

Antonio Salieri's *La secchia rapita*
An experiment in the sustained parody of opera seria

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Count Carl von Zinzendorf, the Viennese bureaucrat whose diary serves as an important source of information about music and theater in the Habsburg capital between 1760 and 1810, left us an occasional glimpse at interaction between spectators in the court theaters, which could influence his understanding of an opera. On 3 December 1772, at an early performance of Salieri's *La secchia rapita* in the Burgtheater, he sat with the British ambassador Robert Keith, who pointed out to him the opera's most characteristic feature:

M. Keith, a coté duquel je me trouvois, me rendit tres attentif a la musique de *la Secchia rapita* petit opera Italien, ou le sérieux est merveilleusement allié avec le Comique. La musique est de Salierj, la fin du 1er acte admirable.¹

La secchia rapita had reached the stage about six weeks earlier; it was first performed in the Kärntnertortheater (not the Burgtheater, as stated in some secondary sources) on 21 October.² In it Antonio Salieri and his librettist Giovanni Gastone Boccherini, probably encouraged by the success of *La fiera di Venezia* earlier the same year, produced one of their most ambitious and interesting experiments in comic opera.³

¹ Zinzendorf, *Tagebücher*, Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, 3 December 1772.

² That the première took place in the Kärntnertortheater is recorded in the papers of the impresario Joseph Keglevich, in Budapest, Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archive), P 421 (Keglevich Cs.), V/21, fol. 66.

³ This discussion is based on the autograph score of *La secchia rapita*, A-Wn, Mus. Hs. 17841,

La secchia rapita is based on the mock-epic poem of the same name by the late Renaissance poet Alessandro Tassoni, who called his work a "poema eroicomico." Tassoni's poem tells of a war between the neighboring cities of Modena and Bologna in 1325, during which the Modenese army, having invaded Bologna, stole a wooden bucket as symbol of its victory. The comedy in Tassoni's poem, which comes largely from its clever parody of the literary devices of epic poetry, appealed to eighteenth-century taste. It was published frequently both in Italy and abroad and translated into English (*The trophy bucket*, 1710; *The rape of the bucket*, 1715) and French (*Le seau enlevé*, 1759). Voltaire, according to Casanova, called *La secchia rapita* "the only tragicomic poem which Italy possesses" and kept a copy at his bedside.⁴

In the *argomento* to his libretto Boccherini pointed to some of the changes he made in turning Tassoni's poema eroicomico into what he called a dramma eroicomico. Then, in an important passage that is not quite as clear as we might like, he explained how he transformed Tassoni's literary parody into an operatic parody:

E non essendo il Poema del Tassoni superficialmente che una Parodia de' Divini Poemi di Omero, del Petrarca, e dell'Ariosto, si è voluto imitare nella condotta delle scene, e nelle espressioni delle Arie, le Opere Eroiche più famose, e più conosciute, coll'intenzione di scegliere pensieri capaci di piacere nuovamente al Pubblico, ancorchè mascherati dallo stile giocoso.⁵

and the libretto published for the first production (Vienna: Kurzböck, 1772). For a list of other sources see Elena Biggi Parodi, *Catalogo tematico delle composizioni teatrali di Antonio Salieri*, Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2005, 630.

⁴ Giacomo Casanova, *History of my life*, trans. Willard R. Trask, 12 vols., London: Longmans, 1967-72, VI, 234. But to Charles Joseph Panckoucke Voltaire expressed a very different view: "La Secchia rapita est un très plat ouvrage, sans invention, sans imagination, sans variété, sans esprit et sans grâce." (28 February 1767, in *The Complete Works of Voltaire* CXV, Banbury: The Voltaire Foundation, 1974, 393).

⁵ The entire *argomento* is transcribed in Biggi Parodi, *Catalogo*, 628.

By "le Opere Eroiche più famose" Boccherini meant the librettos of Metastasio. He adopted certain aspects of the structure of Metastasian opera ("la condotta delle scene"). Several of the aria texts (to which Boccherini may have referred with the words "le espressioni delle Arie") are parodies of famous arias by the *poeta cesareo*.

The libretto of *La secchia rapita*, like Metastasio's *drammi per musica*, consists largely of dialogue in blank verse and exit arias; the ensembles typical of comic opera after 1750 are conspicuously rare. In spite of the fondness for choral writing that Salieri demonstrated in many of his early comic operas (such as *Le donne letterate*, *Don Chisciotte alle nozze di Gamace*, *La fiera di Venezia* and *La calamita de' cuori*) *La secchia rapita* has no choruses. Its nineteen arias, one duet, two finales and concluding *coro* (the short ensemble for all the soloists with which many of Metastasio's operas end) represent a ratio of arias to ensembles of almost 5:1, one of the largest in Salieri's oeuvre, and close to that in some of Metastasio's librettos.

In choosing Metastasian aria-texts to make fun of, Boccherini cast his net widely. He drew material from no less than seven different operas: *Ezio*, *Semiramide*, *Didone abbandonata*, *Demetrio*, *Antigono*, *L'Olimpiade* and *La clemenza di Tito*. Salieri seems to have been particularly fond of *Semiramide*. He later made two attempts to set it to music, the second of which resulted in an opera performed in Munich during Carnival 1782: his only opera on a text by Metastasio.⁶ It was probably under Salieri's influence that Boccherini, in turning Tassoni's poem into a libretto, made more references to *Semiramide* than to any other Metastasian *dramma per musica*.

Salieri knew Metastasio personally. Florian Gassmann, Salieri's mentor and teacher, had introduced him to Metastasio shortly after his arrival in Vienna in 1766.⁷ Salieri participated in

⁶ John A. Rice, "Salieri's *Semiramide* and the End of the Metastasian Tradition in Munich," Theodor Göllner and Stephan Hörner, eds., *Mozarts Idomeneo und die Musik in München zur Zeit Karl Theodors*, Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2001, 151-63.

⁷ John A. Rice, *Antonio Salieri and Viennese Opera*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

Metastasio's regular Sunday-morning salons; he later became a more frequent visitor, taking part in musical entertainments of the Martinez family with whom Metastasio lived. The aged poet befriended the young composer, according to Ignaz von Mosel, Salieri's first biographer:

... ließ Metastasio ihn, wenn sie allein waren, öfters ganze Scenen aus seinen Opern und Oratorien declamirend lesen, "welches," sagt Salieri, "mir zu einer überaus nützlichen Schule in der Declamation gedient hat, eine Schule, die--wie Metastasio meinte--jedem, welcher sich zum Gesang-Componisten bilden will, unumgänglich nöthig sey."⁸

In composing *La secchia rapita* Salieri set to music parodies of texts he may have read aloud in the presence of Metastasio himself. He responded to the heroic and mock-heroic qualities of Boccherini's text with a score that, glorying in and at the same time caricaturing the musical magnificence of serious opera, has heavier orchestration and more complicated textures than those of his previous comic operas. Within the Metastasian framework set up by Boccherini Salieri moved freely between various operatic styles and various juxtapositions of serious and comic. Perceptible through much of the opera, and contributing much to its comedy, is an undercurrent of sexual innuendo propelled by a series of doubles-entendres.

The overture to *La secchia rapita* looks to the past, to the French overture of the Baroque; but more specifically to a French overture written by Gassmann in an opera that may well have served as inspiration for *La secchia rapita*. *L'opera seria* (Vienna, 1769; libretto by Ranieri de' Calzabigi) is a comedy about the production of a Metastasian serious opera.⁹ Act 3 parodies the performance of a *dramma per musica* called *L'Oranzebe*. This act begins with a

1998, 20-21.

⁸ Ignaz von Mosel, *Ueber das Leben und die Werke des Anton Salieri*, Vienna: Wallishausser, 1827, 26.

⁹ *L'opera seria* is available in a facsimile of a manuscript score in A-Wn, Mus. Hs. 17775, New York: Garland, 1982.

sinfonia in the form of a French overture.

Gassmann's sinfonia, in C major, is orchestrated with trumpets and drums. Although it lacks a tempo indication, the first part, fifteen measures in common time, is presumably a slow introduction. This passage, dominated by eighth-note staccato triplets (Ex. 1) and ending with an open cadence, is followed by a fugue in triple meter based on a subject consisting largely of repeated eighth notes (Ex. 2). The fugue includes a prominent oboe solo. Again Gassmann supplied no tempo indication; but he must have intended the fast tempo that was normal in the second, fugal section of a French overture. The movement's several sequences are in keeping with its antiquated form; so is the return, at the end, to the music--and presumably the tempo--of the introduction.

Ex. 1. Gassmann, *Opera seria*, overture, mm. 1-3

[No tempo in source]

oboes, horns, trumpets

timpani

strings

Salieri's overture, also in C, has many of the same features. It also begins with a slow introduction, richly scored for an orchestra that includes trumpets and drums. The Andante maestoso is dominated by eighth-note triplets "tutto staccato" and by massive chords in the

Ex. 2. Gassmann, *Opera seria*, overture, mm. 19-28

Violin I, Oboe 1

Violin 2, Oboe 2

woodwinds, brass and timpani (Ex. 3). It leads to a Presto in polyphonic texture (not a fugue, however) whose principal theme, played by solo oboe, features repeated eighth notes (Ex. 4). Long sequential passages later in the Presto give this music, like Gassmann's, an old-fashioned, learned flavor. Salieri's overture returns to the slow tempo at the end; but the mode here is minor instead of major; and the overture differs from Gassmann's in ending impressively on an open cadence: V of C minor.

Boccherini's relation to Calzabigi was similar to Salieri's relation to Gassmann. Calzabigi had served during the late 1760s as Boccherini's mentor and had, in the year in which *L'opera seria* was staged, urged Boccherini to collaborate with Salieri.¹⁰ The parallels between the overtures to *L'Oranzebe* and *La secchia rapita* suggest that the operatic parody of Calzabigi and

¹⁰ Mosel, 30-31. On Giovanni Gastone Boccherini see Gabriella Biagi Ravenni, "Calzabigi e dintorini: Boccherini, Angiolini, la Toscana e Vienna," *La figura e l'opera di Ranieri de' Calzabigi*, ed. Federico Marri, Florence: Olschki, 1989, 29-71, and Rice, *Antonio Salieri*, 45-46, 112-13.

Ex. 3. Salieri, *La secchia rapita*, overture, mm. 1-4

Andante maestoso

oboes, trumpets, horns

timpani in D, C, G, bassoons

strings

Ex. 4. Salieri, *La secchia rapita*, overture

Presto

oboes

viola, bassoon

Gassmann inspired that of their two protégés. But by using a French overture similar to Gassmann's at the beginning of the opera Salieri emphasized an important difference between *L'Oranzebe* and *La secchia rapita*. While *L'Oranzebe* serves as a single act within a three-act comic opera, *La secchia rapita* is an independent, full-length opera: a parody that mimics the length, structure and musical splendor of the genre of which it makes fun.

A remarkable feature of Salieri's overture is the use of three timpani instead of the normal two. Tuned in D, C and low G, Salieri's timpani enhance the overture's martial sound, serving as

a counterpart to its elaborate trumpet parts. In doing so they anticipate several important numbers later in the opera in which the key of C major, two trumpets and three timpani are combined. One of these numbers is the finale of Act 1, where the text confirms these instruments' martial connotations:

Colaggiù dove rimbomba
 Del Tamburo e della Tromba
 L'alto squillo, e il fiero strepito
 Meglio alfin si parlerà. (Act 1, Sc. 16)

The repeated sound of two trumpets and three drums in C major helps listeners perceive this key as the opera's central tonality and gives *La secchia rapita* a sonority quite different from those of Salieri's other operas.¹¹

Renoppia, a young Modenese woman whom Boccherini, mixing Greek mythology and Italian history, calls an Amazon, awaits the return of her beloved Manfredi from a raid on Bologna, while Renoppia's friend Gherarda awaits her cowardly and dishonest husband, the Count of Culagna. Renoppia's father Lorenzo, leader of the Modenese, welcomes the returning army, which enters to the sound of a march in C major, richly orchestrated with trumpets, horns, flutes and three timpani.

Salieri assigned the roles of Renoppia and Gherarda to high coloratura sopranos. He loved brilliant, high soprano roles, which can be found in many of his early operas (for example, Artemia in *Le donne letterate*, Calloandra in *La fiera di Venezia* and Vanesia in *La finta scema*) and a few of his later ones as well (such as the Marchesa in *Il mondo alla rovescia*). He trained

¹¹ *La secchia rapita* is the first of several operas in which Salieri demonstrated an interest in extending the timpani's role in the operatic orchestra. David Charlton, "Salieri's timpani," in *Musical times*, CXII (1971), 961-2, discusses the three timpani in *La secchia rapita* and other examples of Salieri's adventurous writing for timpani.

some of his best students, such as Catarina Cavalieri (who created the role of Vanesia) and Theresa Gassmann (the first Marchesa), to sing such roles.

Salieri made Manfredi and the Count of Culagna tenors, and Lorenzo a bass. We might have expected him to assign Manfredi to a *musico*. But a male soprano or alto was one feature of opera seria not incorporated into *La secchia rapita*. Although the male *parti serie* in many Goldonian opere buffe of the 1750s and 1760s were created by *musici*, by the 1770s they participated only rarely in opera buffa. A more important reason for the absence of a *musico* from the cast of *La secchia rapita* was the absence of a male soprano from the Viennese opera troupe when this opera came to the stage. Salieri wrote important roles for some of the greatest *musici*--Giuseppe Millico in *Armida*, Luigi Marchesi in *Annibale in Capua*--but seems not to have written any such roles in his comic operas.

Manfredi, in the course of a long account of the battle with the Bolognese, calls Bologna "la città di Sipa," a term explained in one of many pseudo-scholarly footnotes in which Boccherini defined some of the bizarre words and phrases that he used in his libretto: "Fu dal Tassoni chiamata così Bologna, perché là essa suol dirsi *sipa*, invece di *sia*." (In other words, in Bolognese dialect "sipa" served as third-person sigular subjunctive of the verb "essere.") Boccherini found comedy in circumlocution, delighting in the most obscure ways of referring to Bologna and then explaining his obscurities in footnotes. The Count of Culagna says of the Modenese invasion:

Anch'io
Volevo entrare a porre a ferro, e fuoco
Mortadelle, e dottrine. (Act 1, Sc. 2)

A footnote explains:

Bologna fu sempre celeberrima per la sua Università, ed Accademie; viene universalmente chiamata la Madre delle Scienze, perché i suoi Figli sono la maggior

parte dottissimi; ed è famosa la Mortadella, che vi si fabbrica, che è una specie di salsiccioncino di un gusto squisito.

Later in the opera Boccherini incorporated an allusion to mortadella into an amusing *endecasillabo*, referring to Bologna as "La gran città della salsiccia buona" (Act 2, Sc. 5). A footnote reminds readers of the explanation quoted above. These allusions to mortadella are funny in this context partly because Metastasio studiously avoided referring to anything so common as food, and partly because the phallic connotations of this *salsiccioncino* were as obvious in the eighteenth century as they are now.

Manfredi displays a trophy of the Modenese victory: a wooden bucket stolen from a Bolognese well. He entrusts the bucket to Renoppia and asks her to guard it well in an aria borrowed by Boccherini from Metastasio's *Ezio*, a libretto that Gassmann had set to music only three years earlier (Rome, 1769). In Metastasio's aria Ezio asks Fulvia to love him, to trust him, and not to worry about the emperor Valentinian's future actions:

Pensa a serbarmi, o cara,
 I dolci affetti tuoi:
 Amami, e lascia poi
 Ogni altra cura a me.
 Tu mi vuoi dir col pianto
 Che resti in abbandono.
 No, così vil non sono;
 E meco ingrato tanto,
 No, Cesare non è. (Metastasio, *Ezio*, Act 1, Sc. 3)

Boccherini turned this lyrical expression of noble love into a comic aria by replacing *affetti* with *secchia* and by introducing several words whose tone is decidedly non-Metastasian: *civetta*, *fraschetta* and *birbante*. These every-day words would attract no attention in a comic opera, but sound odd and funny in the elevated context of Metastasian poetry. The bucket itself, a round-mouthed receptacle for fluids, might easily have been interpreted as an allusion to the vagina, and

thus a counterpart to the mortadella:

Pensa a serbarmi, o cara,
 La Secchia mia diletta,
 Non far poi la Civetta,
 E lascia fare a me.
 Non ti sdegnar, ben mio,
 Che se non sei fraschetta
 Birbante non son'io,
 E morirò per te. (Act 1, Sc. 8)

Salieri wrote on these silly words an aria that begins with a tender opening phrase and a melody in a-b-b' form, as if he had intended to write a pathetic *aria d'affetto* on Metastasio's original text instead of on Boccherini's parody (Ex. 5). But when Manfredi repeats the word "secchia" to a melisma that includes a quirky dotted figure repeated in descending sequence and then a sudden leap up two octaves, the music begins to sound like a parody. Salieri's parodistic intent is confirmed in the next phrase: short repeated motives, repetition of notes of a single value, and many leaps in the melody all signal a shift to comic style. Comic too is the four-fold repetition of "lascia"; and the return to a more noble, cantabile style at the end of the phrase is itself comic in its unexpectedness.

Renoppia responds with another parody of Metastasio, this one based on an aria in *Semiramide*. In front of Queen Semiramide and the Assyrian court, Scitalce throws down his sword and expresses his anger at having been betrayed:

Voi, che le mie vicende,
 Voi, che i miei torti udite,
 Fuggite, sì fuggite:
 Qui legge non s'intende
 Qui fedeltà non v'è.
 E puoi, tirrano, e puoi (*a Semiramide*)
 Senza rossor mirarmi?
 Qual fede avrà per voi
 Chi non la serba in me? (Metastasio, *Semiramide*, Act 2, Sc. 3)

Ex. 5. Salieri, *La secchia rapita*, “Pensa a serbarmi o cara,” mm. 1-20

Manfredi

Adagio

8 Pen - sa, pen - sa, pen - sa a ser - bar - mi o ca - ra, o ca - ra la

6 sec - chia mia di - let - ta, la sec - chia mia di -

11 *tr* let - ta. Non far poi la ci - vet - ta, e la - scia, e

15 la - scia, e la - scia, la - scia, la - scia, la - scia fa - re me la - scia, la - scia, la - scia fa -

18 *tr* re me

Here again the bucket (used as a masculine rather than a feminine noun) undercuts the seriousness of Metastasio's poetry:

Voi, che le mie faccende,
 Voi, che i miei fatti udite,
 Partite, sì partite,
 La vita quì si spende
 Un Secchio ad onorar.
 E per un Secchio anch'io,
 Oppresso dal timore
 Sento nel petto il core
 Costretto a palpitar. (Act 1, Sc. 9)

The Bolognese Antibo and Titta (both tenors) arrive in Modena as ambassadors seeking peace, the return of the bucket, and the hands of Renoppia and Gherarda in marriage. Antibo

expresses his love for Renoppia in a comic aria, "Un impaziente amante," set by Salieri as a cheerful Allegretto in G major. Titta praises Gherarda in an aria that Boccherini annotated with no less than three footnotes, including a reference to a libretto by Goldoni, to whom Boccherini, who liked to call himself *poeta arcade*, referred by his arcadian pseudonym:

Odi, o mia dolce fiaccola,
 Almen l'estrema ciaccola, (11)
 Che il labbro mio ti dà.
 Amo la vita, e spendola
 Ardendo qual Bellendola (12)
 Ai rai di tua beltà.
 E Tu, crudel, qual fulmine
 Hai già ridotte al culmine (13)
 Le mie calamità.

(11) *Ciaccola* parola Lombarda, che equivale a ciarla, chiacchera, parlata &c.

(12) *Bellendola* equivale lo stesso che farfalla.

(13) *Culmine*, cioè sommo, e più alto grado. Pollisseno Fegejo nella Buona Figliuola maritata:

"Veggio già in aria il fulmine
 "Che dalla Casa al Culmine
 "Sta per precipitar.

(Act 1, Sc. 13)

Lorenzo and the other Modenese receive the Bolognese ambassadors, but refuse their offer of peace. The finale begins with a declaration of war by both sides. Trumpets and three timpani sound yet again in C major. An Allegro in common time, the finale is unusual in that it contains no changes of tempo or meter. This makes dramatic sense. After war is declared the characters exchange threats and express anger and courage, but there are no obvious changes in dramatic situation or clear distinctions of characterization. In another departure from convention the finale ends with the exit of all the characters: a march to war aptly accompanied by Salieri's march-like music.

Here again, even in the midst of an ensemble, an apparently heroic moment is undercut

by parodistic references to Metastasio. Renoppia sings: "Son guerriera e sono amante," echoing the famous aria in *Didone abbandonata*, "Son regina e sono amante." (Salieri was later to make fun of Dido's words again in *Il talismano*, where Pancrazio sings "Padre sono, e son tutore.") Antibo's response--"Meglio tu rifletti al core"--was probably meant to be recognized as a reference to the aria "Meglio rifletti al dono" in Metastasio's *Antigono*. Nonsensical expressions add to the comedy as the Modenese, at the climax of the finale, make this anticlimactic promise:

Come Borea conquassabile
 Che fracassa le Campagne
 A mangiarvi le Castagne
 Tutta Modena verrà. (Act 1, Sc. 16)

A note explains: "Realmente in Bologna si fa gran consumo di Castagne, e di farina di esse." But the note leaves unmentioned the sexual connotations of *castagne*, one of the many Italian slang words for testicles.

Gherarda takes great pride in her marital fidelity, even though her husband is a coward and a liar who asks Titta for help in poisoning her. She exaggerates her constancy, celebrated as a virtue in opera seria, to the point of caricature. Instead of turning against her husband when she hears of his plot near the beginning of Act 2, Gherarda reaffirms the strength of her fidelity in "Sulle mie tempie in dono," at once the opera's most unusual and most characteristic aria.

The text begins with a quatrain that could have been sung in an opera seria, but then evolves into a long comic catalogue in which Gherarda lists women famous for their chastity or fidelity and boasts that she can better them all:

Sulle mie tempie in dono
 Di puri gigli un serto
 Nel tempio suo la Gloria
 Mi porgerà da sè.
 Io sederò per merto
 Di casto cedro in Trono

Ed al mio Nome accanto
 Già perderanno il vanto
 Penelope, Lucrezia,
 Virginia, Dido, Alceste,
 Ersilia, e le Sabine.
 Ed Artemisia, e Porzia,
 E Claudia, e le Vestali,
 Saran Donne triviali
 Al paragon di me. (Act 2, Sc. 4)

In the final phrase the word *triviali* carries a meaning quite different from its English relative. It means bawdy or lewd. With it, Gherarda reduces her claims of virtue to absurdity by accusing Antiquity's most virtuous women of being no better than whores.

The young Salieri delighted in bringing coloratura sopranos together with solo woodwinds, especially oboe, in virtuoso display. "Astrea nel cor mi siede" (in *Le donne letterate*), which features a concerto-like dialogue for flute, oboe, bassoon and high soprano, is the first of many such arias in the early operas. The patently parodistic aim of *La secchia rapita* seems to have encouraged Salieri to take his interest in concertante arias for coloratura soprano to a new level of complexity and innovation.

"Sulle mie tempie in dono" begins with a forty-eight-measure orchestral introduction that features an extraordinary band of soloists: two trumpets in C, three timpani in D, C and G, one horn in C and--as we might expect--one oboe. The trumpets and timpani play by themselves at the beginning, drawing attention to the most unusual part of the concertante group (Ex. 6). Gherarda enters with a march-like melody similar to one that Salieri would later use in a heroic concertante aria in *Europa riconosciuta* of 1778, "Quando più irato freme." Brilliant coloratura takes Gherarda eventually up to high E. Like several of Salieri's other bravura arias for soprano,¹² "Sulle mie tempie" culminates in a written-out cadenza for soprano and all the

¹² Such as "Astrea nel cor mi siede" in *Le donne letterate*, "Vi sono sposa e amante" in *La fiera di Venezia* and "Vedo l'amiche insigne" in the cantata *La sconfitta di Borea*.

Ex. 6. Salieri, *La secchia rapita*, “Sulle mie tempie in dono,” mm. 1-6

Allegro

trumpets

timpani

oboe

basso

6

6

Ex. 7. “Sulle mie tempie in dono,” mm. 192-200

oboe

Gherarda

(porge-) rà

trumpets, timpani (2 octaves lower)

oboe

horn

192

194

trumpets, timpani

oboe

horn

198

198

concertante instruments: surely one of the most bizarre of all eighteenth-century cadenzas (Ex. 7).

Further negotiations between Lorenzo and Antibo lead to an offer from Antibo: the Modenese must give up the bucket or Renoppia in exchange for peace. Lorenzo lets Manfredi make the choice, telling him, in the aria "Talor se i venti fischiano" (a parody of "Talor se il vento freme," in *Semiramide*) that it is better to avoid war.

Boccherini's Metastasian parody is not always as blatant as in "Talor se i venti fischiano." A subtler, less obviously comic transformation of a Metastasian poem served as the basis for the aria that Manfredi sings after Lorenzo leaves the stage. Faced with the classic opera seria dilemma, the choice between love and honor, between Renoppia and the bucket, Manfredi reminds us of Aeneas's moral struggle in *Didone abbandonata*.¹³ Aeneas sings:

Se resto su lido,
 Se sciolgo le vele
 Infido, crudele
 Mi sento chiamar.
 E intanto, confuso
 Nel dubbio funesto
 Non parto, non resto,
 Ma provo il martire
 Che avrei nel partire,
 Che avrei nel restar. (Metastasio, *Didone abbandonata*, Act 1, Sc. 18)

In a parody that Boccherini must have intended for true cognoscenti, Manfredi alludes to Metastasio's versification and style instead of quoting a familiar incipit:

La Sposa se cedo,
 La Secchia se rendo,
 Speranza non vedo
 Di pace, e d'onor.

¹³ Vittorio Della Croce and Francesco Blanchetti, *Il caso Salieri*, Turin: Eda, 1994, 446.

E intanto indeciso
 La scelta sospendo,
 Tradisco, ed offendo
 La Gloria e l'Amor. (Act 2, Sc. 7)

The Count of Culagna tells Renoppia that for her sake he is about to poison his wife; he even jokes about his intended crime in an aria parodying Metastasio's "Scherza il nocchier talora," in *Demetrio* (Act 1, Sc. 10):

Scherza talora il Gatto
 Col Sorce che appetisce... (Act 2, Sc. 9)

Abandoned by Manfredi, Renoppia expresses her despair in "Son qual lacero Tartana," an aria that parodies one of Metastasio's favorite devices: comparing a character in distress to a storm-tossed ship. The aria shares its first two words with one of Metastasio's storm-arias: "Son qual per mare ignoto" (*L'Olimpiade*, Act 3, Sc. 5); but that is probably not enough of a parallel to allow us to call "Son qual lacero Tartana" a parody of Metastasio's aria. Boccherini's intention here seems to have been to make fun of a type of Metastasian aria rather than a particular example of that type. Renoppia reduces the storm-metaphor to absurdity by announcing--in the middle of her aria--that she will now describe the winds threatening the ship, as if she were herself the *poeta cesareo*:

Dunque andiamo a discrizione
 D'Euro, Noto, o d'Acquilone. (Act 2, Sc. 10)

The finale of Act 2 depicts a banquet at which a cup of soup, thought to contain the poison, is passed comically from character to character, in a parody of a scene in *Semiramide* in which a poisoned drink is likewise passed around the stage. In Metastasio's libretto Ircano throws the cup on the ground with the words

Vada la tazza a terra (Metastasio, *Semiramide*, Act 2, Sc. 2)

while Boccherini has the Count of Culagna sing

Vada la broda a terra. (Act 2, Sc. 12)

Suddenly Lorenzo enters with soldiers, announcing that the Bolognese are attacking Modena. The Modenese react mock-heroically:

Renoppia:	Astri!	
Manfredi:	Stelle!	
Gherarda:	Numi!	
Il Conte:	Fato!	(Act 2, Sc. 12)

They all go off to defend the city and the bucket.

In Act 3 it is decided to settle the quarrel once and for all by means of duels between Manfredi and Antibo and between the Count of Culagna and Titta. Before leaving to prepare for combat, Manfredi bids farewell to Renoppia by parodying the aria in *La clemenza di Tito* in which Sesto bids farewell to Vitellia as he is being taken away to prison. Sesto sings:

Se mai senti spirarti sul viso
Lieve fiato che lento s'aggiri (Metastasio, *La clemenza di Tito*, Act 2, Sc. 15)

Manfredi sings:

Se mai senti soffiarti sul viso
Freddo vento, che il naso t'agghiacci (Act 3, Sc. 8)

Boccherini described the setting of the opera's final scenes as follows: "A public amphitheater. In the background Anfiteatro Pubblico. In prospetto distinta Loggia per il

Reggimento Modenese; da un Lato Palchetto per alcuni Suonatori" (Act 3, Sc. 10). To the sound of trumpet fanfares--a sound by now familiar to every listener--Manfredi defeats Antibo; but when it is the count's turn to fight, he pretends to be injured and flees Titta. Lorenzo refuses further negotiations with Antibo and Titta, and the opera ends with a short ensemble in which all seven characters sing that the rape of the bucket will be more famous than the abductions of the Sabine women, of Helen, Ersilia and Persephone.

The première of *La secchia rapita* was recorded in a Viennese theatrical almanac, which referred to the twenty-two-year-old Salieri, with some exaggeration, as a "famous composer":

Den 21 [October 1772] ... zum erstenmale ein wälsches heroisch-komisches Singspiel in drey Akten: *la secchia rapita*, die Musik von dem berühmten Tonkünstler Herrn Salieri, die Poesie von Boccherini. Das Singspiel ist aus dem komischen Gedichte des Tassoni entstanden; einige Episoden gehören dem neuern Dichter. Es gefällt und erhält sich.¹⁴

La secchia rapita, performed eleven times within a month of its first performance, remained in the repertory until the end of Carnival 1773.¹⁵ But despite the opera's favorable reception and Zinzendorf's praise, it does not seem to have been revived in Vienna thereafter.

The lack of revivals may have something to do with Salieri's unusually large orchestra, and especially the elaborate trumpet and timpani parts that probably required the impresario Joseph Keglevich to hire trumpet players and a timpanist (with three drums) for every performance. (The court theater orchestras had no trumpeters or timpanists on their permanent rosters during the 1770s.) A record of the theatrical administration's expenses during 1772 and

¹⁴ *Theatralalmanach von Wien, für das Jahr 1773*, Vienna: Kurzböck, n.d.

¹⁵ A calendar of performances in the court theater from January to November 1772 is published in the *Theatralalmanach von Wien, für das Jahr 1773*; a calendar of performances in the court theaters during 1773 is published in *Almanach des Theaters in Wien*, [Vienna, 1774].

early 1773 includes references to several payments "für Trompeten, und Pauken" between October 1772 and March 1773, precisely the period in which *La secchia rapita* was in the repertory.¹⁶

Nor did *La secchia rapita* receive more than a few productions outside of Vienna. Zinzendorf witnessed one of these, in Dresden during March 1775; his comment suggests that he had not read the libretto in Vienna (or perhaps that the bilingual libretto published in Dresden allowed him to make a more informed judgment of it than he had in Vienna): "*La Secchia rapita*, la musique de Salieri est charmante. Le drame, que je n'avois pas jamais suivi a Vienne, n'a pas de sens commun."¹⁷

Although *La secchia rapita* is a comic opera, it does not involve the insertion of Goldonian parti serie into the framework of an opera buffa. It goes well beyond most parodies of opera seria in eighteenth-century opere buffe, which normally limited themselves to single scenes or single musical numbers.¹⁸ⁱ Metastasian *dramma per musica* pervades every aspect of this work: its large-scale structure as well as its individual numbers. But the seriousness of opera seria is constantly undermined by parody. Like Gassmann's *Oranzebe*, *La secchia rapita* is a comic opera about the conventions of opera seria. As such it foreshadows the Viennese comic operas of the 1780s and 1790s that derive much of their drama from the manipulation of seria conventions. By calling their opera a *dramma eroicomico* Boccherini and Salieri acknowledged their debt to Tassoni; but they also set a precedent for Viennese librettists and composers of the 1780s, who favored this and similar generic terms to emphasize the tragic and heroic content of operas that also contain comic characters and situations.

¹⁶ Magyar Országos Levéltár, P 421 (Keglevich Cs.), V/18, fols. 649-651.

¹⁷ Zinzendorf, *Tagebücher*, 26 March 1775.

¹⁸ See Mary Hunter, "Some Representations of Opera Seria in Opera Buffa," *Cambridge Opera Journal* III (1991), 89-108.

