

# ‘AM I IN ROME, OR IN AULIS?’: JOMMELLI’S CAJO MARIO (1746) AS OPERATIC *CAPRICCIO*

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## ABSTRACT

*In contrast to what its title suggests, Niccolò Jommelli’s* *Cajo Mario* (Rome, 1746) *has little to do with the consul Caius Marius (157–86 BC). Instead, the opera transposes the myth of Iphigenia in Aulis to the Roman Republic, having Marius, his daughter, her lover and her villainous suitor assume the roles of Agamemnon, Iphigenia, Achilles and Ajax respectively. Thus configured, Jommelli’s opera held the stage until 1772, enjoying fifteen revivals with most of the original music intact – a record in the composer’s oeuvre. This essay seeks to clarify the reasons for that remarkable success. By juxtaposing Jommelli’s score and Gaetano Roccaforte’s libretto with a set of six paintings by the contemporary artist Antonio Joli (c1700–1777), it aims to show how* *Cajo Mario* *shares compositional strategies with a connoisseur’s genre in the fine arts: the* *capriccio*. *In keeping with Joli’s capricci, which all deploy the same structural motif, Cajó Mario incorporates a narrative structure through which the ‘parallel universe’ of related works imposes itself on the opera’s setting and action, making spectators wonder – as a character does in the course of the opera – whether they are gazing at an event from republican Rome or reliving a legend from ancient Greece.*

The ‘choice of a subject’, Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782) once confided to Count Luigi Pio di Savoia, was the ‘most tormented phase of [his] poetic efforts’.<sup>1</sup> The doyen of opera seria seems to have racked his brains repeatedly over the subject of his librettos. Throughout his career, Metastasio maintained a list of annotated topics for future use and expressed anguish over his choices in several of his letters.<sup>2</sup> On 4 July 1733, for instance, he implored the soprano Marianna Benti Bulgarelli: ‘Do you want to suggest to me a subject for the opera I have to commence, yes or no? I find myself in an abyss of doubt. Oh, don’t laugh by saying the disease is in the bones, for the choice of a subject all too well merits such agitation and uncertainty.’ (‘Mi volete suggerire un soggetto per l’opera che ho da incominciare? sì, o no? Io sono in un abisso di dubbi. Oh non ridete con dire che la malattia è nelle ossa, perché la scelta di un soggetto merita bene questa agitazione e questa incertezza.’)<sup>3</sup> Two years later the irresolute poet informed his brother Leopoldo that he laboured ‘like a galley slave’ and was thus in a bad mood: ‘I have a burst of bile and do not feel like writing. Do you want to help me find a subject for another opera, yes or no? I have to start with it immediately after terminating the one I am writing at present.’ As the work at hand would celebrate the name day of Emperor

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1 Bruno Brunelli, ed., *Tutte le opere di Pietro Metastasio*, five volumes (Milan: Mondadori, 1953–1965), volume 4, 802 (No. 1842, 12 February 1770): ‘Sappia che la scelta del soggetto è stata sempre per me fin’ora il più tormentoso passo de’ miei poetici lavori’. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.

2 Metastasio’s *annotazioni di soggetti* are preserved at the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna (Cod. 10279, fols 36–78) and transcribed in Brunelli, *Tutte le opere*, volume 2, 1279–1286.

3 Brunelli, *Tutte le opere*, volume 3, 85 (No. 55). The opera under discussion was most probably *Demofonte*, which enjoyed its premiere in Vienna on 4 November 1733 with music by Antonio Caldara. Marianna Benti Bulgarelli *detta* ‘la Romanina’ (1684–1734) was the creator of the title role in Domenico Sarro’s *Didone abbandonata* (Naples, 1724), the first setting of that libretto.



Charles VI, its plot had to be based on a 'Roman incident'. Unfortunately, one after another option had to be turned down: Coriolanus, on account of that character's meddlesome mother, Volumnia (or Venturia); the Horatii, because of Horatius's murder of his own sister; Mutius Scevola, for having been recently 'refried' at the Viennese Court; and the Scipiones, Fabii and Papirii, because these families had graced the stage so often that they had 'desiccated humanity'.<sup>4</sup>

Decades of frenzied activity following the Horatian adage of 'treating in one's own way what is common' (*proprie communia dicere*) had clearly taken their toll on the invention of eighteenth-century playwrights, including seasoned librettists of Metastasio's calibre.<sup>5</sup> Authors of spoken plays, too, recognized the dearth of unoccupied narrative territory. In the letter prefacing his 1743 tragedy *La Mérope* (or *La Mérope française*) Voltaire himself apologized to Scipione Maffei for publishing a new tragedy on the subject of Maffei's box-office success, *Merope* (1713). In defence of his own treatment, Voltaire surveyed the miscellaneous Merope plays before and after Maffei's, only to conclude that a fresh version was a welcome addition. Voltaire soothed his rivals by arguing that the modern theatre had become somewhat of a 'gallery of paintings' anyhow, the various exhibits of which 'represent the same subjects. The connoisseurs enjoy themselves by distinguishing between the diverse manners; everyone embraces, according to his own taste, the character of each painter; it is a kind of competition that serves at once to perfect art and to increase the public's enlightenment'. ('Il est arrivé à notre Théâtre, ce qu'on voit tous les jours dans une galerie de peinture, où plusieurs tableaux représentent le même sujet. Les Connoisseurs se plaisent à remarquer les diverses manieres; chacun saisit, selon son goût, le caractère de chaque Peintre; c'est une espèce de concours qui sert, à la fois, à perfectionner l'art, & à augmenter les lumières du Public.')<sup>6</sup>

Voltaire's image of the theatrical repertoire as a thematic museum rings true in the case of opera seria around 1750. As Pietro Metastasio reached the zenith of his fame, it was not just librettists and playwrights who experienced difficulty in finding fresh subjects: with opera impresarios resorting to safe, proven materials on commercial grounds, the most sought-after composers were likely to revisit several *drammi* during their career, while their singing peers would typically perform multiple musical renderings of the same role.<sup>7</sup> Niccolò Jommelli (1714–1774) stands out among this generation of *metteurs en musique*,<sup>8</sup> whose constant but ephemeral (re)interpretations of the dramatic canon to some degree anticipate the practices of today's stage directors or *metteurs en scène*. During the thirty-four years of his activity in opera seria (1740–1774) Jommelli composed four new scores each to Metastasio's *Ezio* (1741, 1748, 1758 and 1772) and *Demofonte* (1743, 1753, 1764 and 1770), three to *Semiramide riconosciuta* (1742, 1753 and 1762) and *Didone abbandonata* (1747, 1749 and 1763), and two to *Alessandro nell'Indie* (1743 and 1760), *Ciro riconosciuto* (1744 and 1749), *Achille in Sciro*

4 Brunelli, *Tutte le opere*, volume 3, 127 (No. 96, 28 May 1735): 'Lavoro come un galeotto, onde al solito non sono di buon umore; ho la bile in moto, e per necessaria conseguenza ho poca voglia di scrivere. Mi volete aiutare a cercare un soggetto per un'altra opera, sì o no? L'ho da incominciar subito terminata quella che sto scrivendo: e per far bene, dovrebbe essere un fatto romano. Farei volentieri il *Coriolano*, ma quella vecchia b. [brutta?] g. [sic] della madre non mi accomoda in teatro. Farei gli *Orazi*, ma quel *sorellicidio* mi storpia. Il *Muzio Scevola* è stato qui rifritto non ha gran tempo. Gli *Scipioni*, i *Fabi* ed i *Papirii* hanno seccata l'umanità.' The *Muzio Scevola* Metastasio referred to was possibly Giovanni Bononcini and Silvio Stampiglia's, as originally performed in Rome (1695) and revised for the Viennese Court in 1710.

5 *Ars poetica*, line 128, cited from Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. Henry Rushton Fairclough (London: Heinemann, 1955), 460.

6 Voltaire, 'À Monsieur le Marquis Scipion Maffei', in *La Mérope française, avec quelques petites pièces de littérature* (Paris: Prault, 1744), xxi.

7 Carlo 'Farinelli' Broschi's double appearance as Epitide in the *Merope* operas of Riccardo Broschi (Turin, 1732) and Geminiano Giacomelli (Venice, 1734) is a well-known instance here.

8 I borrow the term from Christophe Deshoulières, *L'opéra baroque et la scène moderne: essai de synthèse dramaturgique* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), 94.



(1749 and 1771), *Artaserse* (1749 and 1756) and *La clemenza di Tito* (1753 and 1765).<sup>9</sup> Given the surprising rarity of borrowings in this Herculean oeuvre, one imagines that Jommelli’s contemporaries would have endorsed Voltaire’s statement and increased their enlightenment by discerning the subtleties of taste and character in the composer’s different treatments of ‘what was common’.

But Metastasian adaptation, which dozens of authors have studied since Abbé Vogler’s pioneering work, is not the central focus of this article.<sup>10</sup> This is not to downgrade comparative analysis as a tool to distinguish the hallmarks of a certain composer vis-à-vis those of his rivals.<sup>11</sup> Quite the contrary: there can be no doubt that the melodic and harmonic schemata (solfeggi and partimenti) of the galant style, which we have recently started to understand anew, are of value as a basis for recognizing the stylistic particulars of a certain master.<sup>12</sup> Even so, textual disentanglements of the score tend to overemphasize the composer’s agency in opera – an artistic construct which, by its very audio-visual nature and performative context, agglomerates the distinct conceptual input of various agents, both artistic and non-artistic.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the quest for authorial identity – what makes one composer’s Metastasian rendering special in relation to another’s – not only runs counter to post-Barthesian notions of authorship,<sup>14</sup> but also risks passing over the different spectatorships – from untrained and indifferent to highly expert and involved, each informed by a different horizon of expectations – that coalesced into the audiences of Jommelli’s day.

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- 9 Jommelli also created two versions of Apostolo Zeno’s *Merope* (1741 and 1749) and *Eumene* (1742 and 1747, the latter entitled *Artemisia*). His *Tito Manlio* operas for Turin (1743) and Venice (1746) are based on different librettos by Gaetano Roccaforte and Matteo Noris (revisions by Sanvitale and Zanetti). There exist two comprehensive surveys of Jommelli’s operatic career: Hermann Abert, *Niccolò Jommelli als Opernkomponist, mit einer Biographie* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1908), which dedicates pages 190–202 to a formal analysis of *Cajo Mario*; and Marita P. McClymonds, ‘The Evolution of Jommelli’s Operatic Style’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 33/2 (1980), 326–355, in which *Cajo Mario* is not mentioned.
- 10 See Vogler’s comparison of Galuppi’s, Jommelli’s and Anfossi’s settings of the aria ‘Se cerca, se dice’ from Metastasio’s *L’Olimpiade* in the *Betrachtungen der Mannheimer Tonschule* (1778), 129–153.
- 11 For comparative analyses pertinent to Jommelli and mid-eighteenth-century opera seria see Agostino Ziino and students, ‘Le quattro versioni dell’*Ezio* di Niccolò Jommelli’, in *Musica e cultura a Napoli dal XV al XIX secolo*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi and Renato Bossa (Florence: Olschki, 1983), 239–265; Biancamaria Bigongiali, ‘La “Merope” di Apostolo Zeno nelle versioni di Jommelli e Terradellas: libretti e fonti musicali manoscritte’, *Fonti musicali italiane* 10 (2005), 39–84; Tarcisio Balbo, ‘L’aria “Che mai risponderai” nel *Demofonte* del Metastasio nelle intonazioni di Gluck, Jommelli, Hasse e Galuppi’, in *Johann Adolf Hasse in seiner Zeit: Bericht über das Symposium vom 23. bis 26. März 1999 in Hamburg*, ed. Reinhard Wiesend (Stuttgart: Carus, 2006), 155–164; Bruno Forment, ‘Jommelli’s “Tenacious Memory”: Replications in *L’Ifigenia* (1751)’, *Studi musicali* 38/2 (2010), 361–387; and Antonella D’Ovidio, ‘Da Roma a Vienna: scelte drammaturgiche e compositive nelle prime due intonazioni della “Didone abbandonata” (1747, 1749) di Niccolò Jommelli’, in *Niccolò Jommelli: l’esperienza europea di un musicista “filosofo”. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Reggio Calabria, 7–8 ottobre 2011)*, ed. Gaetano Pitarresi (Reggio Calabria: Edizioni del Conservatorio di Musica F. Cilea, 2014), 189–221.
- 12 Examples of such dissections are offered aplenty in Robert O. Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); see in particular pages 315–331, where the Romanesca, Prinner, Cudworth and Jommelli schemata (the latter being ‘an intensified version of the Comma’) are indicated in a duet from *Demofonte* (Stuttgart, 1764).
- 13 The conglomeration and concomitant diffraction of voices in Italian serious opera are examined in Reinhard Strohm, ‘Zenobia: Voices and Authorship in Opera Seria’, in *Johann Adolf Hasse in seiner Epoche und in der Gegenwart: Studien zur Stil- und Quellenproblematik*, ed. Szymon Paczkowski and Alina Żórawska-Witkowska (Warsaw: Instytut Muzykologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2002), 53–81. Strohm contends that music analysts ‘are always only talking of the qualities of the work after the author has left it; the performative qualities or audience expectations which may have contributed to it or may have been lost in the author’s plotting of the voices, remain lost in their analyses too’ (56).
- 14 Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, *Aspen* 5–6 (1967), no pagination.



It is precisely one such spectatorship, that of the connoisseur, that this essay concentrates on with respect to *Cajo Mario* (Rome, 1746), Jommelli's most revived opera in his lifetime.<sup>15</sup> Juxtaposition of the opera's libretto and score with a series of six highly theatrical paintings by Antonio Joli (or Jolli; c1700–1777), a fine artist and set designer in Jommelli's artistic network, reveals how *Cajo Mario* can be understood as the audio-visual analogue of the *capriccio*: a dominant mid-eighteenth-century art form that catered precisely to a clientele of sophisticated art-lovers. Both Joli's six *capricci* and *Cajo Mario*, as we shall see, push Voltaire's gallery metaphor to extremes, (re)combining classicist inspirations so that each individual creation gains its place in a thematic sequence or 'gallery', inviting comparison with related works. Their intertextuality is signalled so overtly, moreover, that their central narratives become suppressed by remote subjects, confusing the most perceptive viewers and making them feel displaced to another realm, fictitious or historical. But let us first consider Joli's legacy.

### JOLI'S CAPRICES

Considered by Farinelli as 'famous in his craft and practice in the Theatre' ('famoso nel suo mestiere e pratica nel Teatro'),<sup>16</sup> Joli may have made a greater impact on the art of his time than posterity has been willing to admit.<sup>17</sup> Joli was apprenticed with Raffaello Rinaldo in Modena and Giovanni Paolo Panini in Rome before developing a successful career as easel painter, interior decorator and set designer. His multifaceted talent took him to Venice, Padua, Reggio Emilia, London, Madrid and Naples, where Joli ended his career in the capacity of 'inventore, dipintore, ed architetto delle scene' to the Teatro San Carlo.<sup>18</sup> Joli designed several productions that involved music by Jommelli: *Merope* at the Venetian Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo (1741), *Armida abbandonata* (1770), *Demofonte* (fourth version, 1770) and *Ifigenia in Tauride* (1771) at the Neapolitan San Carlo, as well as the revivals – under Farinelli's supervision – of *Demetrio* (1751; originally Parma, 1749) and *Semiramide riconosciuta* (1753; originally Piacenza, 1753) at the Teatro del Buen Retiro in Madrid.

With only a handful of his set designs surviving, notions of Joli's style must be gleaned from his endeavours in the genre on which his renown now rests: the *capriccio* (*architettonico*) or 'architectural fantasy'.<sup>19</sup> The *capriccio* was developed in the early 1700s by Luca Carlevaris, Marco Ricci, Antonio Canaletto and other Venetian artists from two quintessentially eighteenth-century genres: the view painting (*veduta*), with its

15 The spelling of *Cajo* with a *j* instead of an *i* follows the original libretto.

16 Letter of Farinelli to Sicinio Pepoli, Madrid, 26 August 1749, cited in Carlo Broschi Farinelli, *La solitudine amica: lettere al conte Sicinio Pepoli*, ed. Carlo Vitali (Palermo: Sellerio, 2000), 188: 'L'Eccellenza Vostra mi raccomanda il signor Iomelli, ed un pittore. . . . Per il secondo . . . mi risolvetti scrivere in Inghilterra al signor Antonio Iolli famoso nel suo mestiere e pratica nel Teatro, e già sta qui dipingendo nel Real Teatro con soddisfazione.' (Your Excellency recommends signor Jommelli to me and a painter. . . . For the second . . . I resolved to write to signor Antonio Jolli in England, famous in his profession and in his theatrical practice; he is already painting here at the Teatro Real to our satisfaction.) Joli would be active at the Teatro del Buen Retiro in Madrid from 1749 to 1754.

17 Biographical accounts of the artist are offered in 'Jolli, Antonio', *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, ed. Silvio D'Amico, eleven volumes (Rome: Le Maschere, 1954–1968), volume 6, 780–781; Anna Coccioli Mastroviti, 'Joli (Jolli), Antonio', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* <[www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-joli\\_%28Dizionario\\_Biografico%29](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-joli_%28Dizionario_Biografico%29)> (23 January 2015); Ralph Toledano, *Antonio Joli (Modena, 1700–1777 Napoli)* (Turin: Artema, 2006).

18 Girolamo Tiraboschi, *Notizie de' pittori, scultori, incisori, e architetti natii degli stati del Serenissimo Signor Duca di Modena con un appendice de' professori di musica* (Modena: Società Tipografica, 1786), 230. Among Joli's scenographies for the San Carlo, there is a *Cajo Mario* (1770; music by Niccolò Piccinni) for which, unfortunately, no visual documentation has come down to us.

19 On Joli's set designs see Franco Mancini, 'Appunti per una storia della scenografia napoletana del Settecento: il periodo della decadenza (1762–1806)', *Napoli nobilissima: rivista di arti figurative, archeologia e urbanistica* 2/4 (1962), 147–158; *Scenografia napoletana dell'età barocca* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1964); and 'Antonio Joli: la transizione al neoclassico', in *Il Teatro di San Carlo 1737–1987*, volume 3: *Le scene, i costumi* (Naples: Electa, 1987), 37–48.



Figure 1 (Colour online) Antonio Joli, *Interior of a Palace with the Liberation of a Black Page*. Soprintendenza Speciale per il Patrimonio Storico, Artistico ed Etnoantropologico e per il Polo Museale della Città di Napoli e della Reggia di Caserta. Used by permission

(deceptive) topographic precision and luminous palette, and theatrical decor, from which the *capriccio* adopted the then-popular oblique perspective (*vista per angolo*).<sup>20</sup> To a greater extent than the *veduta* and stage set, the *capriccio* catered to the taste of connoisseurs through pseudo-realistic tableaus of ancient monuments displaced to different locations and enriched with imaginary staffage (figures and props). In one such work by Joli (Figure 1), a black page is freed by Roman warriors in a Corinthian atrium. Any suspicion that the painter is guilty of realism – of portraying an existing location – is dispelled by comparison of this canvas with a second *capriccio* by Joli (Figure 2), depicting Alexander the Great’s (356–323 BC) discovery of Achilles’s tomb. Curiously enough, the spot in question, marked by an equestrian statue, is located in a dilapidated version of the atrium seen in the former painting, despite the action being situated in the Hellenic

20 See Ekkehard Mai and Joachim Rees, *Kunstform Capriccio: Von der Grotteske zur Spieltheorie der Moderne* (Cologne: König, 1998); Roland Kanz, *Die Kunst des Capriccio: Kreativer Eigensinn in Renaissance und Barock* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2002); Lucien Steil, ed., *The Architectural Capriccio: Memory, Fantasy and Invention* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014). The bonds between the *capriccio*, *veduta* and stage set are embodied in works by the many artists who excelled in all three genres (besides Joli, his teacher Giovanni Paolo Panini and Marco Ricci), or who made efforts to combine them (as Vincenzo Mazzi did in his engraved *Capricci di scene teatrali* (Bologna, 1776)).





Figure 2 (Colour online) Joli, *Alexander the Great Discovers the Tomb of Achilles*. Paisley Museum and Art Galleries, Renfrewshire. Used by permission

era. A third *capriccio* by Joli (Figure 3) places the by now familiar atrium in the garden of an eighteenth-century palace, where it is populated by courtly, fashionable people. Joli expert Ralph Toledano has identified no fewer than three additional versions of the painting in private collections: one has the atrium look out on a Mediterranean coastline, with oriental characters suggesting a Roman settlement somewhere in north Africa; another flips the architecture horizontally and presents alternative statuary, a cupola, stairs, an extra alcove and an arched wall to the rear; while a third copies the two previous *capricci* but introduces a different narrative and idiosyncratic details.<sup>21</sup>

The six paintings under discussion do not immediately bespeak the inventive qualities of the *capriccio* as a genre. Rather than presenting ‘capricious’ or bewilderingly original compositions, each work presents a variation or ‘fantasy’ on one and the same Corinthian atrium, which seems stylistically more indebted to the *Settecento* than to Roman antiquity. Theatre historians will instantly recognize this architectural frame as a ‘stock set’ (*scena di dotazione*), the modular ‘flats’ and ‘drops’ of which Joli combined with a variety of ‘backdrops’, ‘set pieces’, ‘props’ and ‘costumed actors’ in order to represent different interiors and exteriors. On a deeper interpretative level, the action, architectural frame, staffage and background engage in an intricate relationship with the Corinthian atrium, which functions as a ‘commonplace’ (*locus topicus*) in the strictest sense of the term – a generic frame that can denote any type of building at any time, ancient (Figures 1 and 2) or ‘present’ (Figure 3). In keeping with Voltaire’s gallery metaphor, each painting actively invites juxtaposition with others in the ‘series’. Variable content fills this frame in the guise of stairs, balustrades, balconies and reliefs, now present in the foreground, then relegated to the back or altogether

21 Toledano, *Antonio Joli*, 115–116. The (apocryphal) titles of the works are: *Capriccio architettonico con personaggi orientali e veduta di costiera mediterranea*, *Capriccio con architettura di palazzo romano e personaggi all’antica* and *Capriccio architettonico*. This last painting was previously owned by the Denver Art Museum.



Figure 3 (Colour online) Joli, *Capriccio: Elegant Figures outside and within a Classical Palace*. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Used by permission

absent. In sum, Joli's six *capricci* combine two layers, the one (atrium) permanent and universal, the other (staffage) transitory and idiosyncratic, into a modular or composite representation that invites connoisseurs to recompose the thematic gallery envisaged by the artist. It is this compositional duplicity that provides a vital clue to understanding Jommelli's *Cajo Mario*, which received its premiere at the Roman Teatro Argentina on 6 February 1746.

### OBSCURE STAFFAGE

In contrast to what its title suggests, *Cajo Mario* has hardly anything to do with the historical Roman consul Caius Marius (157–86 BC), his political strife with Lucius Cornelius Sulla (138–78 BC) or the ensuing clash between the proletarians (*populares*) and patricians (*optimates*) that paved the way for social war and Marius's banishment in the first century BC. Instead, librettist Gaetano Roccaforte (*fl.* 1743–1759) situated the action on 1 January 104 BC, on which day Rome celebrated Marius's return as victor of the Jugurthine War (*Bellum Jugurthinum*): a conflict between Rome and Numidia (modern Algeria) that flared in 112 BC and ended seven years later with the handover and execution of King Jugurtha.<sup>22</sup> Roccaforte's synopsis (*argomento*) informs the reader that Micipsa, the son of Scipio Africanus's ally Masinissa and ruler of Numidia (148–118 BC),

22 The incident is reported in Plutarch, 'Life of Marius', in *Parallel Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), 12.2, as consulted at <[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Marius\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Marius*.html)> (17 March 2015): 'Marius came across the sea from Africa with his army, and

Table 1 The characters in Braccioli's *Calfurnia* (Venice, 1713) and Roccaforte's *Cajo Mario* (Rome, 1746)

<b>Calfurnia</b>	<b>Cajo Mario</b>
G[AJO] MARIO, Roman consul	CAJO MARIO, consul of Rome, father of . . .
GIULIA, his wife	—
CALFURNIA, their daughter, promised to . . .	MARZIA CALFURNIA, future wife of . . .
A[NNIO] TREBONIO, spouse of Calfurnia	ANNIO, Roman patrician and lover of the aforenamed
ALVIDA, daughter of Jugurtha, in love with Trebonio, disguised as Oritia, prophetess of Osiris	RODOPE, Numidian princess under the name of Pirra, secret lover of Annio
T[ITO] SICELIO, priest, in love with Alvida	—
LUCIO, nephew of Mario	LUCIO, lover of the aforementioned and secret enemy of Mario and Annio
CLAUDIO, Roman senator	AQUILIO, prefect of the Roman armies, friend of Annio

left three heirs: two biological sons, Hiempsal and Adherbal, and an adoptive son, Jugurtha, the illegitimate child of Micipsa's brother Mastanabal.<sup>23</sup> The eldest of the three princes, Jugurtha considered himself the sole heir to the Numidian crown, and usurped sovereignty by murdering his stepbrother Hiempsal (118 BC). Jugurtha's crime ignited a civil war (118–112 BC) that split Numidia into a western and eastern kingdom, the former governed by Jugurtha, the latter by Micipsa's surviving son Adherbal. Jugurtha's military campaign to annex Adherbal's territory and kill his opponent divided Rome into an interventionist camp, represented by Marius and the proletarians, and a non-interventionist party, endorsed by Sulla, who considered Jugurtha a friend of Rome in light of his past services to General Scipio Africanus. Jugurtha's slaughter of Italian merchants (112 BC), however, compelled Rome to mobilize its troops and Marius to enter the Jugurthine War as consular legate in 109 BC, becoming consul and commander two years later, and conquering Numidia two years after that.<sup>24</sup>

According to Roccaforte, the historical tapestry provided him with no more than a backdrop to a plot he drew in part from Livy's *Ab urbe condita* (c29–27 BC), Plutarch's biography of Marius in the *Parallel Lives* (early second century AD), Florus's *Epitome of Roman History* (before c130 AD), and from his 'verisimilar' invention.<sup>25</sup> What Roccaforte did not disclose was his direct inspiration for *Cajo Mario*: this was *Calfurnia* (1713), a Venetian *dramma per musica* by Grazio Braccioli (see Table 1).<sup>26</sup> In Braccioli's *Calfurnia*, too, the title character (a tenor in Jommelli's version) has a daughter named (Marzia) Calfurnia (soprano), after the 'Calpurnia' described in the *Parallela Minora* (also *Parallela Græca et Romana*) formerly attributed

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on the very Calends of January, which with the Romans is the first day of the year, assumed the consulship and celebrated his triumph, exhibiting to the Romans Jugurtha in chains. This was a sight which they had despaired of beholding, nor could any one have expected, while Jugurtha was alive, to conquer the enemy; so versatile was he in adapting himself to the turns of fortune, and so great craft did he combine with his courage.'

23 Gaetano Roccaforte, *Cajo Mario: drama per musica* (Rome: Rossi, 1746), 3–5.

24 Further details can be found in Phillip Andrew Kildahl, *Caius Marius* (New York: Twayne, 1968), 39–49 and 81–98 (Marius's triumph is discussed on page 97), and Gareth C. Sampson, *The Crisis of Rome: The Jugurthine Northern Wars and the Rise of Marius* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2010), 32–41. Marius's conquest of Numidia furnished the subject of an anonymous *azione scenica* composed by Pietro Scarlatti, *Cajo Mario in Numidia* (Palermo, 1749).

25 Roccaforte, *Cajo Mario*, 4.

26 Braccioli is first and foremost remembered as the librettist of Antonio Vivaldi's *Orlando finto pazzo* and *Orlando furioso* (Venice, 1714). His *Calfurnia* has been overlooked as a source for *Cajo Mario*. See Dorothea Link, 'Caio Mario', *Grove Music Online* <[www.oxfordmusiconline.com](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com)> (25 March 2015).





to Plutarch.<sup>27</sup> The maiden is promised to Annius Trebonius (Annio Trebonio), whose name Roccaforte shortened to Annius (Annio, soprano), either in homage to Servilia’s homonymous lover in Metastasio’s *La clemenza di Tito* (1734), or to divert the figure from an anecdote recorded in Plutarch’s biography of Marius in the *Parallel Lives*:

Caius Lusius, a nephew of [Marius] . . . was a man of good reputation, but he had a weakness for beautiful youths. This officer was enamoured of one of the young men who served under him, by name Trebonius, and had made unsuccessful attempts to seduce him. But finally, at night, he sent a servant with a summons for Trebonius. The young man came, since he could not refuse to obey a summons, but when he had been introduced into the tent and Caius attempted violence upon him, he drew his sword and slew him. Marius was not with the army when this happened; but on his return he brought Trebonius to trial. Here there were many accusers, but not a single advocate, wherefore Trebonius himself courageously took the stand and told all about the matter, bringing witnesses to show that he had often refused the solicitations of Lusius and that in spite of large offers he had never prostituted himself to anyone. Then Marius, filled with delight and admiration, ordered the customary crown for brave exploits to be brought, and with his own hands placed it on the head of Trebonius, declaring that at a time which called for noble examples he had displayed the most noble conduct.<sup>28</sup>

Lusius, the assaulter, also features in *California* and *Cajo Mario*, albeit as Lucius (Lucio, mezzo-soprano), the (heterosexual) pursuer of Calpurnia and secret ally of Jugurtha’s daughter – named Alvida in *California*, Rodope (soprano) in *Cajo Mario*. *California* follows Plutarch’s account in specifying Lucius as Marius’s cousin (‘Lucio Nipote di Mario’),<sup>29</sup> whereas *Cajo Mario* omits references to the blood relationship between the men. In Roccaforte’s libretto, finally, there appears a Roman prefect, Aquilius (Aquilio), whose name may refer either to Claudius Aquilius Gallus, a key figure in Marius’s military conquests and reforms,<sup>30</sup> Manius Aquillius, a lieutenant of Marius in 103 BC and fellow consul in 101 BC,<sup>31</sup> or to a tribune by that name in Metastasio’s *Adriano in Siria* (1732).

A salient difference between *California* and *Cajo Mario* lies in their musical afterlife: while Braccioli’s work received a mere two settings, one by Johann David Heinichen (Venice, 1713) and another by Giovanni Bononcini (London, 1724), Roccaforte’s *Cajo Mario* held the stage throughout the second half of the eighteenth century in settings by Jommelli (Rome, 1746), Baldassarre Galuppi (Venice, 1764), Niccolò Piccinni (Naples, 1765), Pasquale Anfossi (Venice, 1770), Carlo Monza (Venice, 1777), Domenico Cimarosa (Mantua, 1780), Ferdinando Bertoni (Venice, 1781), Francesco Bianchi (Naples, 1784) and Felice Giordani (Milan, 1791). Far from indicating a lapse of interest in Roccaforte’s libretto, the conspicuous eighteen-year interval (1746–1764) between Jommelli and Galuppi’s settings marks the outright monopoly of Jommelli’s version, fifteen revivals of which are recorded with certainty.<sup>32</sup>

27 Pseudo-Plutarch, *Parallela minora*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 20, as consulted at <[http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Parallela\\_Minora\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Moralia/Parallela_Minora*.html)> (17 March 2015). Calpurnia’s true age in 104 BC, the temporal setting of both Braccioli and Roccaforte’s librettos, can have been six at the most, unless Marius adopted the girl or fathered a child before his marriage (in 110 BC) with Julia, the aunt of Julius Caesar who makes an appearance in Braccioli’s drama, but not in Roccaforte’s.

28 Plutarch, ‘Life of Marius’, 14.3–5.

29 Grazio Braccioli, *California: drama per musica* (Venice: Rossetti, 1713), 11.

30 Kildahl, *Caius Marius*, 117.

31 Plutarch, ‘Life of Marius’, 14.7

32 Foligno (1747), Bologna (1751 and 1758), Modena (1752), Pavia (1752), Casale Monferrato (1753), Livorno (1754), Cremona (as *Cajo Mario Romano*, 1755), Faenza (1761), Siena (1762), Verona (1762), Barcelona (1766), Arezzo (1769), Cesena (1770) and Prague (as *Il Cajo Mario Proconsole e Patrizio Romano*, 1772). Two further revivals, in Florence (1747) and Barcelona (1752), are doubtful. My information on the reception of *Cajo Mario* is compiled in part from Claudio Sartori, *I libretti*



[Allegro moderato]

11

Horns and trumpets

Annio  
Se per - de l'u - si - gnuo

Violino solo obbligato

Violino 1

Violino 2

Viola

[Basso continuo]

14

*p*

*ten.*

*tr*

*lo*

Example 1 Jommelli, 'Se perde l'usignuolo', *Cajo Mario*, Act 1 Scene 12, bars 11–18. I-Nc, Rari 7.7.8 and 7.7.9; GB-Lbl, Add. 16030

[I see the light of a dark torch, I hear the ghost . . . ]

Those examining Jommelli's setting might easily grasp the reasons for this success, discovering in *Cajo Mario* a crowd-pleaser erected on the commonplaces of opera seria. Slapstick humour, for instance, marks Act 1 Scene 12, when Annio's obbligato recitative to the 'merciless gods' ('Ingratissimi Numi') segues into a 'nightingale' aria, 'Se perde l'usignuolo', in which the warrior expresses his fear of losing Calturnia (Example 1).<sup>33</sup> No doubt triggered by the vocal profile of the original performer of that aria, Gioacchino Conti detto 'Il Gizzello' (1714–1761), Jommelli clothes Roccaforte's lyrics with nearly every vocal and instrumental formula associated with operatic nightingales since Almirena's 'Augelletti, che cantate' in Act 1 Scene 6 of Handel's *Rinaldo* (London, 1711) and Epitide's 'Quell'usignuolo' in Act 2 Scene 4 of Geminiano Giacomelli's

*italiani a stampa dalle origini al 1800: catalogo analitico con 16 indici* (Cueno: Bertola e Locatelli, 1991), and in part from bibliographic data gathered in various Italian libraries.

<sup>33</sup> Roccaforte, *Cajo Mario*, 26: 'Se perde l'usign[u]olo / il caro amato bene, / sfoga col canto il duolo / così l'acerbe pene, / che giunge tra le selve / le belve a impietosir. // Voi pure il mio dolore / v'impietosisca, oh dei! / Pietà de' casi miei, / pietà del mio martir.' (If the nightingale loses its dear beloved, it unleashes its mourning in song. The sour pains thus reach the woods and arouse the pity of wild animals. Gods, may my suffering also arouse your pity for my fate and torture.)



*Merope* (Venice, 1734).<sup>34</sup> That Annius chirps his show-stopper in the atrium of a temple dedicated to Jupiter – a resonant room, indeed, but also one of Rome’s most sacred places – makes this aria all the more risible for modern audiences.<sup>35</sup>

A second exercise in stereotype occurs in Act 2 Scene 13, as Marius begins to hallucinate out of remorse for the pending death of his daughter – who will naturally remain alive:

MARIO MARIUS

Mora la figlia.  
Tutto si versi il sangue . . . Oh Dio . . . ma intanto  
E intanto in Ciel giunto colà tra i Numii  
La bell’alma felice  
Dall’immortal sua sede  
Vegga del padre suo

The girl dies.  
All her blood is shed . . . Oh God . . . but meanwhile,  
Meanwhile in heaven, joining the gods,  
The beautiful, happy soul  
Sees her father from her immortal seat

Upon which the delusional consul launches an aria that brims with ‘gothic’ imagery:

MARIO MARIUS

Che più tardate, o barbari  
Fieri rimorsi atroci  
A lacerarmi il cor.  
Svenatemi, uccidetemi,  
Toglietemi,  
All’orrore  
Di comparir peggiore  
De’ fieri Mostri ancor.

What are you waiting for,  
barbarous, fierce and cruel remorse,  
to tear my heart apart?  
Slay me, kill me,

34 The sole surviving score of the Viennese *Merope* pasticcio (1749), with contributions by Jommelli (A-Wn Mus. Hs. 17948/1–3), reveals a striking, hitherto unnoticed element: Gaetano ‘Caffarelli’ Majorana (1710–1783), the original creator of Trasimede (a secondary character) in Giacomelli’s *Merope*, revived Farinelli’s Epitide part in its entirety at the Habsburg Court.

35 Roccaforte, *Cajo Mario*, 18: ‘Atrio magnifico del Tempio di Giove con maestoso ingresso, che introduce alla parte interna del Tempio . . . con Ara in mezzo del sudetto Atrio con deità di Giove, e Giunone.’ (Magnificent atrium of the temple of Jupiter with a majestic entrance, leading to the internal part of the temple . . . and an altar in the middle of the aforesaid atrium with effigies of Jupiter and Juno; setting for Act 1 Scenes 6–12). The setting of Epitide’s ‘Quell’usignuolo’, by contrast, was a ‘Montuosa con rocca nell’alto. Grotta nel mezzo, e Bosco nel basso’ (Mountainous range with rock up high, a grotto in the middle and woods below). See Apostolo Zeno and Domenico Lalli, *Merope: dramma per musica* (Venice: Marino Rossetti, 1734), 31 (stage directions for Act 2 Scenes 1–4). ‘Se perde l’usignuolo’ was retained in at least three revivals of Jommelli’s opera for which I could consult the libretto (Bologna, 1751, performed by Orsola Strambi; Casal Monferrato, 1753, sung by Giovanni Triulzi; Barcelona, 1766, sung by Angela Catherina Riboldi as Marzia Calfurnia) and discarded in two further versions (Bologna, 1758 and Verona, 1762).



take away  
the horror  
of looking even worse  
than the fierce monsters.

While Jommelli chooses to underscore Marius's battle against fate, setting the aria *Allegro assai* and in *D* major, with oboes, trumpets and horns evoking the consul's heroism, Roccaforte's text is firmly embedded in the tradition of the *ombra* scene – an artefact of the Oresteian tradition, particularly Orestes's delusions after the assassination of his mother Clytemnestra.<sup>36</sup> The *ombra* topos featured in countless operas before *Cajo Mario*, including such hugely successful works as Jommelli's own *Astianatte* (Rome, 1741).<sup>37</sup> Still, *Cajo Mario* is unique in featuring it twice, both times in soliloquies by Marius that close a section (Act 2 and the first tableau of Act 3). While the *ombra* foregrounds the remorse causing Marius's delusion in Act 2 Scene 13,<sup>38</sup> it centres in Act 3 Scene 7 on his audiovisual sensations of his daughter's spirit. After an extensive obbligato recitative, in which the tormented statesman and father reproaches himself for sacrificing an innocent daughter for the benefit of Rome, Marius envisions the ghost of Marzia:

MARIO MARIUS

Veggio un lume di torbida face,  
Odo l'ombra, che freme d'intorno:  
Ombra, ah taci, deh lasciami in pace:  
Non son'io, che ti privo del giorno,  
Sono i Numi, è il Destino crudel.<sup>39</sup>

I see the light of a dark torch,  
I hear the ghost, quivering inside:  
Ghost, please be silent, leave me alone:  
It is not me who deprives you of your life,  
It is the gods and cruel destiny.

In contrast to 'Che più tardate', Jommelli here portrays the *ombra* unambiguously, having the singer perform a monotone against a haunting orchestral fabric comprised of shivering strings, subdued horns and – as the 'ghost' enters the picture – additional pairs of horns, oboes and bassoons (Example 2).

The question is, of course, whether such musical and textual commonplaces were aimed at an audience of less erudite spectators in the hope of ensuring the opera's success on the provincial stage. Alternatively,

36 See Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (458 BC), parts two (*Choëphoroi*) and three (*Eumenids*), in addition to Sophocles's *Electra* (435–410 BC), Euripides's *Electra* (c413 BC), *Orestes* (408 BC), *Andromache* (428–425 BC) and above all Act 1 of *Iphigenia in Tauris* (414–412 BC). An eighteenth-century example worthy of note here is Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon's *Électre* (1708), Act 5 Scene 9.

37 Jommelli's *Astianatte* (libretto by Antonio Salvi) features two *ombra* scenes, albeit for different characters: in Act 2 Scene 15 Andromache perceives the dead Hector, while in Act 3 Scene 10, Orestes sees a fury. The *ombra* topos is surveyed in Clive McClelland, *Ombra: Supernatural Music in the Eighteenth Century. Context, Style, and Signification* (Langham: Lexington, 2012); see also the book's reviews by John Rice in *Early Music* 41/4 (2013), 674–675, and by Sarah Bushey in *Notes* 70/2 (2013), 265–267.

38 Roccaforte, *Cajo Mario*, 48: 'Che più tardate, o barbari / fieri rimorsi atroci / a lacerarmi il cor.' (Barbarous, fierce, atrocious regrets, what are you waiting for to tear my heart apart?)

39 Roccaforte, *Cajo Mario*, 59: 'Veggio un lume di torbida face, / odo l'ombra, che freme d'intorno.' (I see the light of a troubled countenance, I hear the ghost that quivers around me; my italics.) Intriguingly, Jommelli would reunite the two motifs twenty-five years later, in Orestes's 'Tardi rimorsi atroci . . . Odo il suon delle querule voci' in *Ifigenia in Tauride* (Naples, 1771), Act 1 Scene 5. The vocabulary and the musical concept of that aria resemble Marius's two *ombra* arias, with the lyrical flow being interrupted to introduce what Marius describes in a recitative as the 'raucous noise' ('rauco suono') of 'feeble instruments' ('fembali strumenti') – namely, the woodwinds.





**Non presto**

*segue*

8

*segue*

Si veg - - go un lu - me O - do l'om - bra

*poco f* *f* *f* *f assai*

Example 2 Jommelli, 'Veggio un lume', *Cajo Mario*, Act 3 Scene 7, bars 1–14

[I would like to hope . . . oh God . . . I would . . . but then . . . I could not . . . I am afraid . . . despair . . . ah, no]

might the clever introduction of nightingale arias and *ombra* scenes in a story not readily associated with such 'staffage' have appealed to more sophisticated opera lovers, such as the 'Roman Nobility and Curia' to whom Roccaforte dedicated the libretto?<sup>40</sup> In what follows, I shall suppose that at least part of the audience

40 Roccaforte, *Cajo Mario*, frontispiece: 'Dedicato alla Nobiltà e Curia Romana.' The dedication of the libretto to a collective entity might of course also indicate the poet's failure to find an individual patron for his work.



paid close attention to the opera's imaginative play with commonplaces. In assuming such a 'connoisseur's perspective', I will argue that *Cajo Mario* functioned as an audio-visual equivalent to the six 'Corinthian frame paintings' by Antonio Joli.

## THE IPHIGENIA FRAME

On closer examination, intertextuality does not merely pervade individual scenes of *Cajo Mario*, but defines the opera's dramatic nexus, a legend reported in the Pseudo-Plutarch's *Parallela minora*: 'When Marius was fighting the tribe of the Cimbri [Germanic tribe] and was being worsted, he saw in a dream that he would conquer if he sacrificed his daughter before the battle'.<sup>41</sup> Braccioli and Roccaforte allude to this rather obscure episode from Marius's life in their librettos. In the very opening scene of *Cajo Mario*, Marius refuses to celebrate his triumph over Jugurtha by first referring to Hannibal's unanticipated arrival at the gates of Rome during the Second Punic War (218–201 BC), then to the three consuls that had been defeated by the Cimbri in 105 BC: Quintus Servillius Cæpio, Marcus Iunius Silanus and one 'Manilius', whose name should read Gnæus Mallius Maximus.<sup>42</sup> Still in the opening scene of *Cajo Mario*, Marius tells Aquilius to wait for him at the temple, where he is to consult the auguries – a hint at Marius's penchant for omens as recorded by Plutarch on the basis of (lost) biographies by Scaurus, Rufus, Catullus and Sulla.<sup>43</sup>

Pseudo-Plutarch's story of Marius's sacrifice of his daughter – or his intention to sacrifice her to satisfy the gods – is evidently built on the foundations of Iphigenia at Aulis, a myth that had already provided the subject for various *opere serie*, including a work performed at the Teatro Argentina in 1739: Geminiano Giacomelli's *Achille in Aulide*, after Apostolo Zeno's *Ifigenia in Aulide* (Vienna, 1718).<sup>44</sup> Twelve years later, Jommelli himself would premiere an *Ifigenia* at the Teatro Argentina starring the creator of *Cajo Mario*, the tenor Litterio 'Lettorino' Ferrari, as Agamemnon.<sup>45</sup> In that opera, Calpurnia is transformed into Iphigenia (Ifigenia, soprano), Annius into Achilles (Achille, soprano), and Lucius into Ajax (Ajace, mezzo-soprano), with motifs such as patriotism, love, jealousy and secret hostility serving as the glue between these characters (Table 2).

Roccaforte spared himself the effort of disguising the obvious links between Greek mythology and Roman republican history in *Cajo Mario*. In Act 2 Scene 3 he consciously opens up the plot by imposing a remote, yet parallel narrative frame (or 'abyss') on the opera's setting: Rome in 104 BC. In this scene the *déjà vu* of seeing Calpurnia undergo the fate of Iphigenia has become so manifest for her lover, Annius, that he openly wonders: 'Am I dreaming, or I am awake? Am I in Rome, or in Aulis? Is this Marius, or rather the wicked Atreid [descendant of the Mycenaean King Atreus – in other words, Agamemnon]?' ('Inorridisco! aghiaccio! / Che

41 Pseudo-Plutarch, *Parallela minora*, 20, <[www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0219%3Asection%3D20](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0219%3Asection%3D20)> (24 March 2015).

42 Roccaforte, *Cajo Mario*, 10: 'Un grand'empio, / Annibale è per noi; Che se fra gli agi / Negletto non l'avesse in vil riposo, / Proffittandone, forse / Avrebbe, avrebbe incenerita, e doma / Italia, tutta, il Campidoglio, e Roma. . . . Cèpio, Sillano, / Manilio già sconfitti / Dals Barbaro furor del Cimbro altero / Piangono la lor sventura'. The inverted commas (*virgolette*) next to the original passage in Braccioli's *Calpurnia*, 15 ('Ah mia figlia non vedi / Sparsi d'ossa Romane I campi? e a scorno / Del destino di Roma, / E Silano, e Manilio, e Cèpio vinti?') seem to imply that this reference was found too hermetic for a Venetian audience. According to Plutarch, 'Life of Marius', 12.4–5, Marius did triumph, and exuberantly so, thereby trespassing senatorial law.

43 See Kildahl, *Caius Marius*, 109. The primary sources on Marius's life are scrutinized in J. Van Ooteghem, *Caius Marius* (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1963), 7–45.

44 For a complete overview of eighteenth-century operas on the Iphigenia myth see Reinhard Strohm, 'Iphigenia's Curious *Ménage à Trois* in Myth, Drama, and Opera', in *(Dis)Embodying Myths in Ancien Régime Opera: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Bruno Forment (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 117–138.

45 For a structural analysis of Jommelli's *L'Ifigenia* see Bruno Forment, "'La Terra, il Cielo e l'Inferno": The Representation and Reception of Greco-Roman Mythology in Opera Seria' (PhD dissertation, Ghent University, 2007), 122–170.

Table 2 Principal characters in Jommelli’s *Cajo Mario* and *L’Ifigenia*

<i>Cajo Mario</i> (Rome, 1746)	<i>L’Ifigenia</i> (Rome, 1751)
CAJO MARIO, tenor, Roman general, father of MARZIA CALPURNIA, soprano, ill-fated lover of ANNIO, soprano, Roman patrician and rival of LUCIO, mezzo-soprano, secret enemy of Marius	AGAMEMNONE, tenor, Greek general, father of IFIGENIA, soprano, ill-fated lover of ACHILLE, soprano, Thessalian prince and rival of AJACE, mezzo-soprano, secret enemy of Iphigenia and Achilles

Genitor crudel! Sogno? Son desto? / Sono in Roma? ò in Aulide? / È Mario questo, o il scelerato Atride?’).<sup>46</sup> This one statement forces spectators who have hitherto been unaware of the plot’s intertextuality to turn their imagination from one story and site (Caius Marius in Republican Rome) to the other (Agamemnon in ancient Greece) in order to establish explicit, allegorical ties between two realms of fiction. Interestingly enough, the literary technique at work here – called *mise en abyme* – is itself a commonplace, indebted to Metastasio’s *Ezio* (1728), a libretto Jommelli set in 1741. At the height of her distress, the female protagonist of *Ezio*, Fulvia, questions whether she is in Rome, breathing the ‘airs of the Tiber’, or on the ‘streets of Thebes or Argos’, seeing the ‘domestic furies from the offspring of Cadmus [founder of Thebes] and the Atreids come to these coasts from Grecian shores, fertile in tragedies’ (‘Misera dove son! / L’aure del Tebro / Son queste ch’io respiro? / Per le strade mi aggiro / Di Tebe, e d’Argo? O dalle Greche sponde / Di Tragedie feconde, / Le domestiche furie / Vennero a questi lidi / Della prole di Cadmo, e degli Atridi?’).<sup>47</sup>

Calpurnia effectively fulfils the role of Iphigenia substitute. Although the young woman only learns of her pending sacrifice in the second act, she has already erupted emotionally on at least two occasions during the first act. Instead of happiness over her betrothal with Annio, her main feelings are torment and fear, expressed in ‘Vorrei sperare . . . oh Dio’, a syllabic aria with multiple rests, off-beat accompaniments and nervous violin parts (Example 3).<sup>48</sup> For reasons that are still unclear at this point of the story, she is in such distress by the ninth scene of Act 1 that she palpitates with every single movement or breath of wind – an image Jommelli conveys in the introductory ritornello of her aria ‘Sposo, oh Dio!’ through alternations of pizzicato and arco (Example 4).

Although Calpurnia’s premonitions may reflect a young bride’s doubts on the brink of marriage, it is tempting to connect them with an occult character Roccaforte chose not to copy from Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* via Braccioli’s *Calpurnia*: a ‘certain Syrian woman, named Martha, who was said to have the gift of prophecy’, and who

had previously been rejected by the senate when she wished to appear before them with reference to these matters and predicted future events. Then she got audience of the women and gave them proofs of her skill, and particularly the wife of Marius, at whose feet she sat when some gladiators were fighting and successfully foretold which one was going to be victorious. In consequence of this [Martha] was sent to Marius by his wife, and was admired by him.<sup>49</sup>

The Syrian fortune-teller became a ‘prophet of Osiris’ (*profetessa di Osiri*) in Braccioli’s cast: Jugurtha’s daughter in disguise, invoking the underworld, transforming idols into monsters and conjuring up furies

<sup>46</sup> Roccaforte, *Cajo Mario*, 31–32.

<sup>47</sup> Text from the libretto of Jommelli’s Bolognese setting, Pietro Metastasio, *Ezio: dramma per musica* (Bologna: Borghi negli Orefici, 1741), 72 (Act 2 Scene 12). Jommelli renders the passage in *recitativo obbligato*. See GB-Lbl Rm22 F.4.

<sup>48</sup> The various manuscript copies of this aria (for example, in B-Bc 5220, D-Dl Mus.1-F–28,13 and I-Nc 388) seem to testify to its popularity.

<sup>49</sup> Plutarch, ‘Life of Marius’, 17.1–3.



[Andante non molto]

32

Marzia  
Vor - rei spe - ra - re oh Di - o, vor - re - i ma poi... ma poi non só

Violin 1  
*p*

Violin 2  
*[p]*

Viola  
*p*

[Basso continuo]  
*p*

40

nó... ma poi... ma poi non só te - mo... di - spe - ro... te - mo... di - spe - ro... ah nó

*p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f*

*[p]* *f* *[p]* *[f]* *[p]* *[f]*

*[p]* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f*

Example 3 Jommelli, 'Vorrei sperare . . . oh Dio!', *Cajo Mario*, Act 1 Scene 3, bars 32–49

[senza tempo]

10

[Violin 1]  
*pizzicato* *arco* *pizzicato* *arco*

Example 4 Jommelli, 'Sposo, oh Dio!', *Cajo Mario*, Act 1 Scene 9, bars 9–12, violins

from a magic mirror. Roccaforte, who admitted anything but the irrational in his version, may have retained elements of Martha in Marzia Calpurnia, having the latter foresee terrible events and, in keeping with Plutarch's account, intrude into the Senate (Act 2 Scene 11), for which she is severely reproached by her father.<sup>50</sup>

Close analysis of *Cajo Mario* buttresses the hypothesis that the opera can be understood as a *capriccio*, the framing architecture of which is provided by the myth of Iphigenia in Aulis, while its empty spaces are filled in with staffage from a wide range of sources – from Farinellian nightingale arias to Oresteian hallucinations. Thus composed, Jommelli's hugely successful opera testifies to classicism's paradoxical endeavour to enclose original subject matter in familiar frameworks. Marius's sacrifice of Calpurnia was not a hackneyed subject at all, but Iphigenia in Aulis and other mythological narratives loom so large over the opera's plot that the connoisseur does well to place *Cajo Mario* in an imaginary gallery of paintings and to take (mischievous) pleasure in the dissection of its inspirations.

50 See Roccaforte, *Cajo Mario*, 43–45 (Act 2 Scene 11).