

A young composer, Beethoven, used a speech from Pietro Metastasio's Trojan War tragedy, Achilles in Sciro, in writing his concert aria in Ah! perfido.

Knowing that the Trojan War cannot end without Achilles' death, his supernatural mother arranged for Achilles to be disguised as a daughter of the Greek king Lycomedes of Skyros. He naively falls in love with one of the king's actual daughters, Deidamia, and one thing leading to another: they conceive a child.

Ulysses eventually tracks Achilles down, and calling upon his sense of destiny, manliness and pride, persuades him to leave Skyros. In Metastasio's play, Deidamia speaks the Recitativo section. The authorship of the Aria text used by Beethoven remains a mystery.

One doesn't need to know the plot of the Metastasio play to understand the pain of Deidamia abandoned and seething but also mixed in her emotions.

Recitativo:

Ah, perfido! ah, spergiuoro!
Barbaro! traditor! Parti? E son questi
Gli ultimi tuoi congedi? Ove s'intese
Tirannia più crudel? Va, scellerato!
Va pur, fuggi da me: l'ira de' numi
Non fuggirai. Se v'è giustizia in cielo,
Se v'è pietà, congiureranno a gara
Tutti, tutti a punirti. Ombra seguace,
Presente ovunque sei,
Vedrò le mie vendette. Io già le godo
Immaginando; i fulmini ti veggo
Già balenar d'intorno...! Ah! no, fermate,
Vindici dèi. Di tanto error se alcuno
Forza è che paghi il fio,
Risparmiate quel cor; ferite il mio.
S'egli ha un'alma sì fiera,
S'ei non è più qual era, io son qual fui:
Per lui vivea; voglio morir per lui.

Aria:

Per pietà, non dirmi addio! Di te priva che farò?
Tu lo sai, bell'idol mio! Io d'affanno morirò. Ah
crudel! Tu vuoi ch'io mora! Tu non hai pietà di
me? Perchè rendi a chi t'adora Così barbara
mercè? Dite voi se in tanto affanno Non son
degn di pietà?

Ah! You treacherous, faithless, barbaric traitor,
you leave?
And is this your last farewell? Where did one
hear of a crueller tyranny?
Go, despicable man! Go, flee from me! You
won't flee from the wrath of the gods.
If there is justice in heaven, if there is pity, all
will join forces in a contest to punish you.
I follow your trail! I am wherever you go, I will
live to see my revenge, I already take my
delight in it in my imagination. I already see
you surrounded by flashes of lightning.
Alas! Pause, avenging gods! Spare that heart,
wound mine! If he is not what he was, I am still
what I was.
For him I lived, for him I want to die!

Have mercy, don't bid me farewell, what shall I
do without you? You know it, my beloved idol!
I will die of grief. Ah, cruel man! You want me
to die! Don't you have pity on me? Why do you
reward the one who adores you in such a
barbaric way? Tell me, if in such a grief I do not
deserve pity?

Trans. Bertram Kottmann