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THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF "DERANGING": SUBVERTING CAESAR IN SPANISH NAPLES, *CESARE IN ALESSANDRIA* (1699)

Abstract. This essay analyzes the previously unrecognized relationship between *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), by Francesco Maria Paglia and Giuseppe Aldrovandini, and *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, by Francesco Antonio Bussani and Antonio Sartorio (Venetia, 1677). I argue that Paglia and Aldrovandini developed intertextual resonances with the Venetian source that allowed them to "derange" Caesar by consistently reversing his portrayal in parallel scenes. In 1699, Naples was alight with discontent against Spanish occupation, and critiques of imperial Spain were often disguised as critiques of imperial Rome. The opera's "deranging" of Caesar thus connects to a network of critiques against Spanish rule that were circulating at the time, confirmed by the libretto's reference to the polemic text "Dell'imperio romano." Situated in the liminal space between adaptation, arrangement, and the creation of a new work, *Cesare in Alessandria* offers a window into the political implications of "deranging."

Keywords: seventeenth-century Naples; Spanish imperial rule; *dramma per musica*; adaptation; political role of baroque opera; libretto analysis; Francesco Maria Paglia

POLITYCZNE IMPLIKACJE „ZNIEKSZTAŁCANIA": PODWAŻANIE POSTACI CEZARA W HISZPAŃSKIM NEAPOLU, *CESARE IN ALESSANDRIA* (1699)

Abstrakt. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje dotychczas nierozpoznany związek pomiędzy *Cesare in Alessandria* (Neapol, 1699) Francesca Marii Paglii i Giuseppego Aldrovandiniego a *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* Francesca Antoniego Bussaniego i Antoniego Sartoria (Wenecja, 1677). Dowiedziono, że Paglia i Aldrovandini stworzyli intertekstualne odniesienia do weneckiego pierwowzoru, które pozwoliły im na „zniekształcenie" postaci Cezara poprzez konsekwentne odwracanie jego przedstawienia w odpo-

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wiadających sobie scenach. W 1699 roku w Neapolu narastało niezadowolenie z powodu okupacji hiszpańskiej, a krytyka imperium hiszpańskiego była często maskowana jako krytyka imperium rzymskiego. „Zniekształcenie" postaci Cezara w tej operze wpisuje się zatem w sieć krytycznych odniesień wobec panowania hiszpańskiego, co potwierdza odniesienie libretta do polemicznego tekstu *Dell'imperio romano*. Sytuując się na pograniczu adaptacji, aranżacji i tworzenia nowego dzieła, *Cesare in Alessandria* stanowi wgląd w polityczne implikacje procesu „zniekształcania".

Słowa kluczowe: XVII-wieczny Neapol; panowanie hiszpańskie; *dramma per musica*; adaptacja; polityczna rola opery barokowej; analiza libretta; Francesco Maria Paglia

This essay analyzes the so far unnoticed relationship between *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), by librettist Francesco Maria Paglia and composer Giuseppe Aldrovandini, and *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, by librettist Giacomo Francesco Bussani and composer Antonio Sartorio (Venetia, 1677).[1] During his time in Naples (1696–1702), Paglia developed an expertise in writing entirely new libretti modeled on Venetian sources from the 1670s and 1680s, including another libretto by Bussani, *Antonino e Pompeiano* (Venetia, 1677), performed in Naples as *Comodo Antonino* (1696).[2]

Despite important differences in plot and casting, the two operas tell the story of Caesar, who has followed his enemy Pompey to the Egyptian city of Alexandria. There, Caesar is greeted by Achilla, who offers him Pompey's severed head on behalf of the Egyptian ruler Tolomeo, himself in a fight with his sister Cleopatra over the succession of the Egyptian throne. Neither Bussani nor Paglia cite their historical sources, however this episode was well known through Plutarch and Lucano's accounts, among others.[3] Though *Cesare in Alessandria* was considered a new work

[1] CESARE / IN / ALESSANDRIA / *DRAMA PER MUSICA* / DI FRANCESCO MARIA PAGLIA / DEDICATO / *All'Illutriss. & Eccellentiss. Signora* / LA SIGNORA / D. MARIA / DE GIRON, Y SANDOVAL / Duchessa di Medina-Celi, e / Viceregina di Napoli. / IN NAPOLI 1699. / Per Dom. Ant. Parrino, e Michele Luigi Mutio. / *Con Licenza de' Superiori*. / Si vende nella Stampa del Mutio, sita / allo Spedaletto.

GIULIO CESARE / IN EGITTO / *DRAMA PER MUSICA* / Nel Famoso Teatro Vendramino / di S. Salvatore. / *L'ANNO M.DC.LXXVII.* / DEL BUSSANI / CONSACRATO / *A MADAMOISELLE* / *Madamoiselle* / GRAZIA HIGGONS / *Figlia dell'Illustrissimo, & Eccel- / lentissimo Cavalier.* / TOMASO HIGGONS / Inviato Estraordinario del Rè della / Gran Bretagna, appresso la Sere- / niss. Republica di Venetia. / IN VENETIA, M.DC.LXXVII. / Per Francesco Nicolini. / *Con Licenza de' Superiori, e Privilegio*.

[2] On Paglia's libretti for Naples, see Zoey M. Cochran, "Everyday Resistance against Contested Foreign Rule: Operatic Adaptation in Viceregal Naples (1696–1702)" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2025).

[3] In his analysis of *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, Craig Monson lists a number of potential historical sources for Bussani's libretto: Dio's *Roman History*, Plutarch's *Lives* of Caesar and Pompey, Suetonius's *Julius Caesar*, Lucan's *Civil Wars*, Appianus's *Civil Wars* II, and *De bello Alexandrino*; Monson, "'Giulio Cesare in Egitto': From Sartorio (1677) to Handel (1724)," *Music and Letters* 66, no. 4 (1985): 313, https://www.jstor.org/stable/855135.

rather than an adaptation, I argue that Paglia establishes a relationship with the Venetian *Giulio Cesare* that allowed for a "deranging" of the figure of Caesar, which would have carried subversive political implications in the Neapolitan context. As historians Harold Stone and Aurelio Musi have shown, in late seventeenth-century Naples, critiques of imperial Spanish rule were often disguised as critiques of imperial Rome.[4] Furthermore, in 1699, discontent with the Spanish rule of Naples was at its peak, leading to increasing political unrest.[5]

In this article, I first demonstrate how Paglia—and, to a lesser extent, Aldrovandini—created a relationship between *Cesare in Alessandria* and *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, consistently reversing the portrayal of Caesar in parallel scenes. I then connect the opera's "deranging" of Caesar to contemporary critiques of imperial Spain that were widely circulated at the time. This case study highlights a practice that lies between adaptation, arrangement, and the creation of an entirely new work, while bringing to light a so far unnoticed connection between the two operas.[6]

1. ESTABLISHING A CONNECTION BETWEEN *CESARE IN ALESSANDRIA* AND *GIULIO CESARE IN EGITTO*

Despite the different plots of *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699) and *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), both operas share four characters—Cesare, Cleopatra, Tolomeo, and Achilla—as well as the relationships among them (shown in Figure 1). They also share dramatic content in ten scenes, summarized in Table 1, establishing a close relationship between the two operas.

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[4] Harold Stone, *Vico's Cultural History: The Production and Transmission of Ideas in Naples 1685-1750* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 98; Aurelio Musi, *L'Italia dei Viceré: Integrazione e resistenza nel sistema imperiale spagnolo* (Roma: Avagliano, 2000), 134–35; and *Mito e realtà della nazione napoletana* (Napoli: Guida, 2016), 53.

[5] On the strong discontent towards Spanish rule in late seventeenth-century Naples, see Giuseppe Galasso, *Il Regno di Napoli: Il Mezzogiorno spagnolo e austriaco (1622-1734)* (Torino: UTET, 2006), 745–86; and *Napoli spagnola dopo Masaniello: politica, cultura, società* (Firenze: Sansoni Editore, 1982), 475–608; Francesca Fausta Gallo, *La congiura di Macchia: Cultura e conflitto politico a Napoli nel primo Settecento* (Roma: Viella, 2018), 7–80; and Maria Anna Noto, "Il giglio borbonico e l'aquila imperiale. Scontro politico, congiura e progetti autonomistici nel regno di Napoli agli albori del Settecento," *Nuova Rivista Storica* 12, no. 1 (2018): 97–132.

[6] For a discussion and typology of seventeenth-century operatic adaptation practices, including "new works with a strong intertextual relationship with existing libretti," see Cochran, "Everyday Resistance," 115–51.

Figure 1. Characters and love interests of Giulio Cesare in Egitto (Venetia, 1677) and Cesare in Alessandria (Napoli, 1699). Arrows indicate love interests, double-headed arrows indicate reciprocal love interests, and single-headed ones indicate non-reciprocal love interests

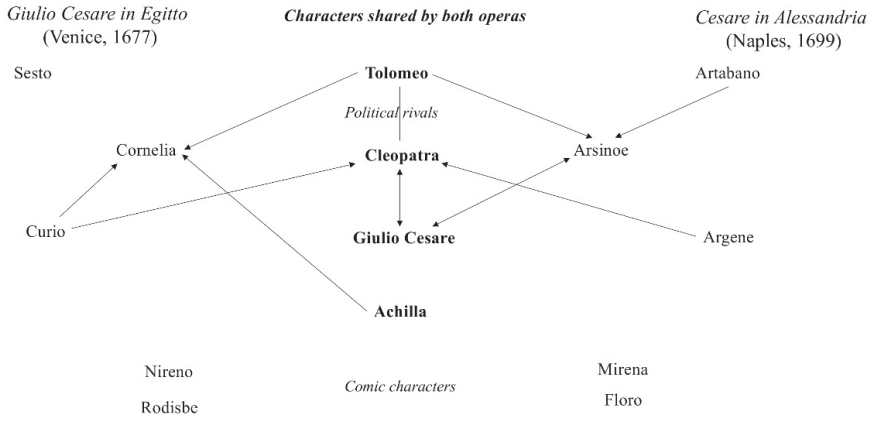

Table 1. Shared dramatic content between Giulio Cesare in Egitto (Venetia, 1677) and Cesare in Alessandria (Napoli, 1699)

	Shared dramatic content	**Venetia, 1677**	**Napoli, 1699**
1	Opening of the opera: Ceasar, with his army, reflects on his conflict with Pompey, he is prepared to fight	I.1	I.1
2	Achilla arrives, offering Caesar Pompey's severed head on behalf of Tolomeo	I.3	I.2
3	Cleopatra and Tolomeo are enemies	I.8	I.3
4	Ceasar comes to the Egyptian court, he is angry because of Pompeo's execution	I.9	I.7
5	Cleopatra asks for Caesar's help, they fall for each other	I.12	I.8–9
6	Sleep scene involving Caesar and Cleopatra	II.16–17	II.3–4
7	A love scene is interrupted by news of an insurgence, Cleopatra (in Venice) / Ceasar (in Naples) leave to put a stop to it, but fail	II.18, II.20	II.6–7
8	Tolomeo and Cleopatra are in battle	III.1	II.8
9	Public encounter between Tolomeo and Caesar, accompanied by trumpets	I.17	III.10
10	Final scene: Cleopatra is crowned, order is restored	III.17	III.14

Though some of these scenes—such as a sleep scene, battles over a succession, or a final coronation—are conventional scenes that can be found in many operas of the period, the attribution of these scenes to the same characters in the two operas, as well as the striking parallels between the content of the operas' opening scenes

and other details within the parallel scenes set up a connection between the works, tying into Paglia's habitual practice of writing entirely new scenes modeled on Venetian source libretti.

Indeed, the two operas open with Caesar reflecting upon the conflict with Pompey that led him to Egypt, followed by the arrival of Achilla, who offers Caesar Pompey's severed head on behalf of Tolomeo. This episode, depicted in the 1677 Venetian libretto of *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (and in its 1689 Bergamo revival), was likely the most striking scene of the opera.[7] The two works then present a version of Cleopatra and Tolomeo's fight over the Egyptian throne, followed by a first meeting between Caesar and Cleopatra, where she asks Caesar to protect her from Tolomeo. In act 2, the libretti both present a sleep scene involving Caesar and Cleopatra, followed shortly by news of an insurgence and unrest amongst the Egyptians, that one of the two protagonists attempts to quell—Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare*, Cesare in *Cesare in Alessandria*—but fails.[8] The two operas also present a public encounter between Tolomeo and Caesar, accompanied by trumpets, and end with a coronation scene in which Egypt defines its relationship to Rome. As I will show, by setting up a relationship with *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* from *Cesare in Alessandria*'s opening scenes, Paglia could use this relationship to create a second layer of meaning in the opera, using Bussani's Giulio Cesare as a heroic foil for his Cesare, subverting Cesare's heroism.[9]

2. DERANGING CAESAR

In the parallel scenes between the two operas involving Caesar directly, Paglia systematically reverses the Roman emperor's portrayal: he alters his characterisation (Caesar is mostly heroic in Venice, vs. lazy and dedicated to love in Naples) and reverses the dynamics of his interactions with Tolomeo and Cleopatra in their shared scenes (actions performed by Cleopatra in Venice are taken on by Caesar in

[7] GIULIO CESARE / IN EGITTO / DRAMA PER MUSICA / *DA RAPPRESENTARSI* / NEL TEATRO DI BERGAMO / Dell'Illustriss. Sig. Conte, e Cau. / GIUSEPPE SECCO SOARDO. / *CONSACRATO* / ALL'ILLUSTRISS. SIGNORI / *LI SIGNORI* / ANTONIO CONTE / BARZIZA, / E MARIETTA TOFETTI, / Patritia Veneta. / IN MILANO, MDCLXXXIX. / Nella Stampa di Francesco Vigone. / *Con licenza de'Superiori*.

[8] In *Cesare in Alessandria*, the news interrupts Cesare's love scene with Arsinoe (which follows his love scene with Cleopatra) rather than with Cleopatra. In act III, *Cesare in Alessandria* has a second sleep scene involving Caesar and Cleopatra, in which she pretends to sleep (act 3, scenes 3 and 4).

[9] Though heroes in seventeenth-century Venetian opera were rarely unequivocally heroic, Craig Monson describes Bussani's Caesar as "heroic, certainly [though he] may from time to time betray moments of human weakness," Monson, "'Giulio Cesare in Egitto'," 322.

Naples, for example). In the opening scene and exchange with Achilla, where Giulio (Venice) was heroic, Cesare (Naples) is lascivious, temperamental, and duplicitous. In the scenes involving Caesar and Cleopatra, whereas Bussani's Cleopatra (Venice) pursues Giulio in order to obtain his help and attempts to discover his feelings for her by pretending to sleep, Paglia's Cesare (Naples) becomes the pursuer: he visits her, and he is the one to fake sleep in order to discover her feelings. Finally, in Caesar's relationship with Tolomeo, Paglia's Cesare, not Tolomeo, is the one who is dedicated to love rather than duty, and he expresses this reversal in their public meeting, common to the two operas.

2.1 The opera's opening scene

In the Venetian *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, Giulio Cesare and Curio are shown crossing a bridge over the Nile, when Giulio states his famous maxim, "Caesar came, and saw, and conquered."[10] He then goes on to describe Pompeo's defeat, and to sing his first aria, "Sù trombe guerriere[11]" (I.1), in dialogue with a trumpet. After his aria, Giulio and his army cross the bridge, accompanied by a sinfonia of trumpets, and cause a solar eclipse, a sign of his greatness.

In *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), on the other hand, Cesare first appears "resting in a pavilion with a large army, asleep."[12] His first line, seemingly uttered in his sleep, "indolent Caesar, you are still sleeping," offers a stark contrast to Caesar's heroic opening line in *Giulio Cesare*.[13] Though the gist of the following recitative and aria remain the same, their images and vocabulary are less vivid than in the Venetian libretto and are at times closer to the style used in love arias. For example, whereas

[10] "Cesare venne, e vide, e vinse," *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), I.1. This refers to his famous maxim "Veni, vidi, vici," quoted in Plutarch and Suetonius.

[11] The Venetian libretto indicates the "sound of trumpets" ("fremito delle trombe") after Caesar's aria, *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), I.1. There are two surviving manuscript aria collections of *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, one Venetian and one Neapolitan. The only complete extant score derives from the 1680 Naples performance, a source that remains close to the Venetian version. My musical analysis is based on this complete Neapolitan score. While its precise circulation history cannot be documented, a score copied for Naples provides a possible point of reference for Aldrovandini; meanwhile, Paglia demonstrably worked from Venetian print libretti when reshaping northern repertory for Neapolitan stages. For a discussion of the differences among the surviving musical sources for *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, see Monson, "'Giulio Cesare in Egitto'," 316. The Venetian aria collection is held at the Biblioteca della Fondazione Querini Stampalia Onlus, Venetia (MS Cl.VIII.4 [1430]@16). The complete 1680 Neapolitan score is preserved at the Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica di San Pietro a Majella, Napoli, Rari 6.4.15.

[12] "Giulio Cesare, che riposa in un padiglione, con esercito numeroso, che dorme," *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.1. All translations by the author.

[13] "Cesare neghittoso; e dormi ancora," *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.1.

the B section of the Venetian Giulio's aria "Sù trombe guerriere" invites "a deluge of armies to flood the battlefields," the B section of the Neapolitan Cesare's aria "Al'armi, a le stragi" states that "wounds are pleasant, discomfort is restful." Finally, in Aldrovandini's score, the trumpet symphony precedes Cesare's aria instead of following it, transferring Caesar's role as the vigorous initiator of the call to battle—in his aria text,[14] Giulio calls for the trumpets to play—to the trumpets themselves. Though preceding a heroic aria with a trumpet symphony would not in itself diminish a character's heroism, in light of the contrast between Giulio and Cesare set up from the first line of the opera, it reinforces Cesare's portrayal as less energetic.

The contrast between Giulio and a less noble Cesare is reinforced by their parallel meetings with Achilla at the beginning of the opera. In *Giulio Cesare* (Venetia, 1677), when Achilla arrives in act 1, scene 3, Giulio has already forgiven Pompey due to Cornelia and Sesto's intervention on his behalf in the previous scene, and is presented as a passive recipient of Tolomeo and Achilla's attempts to honour him.[15] In *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), on the other hand, Cesare expects Tolomeo and Achilla to show him respect and is furious with them for admitting Pompey into Egypt; so much so that he interrupts Achilla's first sentence.[16] Furthermore, though in both versions he is appalled at receiving Pompey's severed head, in *Cesare in Alessandria* he notes that he would have been happy "to find his enemy alive to be able to defeat him [himself]," a stark contrast to his reaction in *Giulio Cesare*.[17] Cesare's ambiguous reaction to Pompey's death in Paglia's libretto is highlighted in the aria that closes the scene, "Spirti fieri" (Napoli, 1699, I.2). In his aria, Cesare mourns Pompey's death because the "cruel warrior spirits of my [Cesare's] soul lost the chance of a good victory," not because of the loss of the "noblest thunderbolt of the Roman Eagle," as stated in *Giulio Cesare*.[18] He then goes on to praise Egypt,

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[14] Giuseppe Aldrovandini, *Opera intitulata / Cesare in Ale[s]sandria*, manuscript from the Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica di San Pietro a Majella, Napoli, Rari 6.6.10, 2r–2v. The libretto also places the reference to a "sinfonia strepitosa con trombe" before Cesare's aria, *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.1.

[15] In *Giulio Cesare*, Achilla's visit was entirely Tolomeo's initiative, as he decided to "send you [Caesar] as a token all that a tributary throne can bestow" ("E in un ti manda in dono / Quanto può dar un tributario trono"), *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), I.3.

[16] Before Achilla arrives, Cesare awaits him, expecting an explanation from Achilla as to how "his king, my tributary and friend, could grant asylum to my enemy" ("Venga Achilla, / E mi renda / Ragion, come il suo Rege / Mio tributario, e amico / Abbia dato l'asilo a un mio nemico"), *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.2.

[17] "Trovar vivo il nemico / Per poterlo espugnar, sarei contento," *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.2.

[18] "Spirti fieri / De l'alma guerrieri / Voi perdeste una bella vittoria," *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.2; "che l'Aquila Romana / Impoverì del fulmine più degno," *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), I.3.

seeing as "a target [his enemy Pompey] ended up dead," showing that he was not wholly displeased by the horrific gift of Pompey's head.[19] Caesar's reactions both to Achilla's arrival—expected instead of surprising—and to Pompey's death—ambiguous and partly pleased instead of horrified and devastated—in *Cesare in Alessandria* offer a striking reversal of Ceasar's portrayal in *Giulio Cesare*, lessening his nobility of character.

2.2 Cesare and Cleopatra

The transformation of Cesare from dominant ruler in the Venetian opera to weak-willed lover in Naples in the parallel scenes in *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699) and *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677) also involves his relationship with Cleopatra. In *Giulio Cesare*, Cleopatra and Caesar first meet in Caesar's camp, where Cleopatra arrives disguised as Lidia and compliments him.[20] In *Cesare in Alessandria*, the situation is reversed: Caesar comes to Cleopatra and begins by complimenting her, stating "To the Lady of the Nile, Caesar, already conquered, gives his heart."[21] Furthermore, though in both versions of their first encounter Caesar and Cleopatra fall for each other, in *Giulio Cesare*, their first encounter ends with an aside in which Caesar expresses his feelings, whereas in *Cesare in Alessandria*, the final aside is Cleopatra's.[22] Finally, whereas in *Giulio Cesare* the scene ends with an aria by Curio, "Io non hò maggior contento" (act 1, scene 12), who has also fallen for Cleopatra (disguised as Lidia), in which he dedicates himself to her beauty, in *Cesare in Alessandria*, this first meeting ends in a duet, in which Cesare confirms that love is more important to him than ruling.[23] He insists that he is guided by "the

[19] "Ma non manca in Egitto / La gloria / Se trafitto / Un bersaglio restò," *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.2.

[20] "Caesar, your sword / Has multiplied the Sun in the East / If, by the light of that blade, / The Eagle of Empires / That dared to approach, scorched its feathers" ("Cesare, la tua spada / Moltiplicato ha in Oriente il sole, / Se di quel brando al lume / L'Aquila degl'Imperi, / Che osò accostarsi, incenerì le piume"), *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), I.12.

[21] "A la donna del Nilo / Cesare già soggetto / Dona il suo cor," *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.8.

[22] In Venice, Giulio concludes with the aside "(And your hair binds hearts)" ("(E la tua chioma, i cori)"), *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), I.12, whereas in Naples, Cleopatra concludes the meeting stating, "(Oh, if he loved me, I would be happy)" ("(Oh se m'amasse, io sarei pur contenta)"), *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.8.

[23] Cleopatra asks Caesar "Would you come?… For the glory of the Empire" ("Verresti?… Per gloria del'Impero"), to which he responds "No no … I would come for you" ("Nò nò …Verrei per te"), *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.9.

God of love" rather than by "the glory of the empire," while Cleopatra suggests that this should not be the case.[24]

Cesare and Cleopatra's next meeting in *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699) also recalls a scene from *Giulio Cesare* (Venetia, 1677), where Cleopatra decides to pretend to sleep to discover if Caesar loves her.[25] In Paglia's *Cesare in Alessandria*, it is Caesar who pretends to sleep to see if she is jealous.[26] In Bussani's *Giulio Cesare*, their love scene is interrupted by a conspiracy against Caesar: Cleopatra, still disguised as Lidia, reveals her true identity and decides to intervene, because her "royal presence will soon shatter the bold audacity of the insurgents," only to return because "not even Cleopatra managed to put a stop to such audacious treachery."[27] In *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), the riots are between supporters of Tolomeo and Cleopatra, and it is Caesar who leaves, because "at [his] sight, the riot will cease, and the cries will fade away," only to return because even "at the sight of Caesar the audacity still does not cease."[28] Though these scenes in themselves do not present Caesar as unheroic, I suggest that by systematically attributing Cleopatra's role to Caesar in scenes mirroring *Giulio Cesare*, Paglia feminizes him, further casting doubt on his heroism.

2.3 Cesare and Tolomeo

In *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), Tolomeo is presented as dedicated to love; he prefers love to leadership throughout the opera. Even before his first appearance, Cleopatra and Rodisbe describe him as "a tender Adonis of lascivious Venuses," an "effeminate lover" who "cultivates love instead of a kingdom."[29] Three of Tolomeo's arias are about his conflict between love and duty, caused by his great penchant for love: "Son rege al trono, e son amante al letto" (act 1, scene 10), "Mi tormentano duo pensieri / L'un di regno, l'altro d'amore" (act 2, scene 12), and

[24] "Following the archer God / is not the heart's wish" ("Seguir il Nume arciero / Genio del cor non è"), *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.9.

[25] "To discover whether his heart is wounded, / I will pretend to sleep" ("Per discoprir se porta il cor piagato / Fingerò di dormir"), *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), II.16.

[26] "Cleopatra is coming here, / I want to fake a love dream / To see if her heart is jealous" ("Cleopatra qui giunge / Voglio un sogno amoroso / Fingere per provar s'hà il cor geloso"), *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), II.3.

[27] "De congiurati'l temerario ardire in breve / Questo aspetto regal farà che cada," *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), II.18; "Ne men Cleopatra / Valse a frenar si perfido ardimento," *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), II.20.

[28] "Vieni, ch'a la tua vista / Cessa il tumulto, e svaniran le grida," *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), II.6; "Di Cesare all'aspetto / L'ardire ancor non cessa," *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), II.7.

[29] "Tenero Adon di Veneri lascive," *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), I.6; "Anzi tu pure effeminato Amante … Di Regno invece, a coltivar amori," *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), I.8.

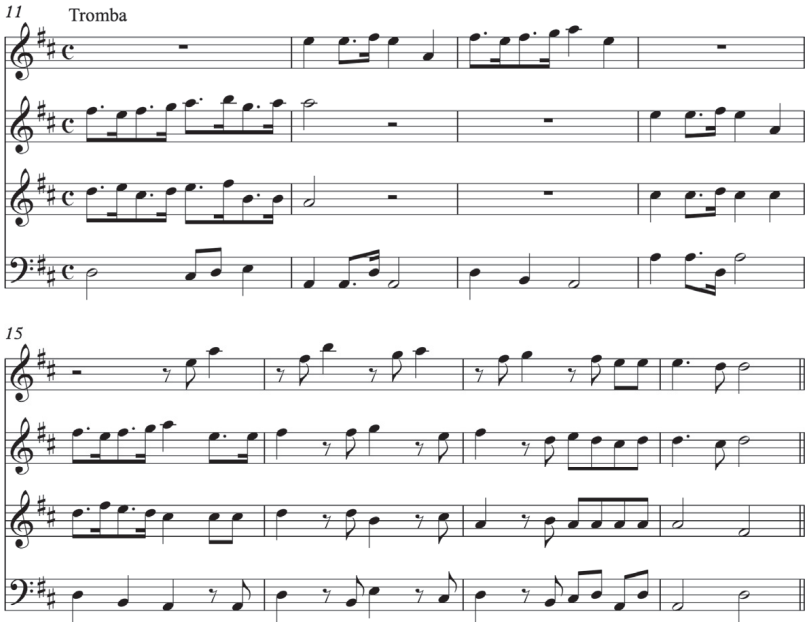
"Mi fan guerra Marte e Amore" (act 2, scene 25). Indeed, in act 3, scene 12, Rodisbe states that love ultimately won, leading Tolomeo "to be abandoned by Mars".[30] In contrast, in *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), the battle between love and duty belongs to Cesare, not Tolomeo. In Naples, Cesare clearly states his dedication to love over leadership in his duet with Cleopatra, "Verresti? Sì. Perché?" which concludes their first meeting (act 1, scene 9).

Cesare reconfirms his dedication to love over duty during his public encounter with Tolomeo, in act 3, scene 10, in a duet that recalls that of act 1, scene 17 from *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677). In Naples, Cesare declares, "Amid your splendour / I consecrate my laurels / To the god of love."[31] Though the content of the two scenes differs, both mark the first public encounter between Caesar and Tolomeo. In both the manuscript of *Giulio Cesare* from the 1680 Neapolitan performance of Bussani and Sartorio's opera and in Aldrovandini's setting of *Cesare in Alessandria*, this parallel scene opens with a duet that uses trumpets, with no singing in parallel intervals. In *Giulio Cesare*, Giulio begins the duet with a heroic ornamented vocal line in a clear D Major, with very little text repetition, shown in example 1. In contrast, his enemy Tolomeo's vocal line modulates constantly, presenting significantly more text repetition than Giulio and visiting the relative minor key for the text "may this land produce laurels and palm branches for the Roman," shown in example 2.[32] The contrast between Tolomeo's use of the minor mode, constant modulation, and excessive text repetition, and Giulio's clear heroic statement, emphasizes the duplicity of the Egyptian Tolomeo, who had conspired to kill Caesar in his previous appearance in the opera (act 1, scene 9).

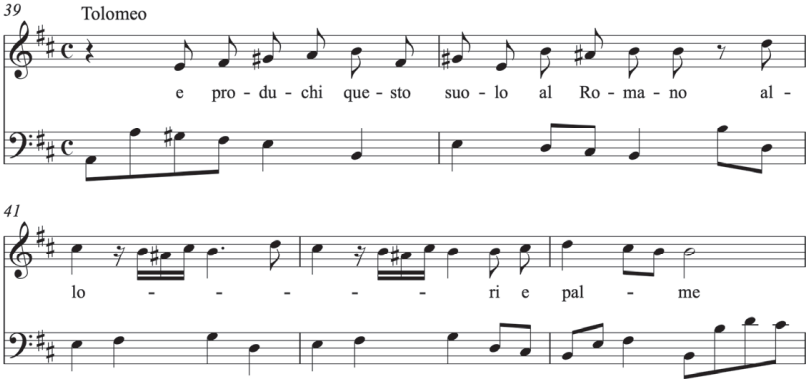
[30] "Mars already abandoned / The victor Tolomeo. The champion of love / Left his weapons of war" ("Vincitor Tolomeo / Marte già abandonò. Campion d'amore / Lasciò l'haste pugnaci"), *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), III.12.

[31] "Tra i vostri splendori / Consacro gl'allori / Al nume d'amor," *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), III.10.

[32] "E produchi questo suolo / Al Romano allori e palme," *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (Venetia, 1677), I.17.

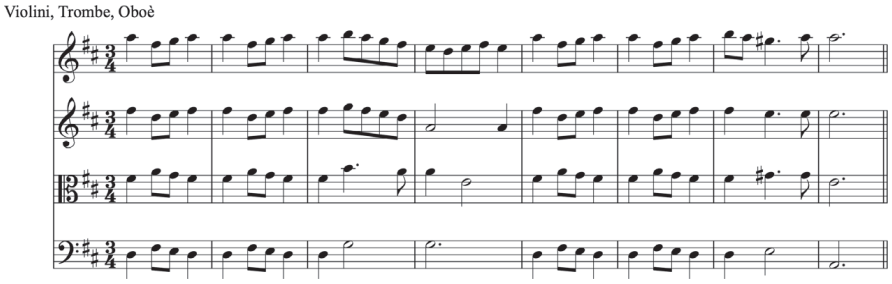


Example 1. Giulio Cesare's heroic entrance in his duet with Tolomeo, act 1, scene 17, Antonio Sartorio, *Il Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, MS, Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica di San Pietro a Majella, Napoli [1680], Rari 6.4.15, 54v–55r, mm. 11–24



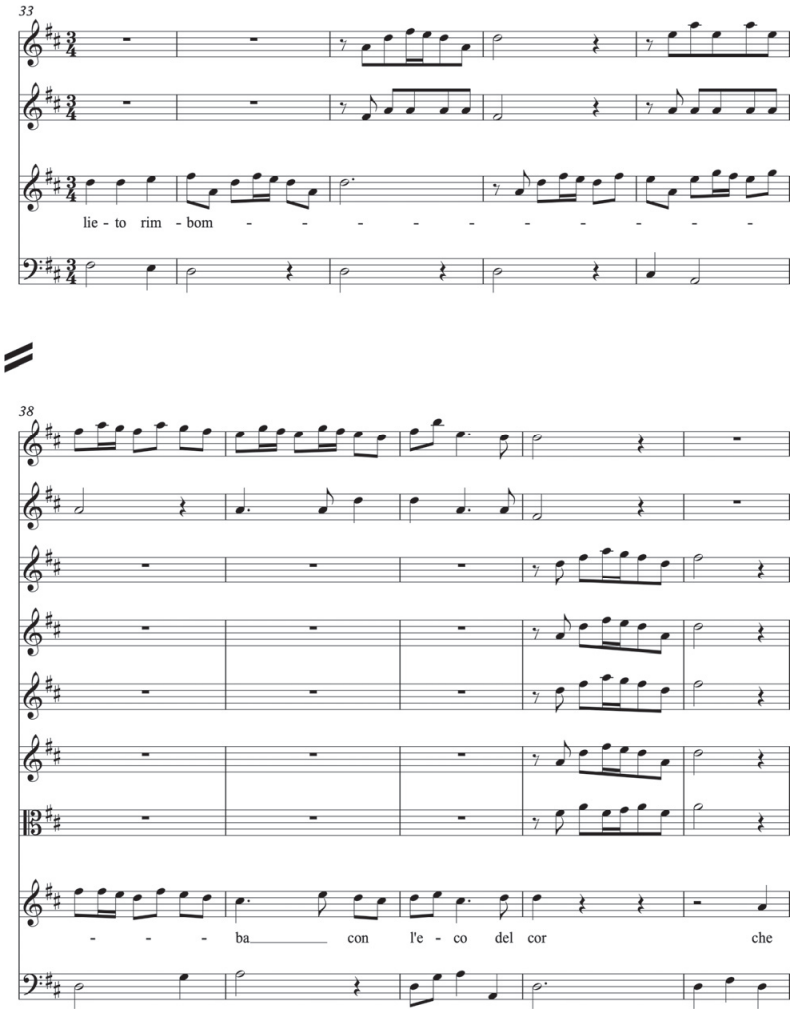
Example 2. Modulation in Tolomeo's duet with Giulio Cesare, act 1, scene 17, Antonio Sartorio, *Il Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, MS, Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica di San Pietro a Majella, Napoli, [1680], Rari 6.4.15, 56r, mm. 39–43

In the Neapolitan opera *Cesare in Alessandria*, the roles are reversed. After a resounding heroic introduction, shown in example 3, it is Tolomeo who opens the duet with a highly ornamented vocal line, accompanied by trumpets, in a heroic D major, shown in example 4. Cesare, on the other hand, sings the B section of their da capo duet in b minor, with very few melismas and no trumpet accompaniment, shown in example 5.[33] The composer Aldrovandini highlights the contrast between Caesar and Tolomeo from the beginning of the B section: Caesar enters alone, with no instrumental accompaniment, directly following the heroic instrumental conclusion to Tolomeo's section (the A section of the da capo aria). Not only does Cesare "consecrate [his] laurels to the god of love" in the Neapolitan *Cesare in Alessandria*, as Tolomeo did in *Giulio Cesare*, but he does so in a duet that musically reverses Bussani and Sartorio's portrayal of Tolomeo and Cesare, casting doubt on Caesar's heroism and highlighting Tolomeo's nobility.

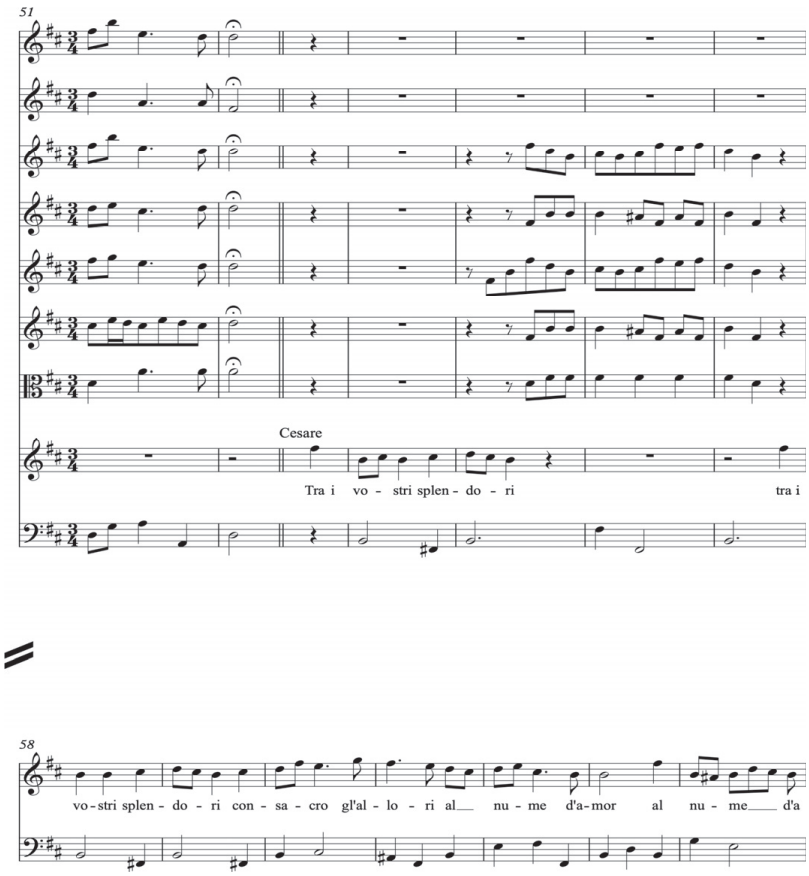


Example 3. First measures of the majestic introduction of Tolomeo and Cesare's duet, act 3, scene 10, Giuseppe Aldrovandini, *Opera Intitulata / Cesare in Ale[s]sandria*, MS, Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica di San Pietro a Majella, Napoli, Rari 6.6.10, 184r, mm. 1–8

[33] He modulates towards the end of the section.



Example 4. Tolomeo's heroic vocal line in his duet with Cesare, act 3, scene 10, Giuseppe Aldrovandini, *Opera Intitulata / Cesare in Ale[s]sandria*, MS, Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica di San Pietro a Majella, Napoli, Rari 6.6.10, 185v–186r, mm. 33–41



Example 5. The beginning of Cesare's B section in his duet with Tolomeo, act 3, scene 10, Giuseppe Aldrovandini, *Opera Intitulata / Cesare in Ale[s]sandria*, MS, Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica di San Pietro a Majella, Napoli, Rari 6.6.10, 186r–186v, mm. 51–64

3. CRITIQUING CAESAR IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTESTED SPANISH IMPERIAL RULE

In 1699, Naples was alight with discontent against Spanish rule.[34] As Aurelio Musi has shown, instead of criticizing Spanish rule directly, publications often dissimulated their complaints in discussions of the history of Naples and its relation to ancient

[34] On the widespread discontent against Spanish rule at the end of the seventeenth century, see Raffaele Colapietra, *Vita pubblica e classi politiche del viceregno napoletano (1656-1734)* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1961), 119, and Francesca Fausta Gallo, "Tra Francesi, Spagnoli e Austriaci. Uso della storia e lotta politica a Napoli (1680-1707)," *MAGALLÁNICA, Revista de Historia Moderna* 3, no. 6 (2017): 116–43.

imperial Rome, blaming the "domination of emperors" for the "loss of the ancient liberty of Naples," previously a "free republic."[35] Harold Stone has also noted that the comparison of imperial Rome and imperial Spain had been a common political strategy since the sixteenth century, and attributes the widespread interest in imperial Rome during the late seventeenth century to Naples's political circumstances, in the context of the erosion of the Spanish empire and the tensions surrounding the Spanish succession.[36] In this context, an operatic subversion of Caesar, the founder of the Roman empire, would have tied into the web of critiques of imperial Rome/Spain that were circulating at the time.

In his extensive study of the operas created in Naples at the turn of the eighteenth century, José María Domínguez Rodríguez connects the libretti of Paglia's contemporary Silvio Stampiglia to a lesson entitled "Dell'imperio romano" ("On the Roman Empire") contained in the manuscript recording the lectures presented during the meetings of the *Accademia palatina* (1698–1701).[37] These lessons, contributed by individual members of the Academy—reuniting Neapolitan men of law, scientists, artists, intellectuals, and a few members of the nobility—presented different perspectives on ancient Roman history and on the opposition between republican and imperial models. Of all the lessons presented in Medinaceli's Academy, "Dell'imperio romano" has been singled out by cultural historian Thomas Dandelet as polemically anti-imperial, presenting a "harsh judgment … on the empire generally and its founder specifically."[38]

In the text, the anonymous author—identified by Michele Rak as Nicola Sersale—blames Caesar and Pompey for having "stolen the precious freedom of their homeland [*patria*]" by establishing imperial rule, and systematically refers to Caesar as a tyrant responsible for Rome's loss of freedom.[39] Near the beginning of the lesson, the author compares Romulus's reaction to his assassination of Remus to Caesar's

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[35] Musi, *L'Italia dei Viceré*, 134–35.

[36] Stone, *Vico's Cultural History*, 98.

[37] José María Domínguez Rodríguez, *Roma, Nápoles, Madrid*. *Mecenazgo musical del duque de Medinaceli, 1687-1710* (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 2013), 175–76. The lessons from Medinaceli's *Accademia*, originally preserved in manuscript form, have been published in Michele Rak, ed., *Lezioni dell'Accademia di Palazzo del duca di Medinaceli (Napoli 1698–1701)*, vol. 1 (Napoli: Istituto italiano per gli studi filosofici, 2000).

[38] Thomas Dandelet, "Imperial Anxiety, the Roman Mirror, and the Neapolitan Academy of the Duke of Medinaceli, 1696–1701," in *Representing Imperial Rivalry in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, ed. Barbara Fuchs and Emily Weissbund (Toronto, University of Toronto Press; Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for 17- and -Century Studies and the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 2015), 150–54.

[39] "e che infine non fecero Cesare e Pompeo, sino a togliere et empiamente rubbare alla patria la cara libertate," in Rak, *Lezioni dell'Accademia di Palazzo*, 309. The manuscript of the *Lezioni*, consulted by Dandelet, only states "Del signor N. N." as author. In his edition of the manuscript, Rak has attributed "Dell'imperio romano" to Nicola Sersale, *Lezioni dell'Accademia*, 1:598.

reaction to the gift of Pompey's head.[40] He writes, "I believe his tears would have been similar to those shed by Caesar at the sight of the honored head of the great Pompey,"[41] going on to quote the following poem by Petrarch:

Cesare poi che'l traditor d'Egitto	Caesar, seeing as the Egyptian traitor
gli fece il don de l'honorata testa,	offered him the honored head,
celando l'allegrezza manifesta,	hiding his apparent joy,
pianse per gli occhi fuor, sì come è scritto.	cried out from his eyes, since so it is written.[42]

In Paglia's libretto, Caesar cries at the sight of Pompey's head ("piange"), and then goes on to praise Egypt in his aria—"but glory is not lacking in Egypt"—"hiding his apparent joy." This aria establishes a connection, from the beginning of the opera, between *Cesare in Alessandria* and a polemic text that was circulated in Naples in the year preceding the opera's composition, that has been shown to have influenced other opera libretti of the period, while setting up a contrast with Caesar's opposite reaction in the Venetian source.[43] Aldrovandini's musical setting, shown in example 6, highlights Caesar's inappropriate reaction to Pompey's severed head: in C major, allegro, with heroic melismas, its affect does not correspond to his tears.

By setting up a relationship between their new opera *Cesare in Alessandria* and both *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* and Sersale's polemic "Dell'imperio romano," Paglia and Aldrovandini could subtly subvert the figure of Caesar, integrating the opera into a network of critiques against imperial rule that were circulating in Naples at a time when a group of Neapolitans had actively began to plot a conspiracy against their Spanish viceroy.[44] References to the Venetian source became a way to "derange" the portrayal of Caesar, while simultaneously keeping their subversion hidden, since it

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[40] This discussion appears on page 288v of the manuscript; the lesson starts on page 287.

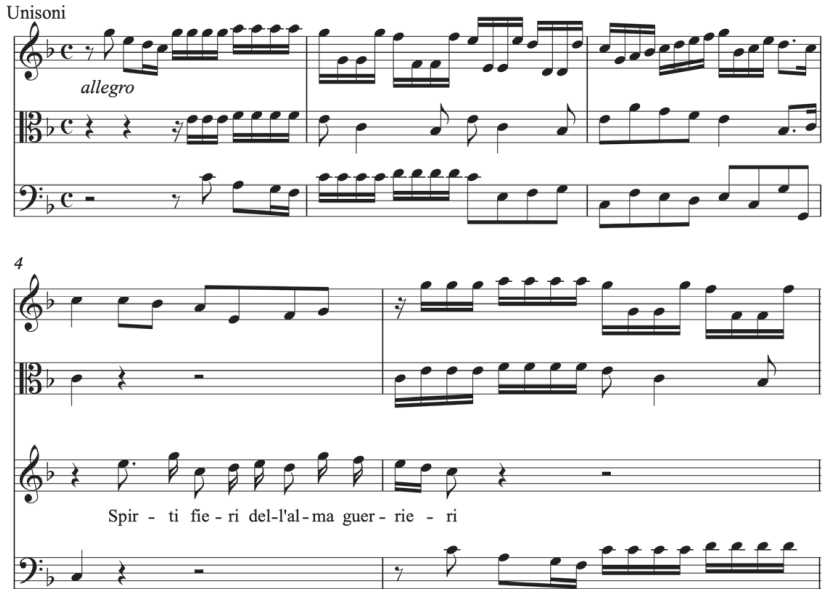
[41] "Io per me sarei per credere fussero le sue lacrime simili a quelle che Cesare alla vista dell'honorato teschio del gran Pompeo versò dagli occhi," in Rak, *Lezioni dell'Accademia di Palazzo*, 282.

[42] The poem can be found in Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Giancarlo Contini (Torino: Einaudi, 1964), 130, online edition (accessed 13 December 2024), https://skypescuola.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/petrarca-canzoniere.pdf.

[43] "Ma non manca in Egitto / La gloria," *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.2. Not only do the stage directions indicate that Cesare cries ("piange"), but he also says it himself in the line preceding his aria: "Caesar weeps, and Tolomeo should not laugh" ("Cesare piange, e Tolomeo non rida"), *Cesare in Alessandria* (Napoli, 1699), I.2.

[44] On the development of a conspiracy against Spanish rule in favour of the independence of Naples in 1699, see Galasso, *Napoli Spagnola*, 528, Gallo, *La congiura di Macchia*, 7 and Giuseppe Galasso, *Alla periferia dell'impero. Il Regno di Napoli nel periodo spagnolo (secoli XVI-XVII)* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1994), 295. For the multiple connections between the operas performed in Naples at the turn of the eighteenth century and a network of resistance against Spanish imperial rule, see Cochran, "Everyday Resistance."

Example 6. Beginning of Cesare's aria "Spirti fieri" (act 1, scene 2) in response to the gift of Pompey's severed head, Giuseppe Aldrovandini, *Opera Intitulata / Cesare in Ale[s]sandria*, MS, Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica di San Pietro a Majella, Napoli, Rari 6.6.10, 8r [12r], mm. 1–5



could only become apparent through a comparison with the source. In the context of contested foreign rule, the practice of arranging/deranging could thus become a strategy of resistance.

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