe Gaetano, *Poetica Toscana all'uso*, Naples 1691, p. 88. Quoted in FREEMAN, Robert, "Apostolo Zeno's reform of the libretto" in: *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 21(1968)3, p. 323. A copy of SALVADORI'S treatise can be found among the holdings of the *Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III*, Naples.
 - 62 DOWNES, Edward Olin, *The Operas of Johan Christian Bach as a reflection of the dominant trends in opera seria, 1750-1780*, Ph. D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1958, p. 54.
 - 63 HOGARTH, George, *Memoirs of the musical drama*, 2 vols., London 1838, p. 340.
 - 64 METASTASIO'S librettos were sufficiently complete to be performed as spoken dramas, as some were - even in Vienna - at the Kärntnertheater, in German translation, beginning with *Demetrio* in 1748 (as Demetrius, in a translation by Friedrich WEISKERN). See ZECHMEISTER, Gustav, *Die Wiener Theater nächst der Burg und nächst dem Kärntnerthor von 1747 bis 1776*, Vienna 1971, pp. 203, 251, 401.
 - 65 NEVILLE, Don, "Metastasio: Poet and preacher in Venice", in: SOMMER-MATHIS, Andrea/HILSCHER, Elisabeth Theresia (eds.), *Pietro Metastasio - Uomo universale (1698-1782)*, Vienna 2000, p. 47. See also NEVILLE, "Metastasio;" NEVILLE, Don, "Metastasio: Beyond the stage in Vienna", in: *Studies in music*, London 1997, pp. 87-109; NEVILLE; Don, *Mozart's La Clemenza di Tito and the Metastasian opera seria*. Ph. D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1986.
 - 66 NEVILLE, "Metastasio," p. 353.
 - 67 FUCILLA, Melodramas, p. 6.
 - 68 FUCILLA, Melodramas.
 - 69 PETZOLDT McClymonds, Marita/HEARTZ, Daniel, p. 698.
 - 70 HERODOTUS, I, 59-61.
 - 71 The primary aim of the Arcadian group was "to return to the simplicity and good taste of the classics, to cleanse literature of the artifice and excessive ingenuity of Baroque poetry. Both Zeno's and Metastasio's aim was to to retrain the chaotic abundance of the Seicento theater through the application of reason, most especially through the application of Aristotelean rationalism, and to correct the previous era's indifference to matters of good taste and morals by adopting a lofty, high-minded, edifying tone." BRAND, Peter/PERTILE, Lino, *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, Cambridge 1966, pp. 350-364. Also, see BURT, Nathaniel, "Opera in Arcadia", in: *The Musical Quarterly*, 41(1955)2, pp. 145-170; KIMBELL, David, *Italian Opera*, Cambridge 1991, p. 237; HATCH WELKINS, Ernest, *A history of Italian Literature*, Cambridge 1974, p.325-331.

- 72 ELSE, Gerald Frank, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*, Cambridge 1967, 9. 51a36-38, 51b5-6; 14. 53b23-27.
- 73 NEVILLE, "Mozart's 'La clemena di Tito'", pp. 115-116.
- 74 See, for example, TOWNELEY, Simon, "Metastasio as a librettist", in: *Arts and Ideas in Eighteenth Century Italy: Lectures given at the Italian Institute, 1957-58*, Rome 1960, pp. 133-145.
- 75 DOWNES, *Operas*, p. 2.
- 76 SALVADORI in FREEMAN, "Apostolo Zeno's reform", pp. 322-323.
- 77 See DOWNES, *Operas*, pp. 53-54; McClymonds and Hertz, p. 699.
- 78 See NEVILLE, Don, "Metastasio and the image of majesty in the Austro-Italian Baroque", in: WEST, Shearer (ed.), *Italian Culture in Northern Europe in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge 1999, pp. 140-158. I do not wish to suggest here that METASTASIO was guilty of advocating the political principles of a particular regime and that he somehow succumbed to the politics of his court responsibilities. The truth is, as NEVILLE states, that for METASTASIO "the demands of a personal moral commitment appear to have had the upper hand upon his powers as both a dramatic and lyric poet" (NEVILLE, "Metastasio", p. 354).
- 79 McClymonds and Hertz, p. 699.
- 80 DENT, Edward J., "Italian opera in the 18th century and its influence on the music of the classical period", in: *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft 1912-13*, vol. XIV, p. 506.
- 81 Letter to Abbé Saluzzo (about 1760-70). Quoted in DENT, "Opera", p. 506.
- 82 LEE, *Studies*, pp. 204-205.
- 83 FUCILLA, *Melodramas*, p. 132.
- 84 FUCILLA, *Melodramas*, p. 155.
- 85 COUBERTIN, Pierre de, "L'Éducation anglaise", in: *La Réforme Sociale* 13(1887), p. 642.
- 86 Cf. METASTASIO'S letter to HASSE in BURNEY, Charles, *Memoires of the life and writing of the Abate Metastasio*, 3 vols., London 1796, vol. 1, pp. 351-330. METASTASIO, like COUBERTIN, placed a high value on "change of sentiment" in a character. Argene's change to virtue is motivated in large part by the selflessness of Megacles, Lycidas' partly by the honor and dignity of Clistene, partly by the loyalty of Megacles.
- 87 Quoted in MÜLLER, Norbert (ed.), *Pierre de Coubertin, 1863-1937: Olympism: Selected writings*, Lausanne 2000, p. 115.
- 88 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 299.
- 89 For a discussion of COUBERTIN'S *pedagogie sportive*, see MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, pp. 121-133; MACALOON, John J., *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games*, Chicago 1981, pp. 83-112.
- 90 COUBERTIN, Pierre de, *The Olympic Idea: Discourses and Essays*, Stuttgart 1967, p. 8.
- 91 COUBERTIN, Pierre de, *Une campagne de vingt-et-une ans*, Paris 1908, p. 6.
- 92 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 560.
- 93 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 122.
- 94 PLANELLI, Antonio, *Dell'opera in musica*, Naples 1771, p. 72ff.
- 95 I do not mean to suggest that COUBERTIN was a complete historical evolutionist. Clearly he recognized the contingent and unpredictable effect of what he called "clashes, disturbances, and destruction" in human history. But he nonetheless subscribed to the possibility of "the historical and geographical unification of our knowledge," that we can uncover "the annals of humanity as a whole" (MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, pp. 232-233).
- 96 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, pp. 227-233.
- 97 FRUGONI, Francesco Fulvio, *L'epulone, opera melodrammatica esposta*, Venice 1675, p. 162. Cited in FREEMAN, "Apostolo Zeno's reform", p. 321.
- 98 COUBERTIN, *Idea*, p. 39.
- 99 Cf. BECKER, Carl L., *The heavenly city of the 18th century philosophers*, New Haven 1932, especially pp. 31, 49, 128-129, et passim.
- 100 COUBERTIN, *Idea*, p. 40.
- 101 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 584.
- 102 NEVILLE, "Metastasio", p. 353.
- 103 NEVILLE, "Metastasio", p. 353.
- 104 NEVILLE, "Metastasio", p. 353.
- 105 NEVILLE, "Metastasio", p. 353.
- 106 NEVILLE, "Metastasio", p. 354.
- 107 NEVILLE, "Metastasio", p. 434.
- 108 COUBERTIN, *Idea*, p. 11.
- 109 COUBERTIN, *Idea*, p. 11.
- 110 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 190.
- 111 DESCARTES, Rene, *The passions of the soul*, Part III, 211. In *The philosophical writings of Descartes*, Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 2 vols., Cambridge 1985.
- 112 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 190.
- 113 COUBERTIN, Pierre de, *Memoires Olympiques*, Lausanne 1931, pp. 22-23.
- 114 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 190.
- 115 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 190.
- 116 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 592.
- 117 COUBERTIN, *Idea*, p. 133.
- 118 COUBERTIN, *Idea*, p. 135.
- 119 DESCARTES, II, 144.
- 120 COUBERTIN, *Idea*, p. 134.
- 121 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 129.
- 122 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 187.
- 123 I have borrowed this phrase from FOUCAULT, Michel, *The history of sexuality*, New York 1980, p. 149.
- 124 Including Giovanni Mario CRESCIMBENI, Lodovico MURATORI, Gian Vincenzo GRAVINA, as well as Apostolo ZENO and of course Pietro METASTASIO. In their quest to reform poetry and poetic drama, the Arcadians in particular turned to ARISTOTLE, HORACE, and LONGIUS for direction and to PETRARCH for their lyrical models. See NEVILLE, *Pietro Metastasio - Uomo universale*, p. 48.
- 125 Among the renowned group who brought pulpit oratory to its perfection were BOSSUET, MASCARON, BOURDALOUE, FLÉCHIER, FÉNELON, and MASSILLON. See DARGAN, Edwin Charles, *A history of preaching*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids, MI 1954, p. 87. See also O'MALLEY, John, *The first Jesuits*, Cambridge 1993.
- 126 HOWELL, Wilbur Samuel (trans.), *Fénelon's dialogues on eloquence*, Princeton 1951, p. 141.
- 127 HOWELL, *dialogues*, p. 81.
- 128 NADAL, Jerónimo, *Scholia in constitutiones*, Manuel Ruiz Jurado, ed., Granada 1976, pp. 386-387.
- 129 GISBERT, Blaise, *Christian eloquence in theory and practice*, (trans. Samuel D'Oyley), London 1718, p. 231.
- 130 HOWELL, *dialogues*, p. 92..
- 131 GISBERT, *eloquence*, p. 183.
- 132 GISBERT, *eloquence*, p. 183.
- 133 NEVILLE, *Pietro Metastasio - Homo universale*, p. 55.
- 134 Institut supérieur de théologie, Enghien, Belgium, *Les établissements des Jésuites en France*. 5 vols., Wetteren 1955, vol. 3, p. 1403. Also, quoted in MACALOON, *Symbol*, p. 33.
- 135 LOCKE, Robert R., *French Legitimists and the politics of moral order in the early Third republic*, Princeton 1974, p. 71.
- 136 MACALOON, *Symbol*, p. 34.
- 137 PROST, Antoine, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France, 1870-1967*, Paris 1968, pp. 52-53.
- 138 PROST, *Histoire*, p. 53.
- 139 COUBERTIN, *campagne*, p. 13.
- 140 MÜLLER, *Coubertin*, p. 566.
- 141 DURKHEIM, Émile, *The evolution of educational thought* (trans. Peter Collins), Boston 1977, p. 263.
- 142 LOCKE, *Legitimists*, p. 141.