

MARGHERITA COSTA

The Buffoons, A Ridiculous Comedy

A BILINGUAL EDITION



Edited and translated by

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Iter Press
Toronto, Ontario

Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies
Tempe, Arizona

2018

Iter Press

Tel: 416/978-7074 Email: iter@utoronto.ca

Fax: 416/978-1668 Web: www.itergateway.org

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Fax: 480/965-1681 Web: acmrs.org

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Printed in Canada.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Costa, Margherita, active 17th century author. | Díaz, Sara editor translator. | Goethals, Jessica editor translator. | Costa, Margherita, active 17th century. Buffoni. English. | Costa, Margherita, active 17th century. Buffoni.

Title: The buffoons : a ridiculous comedy : a bilingual edition / Margherita Costa ; edited and translated by Sara E. Díaz and Jessica Goethals.

Description: Toronto, Ontario : Iter Press ; Tempe, Arizona : Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018. | Series: The other voice in early modern Europe: the Toronto series ; 63 | Series: Medieval and renaissance texts and studies ; volume 535 | In English and Italian. | Includes bibliographical references and index. Identifiers: LCCN 2017052904 (print) | LCCN 2017058246 (ebook) | ISBN 9780866987462 (ebook) | ISBN 9780866985925 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Classification: LCC PQ4621.C74 (ebook) | LCC PQ4621.C74 B9413 2018 (print) | DDC 852/.5--dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017058246>

Cover illustration:

Portrait of Margherita Costa from Costa, *Lo stipo* (Venice, 1639). Photo credit: Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries.

Cover design:

Maureen Morin, Information Technology Services, University of Toronto Libraries.

Typesetting and production:

Iter Press.

Introduction

The Other Voice

Though little known to modern readers, Margherita Costa (c. 1600/1610–after 1657) was one of the most prolific secular female writers of mid-Seicento Italy. A singer, poet, dramatist, and rumored courtesan, Costa published an eclectic and expansive body of literature ranging from dramatic, historical, and devotional works to amorous, occasional, and satirical poetry.¹ She celebrated patrons such as the Barberini, the Medici, and the royal house of France in her publications, and performed before audiences in courts across Italy and Europe. As versatile in content and style as she was in genre, she did not limit herself to the high registers with which she exalted this store of elite benefactors. She also embraced a farcical and ribald approach to courtly life in a number of her works, capturing the appetites and entertainments of her age. Costa's 1641 burlesque comedy *Li buffoni*, or *The Buffoons*, is exemplary of her satirical pen.² Showcasing a cast of unconventional characters engaged in both erotic and bizarre occupations—a group composed of dwarfs, hunchbacks, and the titular buffoons—this “ridiculous comedy” caricatures Florence under Grand Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici.

With *The Buffoons*, the first female-authored comedy published in Italy, Costa participated in a tradition of women's dramaturgy that included such notable figures as Isabella Andreini (1562–1604), Maddalena Campiglia (1553–1595), Barbara Torelli Benedetti (1546–post-1603), and Valeria Miani (c. 1563?–post 1620). While these predecessors made bold incursions into the realm of male letters through pastoral and tragedy, Costa experimented with risqué and slapstick comedy in a period increasingly hostile to female authorship. The late Cinquecento and the first years of the Seicento had still boasted a myriad of prominent and influential women writers, but their numbers declined sharply mid-century, the very moment of Costa's activity. Aspiring female authors faced a number of obstacles in this period: male-authored polemical works increasingly

1. Costa is thus an important exception to Laura Benedetti's assertion that Lucrezia Marinella was “the only early modern Italian woman writer to move so freely among different genres”; Lucrezia Marinella, *Exhortations to Women and to Others If They Please*, ed. and trans. Laura Benedetti (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012), 2.

2. Margherita Costa, *Li buffoni, commedia ridicola* (Florence: Massi e Landi, 1641). In the introduction to her edited volume of select Costa poems, Natalia Costa-Zalessow argues that the work must have been written in 1638–39, before Stefano della Bella, the artist who executed the frontispiece, moved to Paris; Margherita Costa, *Voice of a Virtuosa and Courtesan: Selected Poems of Margherita Costa*, ed. Natalia Costa-Zalessow, trans. Joan E. Borrelli (New York: Bordighera Press, 2015), 34. However, Della Bella continued to work periodically for the Medici even when based in Rome during the 1630s, so distance did not necessarily preclude his collaboration at a later date.

targeted women; a general slump in female authority in Italy's courts, save select locations like Florence, reduced the number of patronesses; and many women were hesitant to associate themselves with the sexual suggestiveness of baroque stylistics.³ Though Costa was not the only woman writing in these years—Lucrezia Marinella published her epic *L'Enrico ovvero Bisanzio acquistato* (Enrico, or Byzantium Conquered) in 1635, for example, while the Venetian nun Arcangela Tarabotti composed a number of works in the 1640s and 1650s—she was both the most fruitful and the most unusual. Nor did her efforts go unnoticed; Costa won the support of patrons and male literary figures alike. Despite her singularity and long list of novel publications, however, this charismatic figure still remains understudied. Contemporary scholarship has largely overlooked her works as a consequence of lingering concerns over her personal sexual morality and the aesthetic value of baroque literature more broadly. The present facing-pages edition of *The Buffoons* aims to introduce readers to this *sui generis* figure and her delightful comedy, and to re-position her within seventeenth-century literary and performative culture.

The Life and Works of Margherita Costa

Like a number of Costa's biographical details, her dates are somewhat hazy. Her contemporaries place her birth in 1600 or 1610, and she last surfaces in 1657.⁴ She began her singing career in her native Rome and throughout her literary engagement consistently emblazoned her cover pages with the name "Margherita Costa romana."⁵ These volumes offer occasional glimpses into her life through dedicatory letters and some autobiographical poetry, though these moments should be treated with the distance and caution appropriate to the enterprise of examining

3. See especially the chapter "Backlash, 1590–1650," in Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 166–227.

4. For the main biographical studies of Costa, see Dante Bianchi's two-part "Una cortigiana rimatrice del Seicento: Margherita Costa," *Rassegna critica della letteratura italiana* 29 (1924): 1–31 and 187–203; and 30 (1925): 158–211; Natalia Costa-Zalessow, "Margherita Costa," in *Seventeenth-Century Italian Poets and Dramatists*, ed. Albert N. Mancini and Glenn Palen Pierce (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2008): 113–18; and Martino Capucci, "Costa, Margherita," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (hereinafter *DBI*) 30 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1984): 233–34; <[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/margherita-costa_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/>](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/margherita-costa_(Dizionario-Biografico)/>) .

5. For reasons that are unclear, a small number of commenters have described Costa as being from Ferrara. See, for example, Alberto Ghislanzoni, *Luigi Rossi (Aloysius de Rubeis): Biografia e analisi delle composizioni* (Milan: Fratelli Bocca, 1954), 154. Also for obscure reasons, the by-line for her final work, *Gl'amori della luna* (Venice: Giuliani, 1654), reads "Maria Margherita Costa." Assorted sources, primarily from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, call her "Margherita Costa Ronaca," a surname that does not appear in any of her works. Costa-Zalessow hypothesizes that it may originate from an erroneous transcription of "romana"; Costa, *Voice of a Virtuosa and Courtesan*, 23.

literary works for historical facts. Medieval and early modern writers often constructed authorial personas through the revelation of ostensibly personal details, and Costa was no exception. Similarly, much of the available information about her early life originates in the satirical works of her contemporary Janus Nicius Erythraeus (the Latin pen name of Giovanni Vittorio Rossi) and must therefore be approached with prudent skepticism.⁶

By such accounts, her family was of humble social standing.⁷ Costa had at least two sisters, one a fellow singer and another a nun, as well as a brother who gained an unseemly reputation due to his involvement in physical altercations and potentially to activities as a bravo in the Barberini's employ. Erythraeus suggests that Costa's father pushed her and her sister, Anna Francesca (called "La Checca"), into the role of court singer (*cantante di camera*).⁸ While opera flourished in Rome during this period thanks to the talent attracted by Barberini patronage, its stages were prohibited to women.⁹ Excluded from public Roman performances and replaced by castrati due to a papal ban motivated by concerns over female morality, the city's female singers performed in more private venues that lent themselves to blurred lines—both perceptual and at times actual—between being a vocalist and a courtesan.¹⁰ As Susan McClary notes in her study of desire and seventeenth-century music, many "skilled female musicians practiced their arts as courtesans, in which case the selling of the voice attached directly to the prostitution of the body and vocal prowess operated quite literally as siren

6. For a discussion of Erythraeus, see Luisella Giachino, "Cicero libertinus: La satira della Roma barberiniana nell'*Eudemia* dell'Eritreo," *Studi seicenteschi* 43 (2002): 185–215; and Luigi Gerboni, *Un umanista nel Seicento, Giano Nicio Eritreo: Studio biografico critico* (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1899).

7. See Bianchi, "Una cortigiana rimatrice del Seicento," 29:3.

8. Janus Nicius Erythraeus [ps. Giovanni Vittorio Rossi], *Eudemiae libri decem* (Amsterdam: Iodocum Kalcovium et socios, 1645), 84–86.

9. On Urban VIII (Maffeo Barberini) and his nephews Cardinal Francesco, Don Taddeo, and Cardinal Antonio Barberini as musical patrons, see Frederick Hammond, *Music and Spectacle in Baroque Rome: Barberini Patronage under Urban VIII* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Hammond, *The Ruined Bridge: Studies in Barberini Patronage of Music and Spectacle, 1631–1679* (Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2010); and Lois Rosow, "Power and Display: Music in Court Theater," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music*, ed. Tim Carter and John Butt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 223–37.

10. This ban remained in place until 1798. On female opera singers, see John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 56–114. For a discussion of late sixteenth-century concerns over female musicianship, see Anthony Newcomb, "Courtesans, Muses or Musicians? Professional Women Musicians in Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 90–115.

song.”¹¹ Virtuosity came with or at a price. Whether or not a female singer or actress engaged in amorous employment, the very act of performing before a public or semi-public audience cast her in a certain light and could signal her openness to such engagements. Accusations of courtesanship followed Costa’s peers and predecessors like the prolific singer and composer Barbara Strozzi (1619–1677), while others such as the renowned actress Isabella Andreini labored to distance themselves from any hint of an unsavory reputation.¹² Despite the questions of decorousness that followed them, however, *virtuose* (accomplished female performers) could also become prized members of a court. Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga expended considerable time and energy wooing the Neapolitan singer and composer Adriana Basile (c. 1581–c. 1640) to Mantua, for example, and poetry and prose celebrated the cultural capital she brought to both cities.¹³ The salty nature of much of Margherita Costa’s writing lends credence to her near-contemporaries’ descriptions of her as a courtesan, at least at the beginning of her career, but both she and her sister used their positions as singers to forge connections with prominent male literati and patrons that served them well in the long term. They each ultimately circulated between the courts of Italy and Paris on the basis of their talents as performers and, in the case of Margherita, as a writer.¹⁴

While Costa’s precise movements during this early period in Rome remain elusive, Erythraeus reports one event that illustrates the social controversies that could surround female performers. In 1625 or early 1626, the composer Domenico Mazzocchi and the poet and librettist Ottavio Tronsarelli collaborated on *La catena d’Adone* (The Chain of Adonis), an operatic adaptation of Giambattista Marino’s epic poem *Adone* (Adonis) of a few years prior. The staging as planned was derailed by a quarrel between the noblemen Giovanni Giorgio Aldobrandini, to whom the work was dedicated, and Giandomenico Lupi over which of two

11. Susan McClary, *Desire and Pleasure in Seventeenth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 81.

12. See, for example, Ellen Rosand, “Barbara Strozzi, ‘virtuosissima cantatrice’: The Composer’s Voice,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 31, no. 2 (1978): 241–81; Anne MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell’Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

13. Newcomb, “Courtesans, Muses or Musicians?” 101; Jane Bowers, “The Emergence of Women Composers in Italy, 1566–1700,” in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 121–22; Bonnie Gordon, *Monteverdi’s Unruly Women: The Power of Song in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 144–49, 153–55.

14. Anna Francesca Costa also played a role in the 1653 production of the musical drama *L’Ergirodo*. On the singer and her patronage network, see Teresa Megale, “Il principe e la cantante: Riflessi impresariali di una protezione,” *Medioevo e Rinascimento* 6 (1992): 211–33; and Megale, “Altre novità su Anna Francesca Costa e sull’allestimento dell’*Ergirodo*,” *Medioevo e Rinascimento* 7, no. 4 (1993): 137–42.

highly acclaimed female singers had the more sonorous voice and more elevated skill and thus deserved the better part: a certain “Cecca of the lagoon” or Margherita Costa.¹⁵ While the dispute was resolved by granting both women equally significant roles in which to showcase their talents, Aldobrandini’s wife intervened. When the opera debuted in February 1626 at the Palazzo Conti, both women had been replaced by castrati.¹⁶

Costa left Rome for Florence at some point after this debacle, most likely in 1628 or shortly thereafter.¹⁷ The exact motivation for this move is unspecified, leading some to speculate that a scandal of some sort precipitated her expulsion from Rome or—and perhaps more likely—that an invitation to perform in the wedding ceremonies for Margherita de’ Medici and Odoardo Farnese of Parma brought her to Florence in search of new opportunities.¹⁸ The transition proved advantageous. Costa insinuated herself into the Medici court, enjoying the protection of Grand Duke Ferdinando II (1610–1670) and his brothers, and rubbed shoulders with members of the Florentine academies. She also launched her publishing career, printing an impressive nine complete works by 1641.

Costa hit the presses with her first major volume shortly after her arrival. In her first documented bid to curry favor with the Medici, she composed a hefty history of young Ferdinando II’s 1627–1628 diplomatic travels to the court of his uncle, the Holy Roman Emperor (also named Ferdinand II). Days after completing this journey, the eighteen-year-old assumed the grand ducal throne from his regents.¹⁹ The *Istoria del viaggio d’Alemania del serenissimo Gran Duca di Toscana Ferdinando Secondo* (A History of the Voyage to Germany of Ferdinando II, Grand Duke of Tuscany) memorializes the grand duke’s political coming of age through a day-by-day account of the trip’s meetings and entertainments.²⁰ This first publication has also proven to be Costa’s most problematic, however. As she acknowledges in her dedicatory letter to the Spanish ambassador to Tuscany, Costa derived her knowledge of the expedition from the notes of Ferdinando’s secretary, Benedetto Guerrini. Costa’s reliance on this external source led later

15. Costa-Zalessow notes that some have hypothesized that this Cecca may have been “Checca,” Costa’s sister Anna Francesca, but concludes that this is unlikely; Costa, *Voice of a Virtuosa and Courtesan*, 20.

16. Janus Nicius Erythraeus [ps. Giovanni Vittorio Rossi], *Pinacotheca imaginum illustrium, doctrinae vel ingenii laude virorum* (Amsterdam: Iodocum Kalcovium et socios, 1643–1648), 3:150–51.

17. On the dating of the move, see Bianchi, “Una cortigiana rimatrice,” 29:8–10.

18. Bianchi, “Una cortigiana rimatrice,” 29:10–11; Costa-Zalessow, “Margherita Costa,” 114; Lucia Strappini, *La tragedia del buffone: Percorsi del comico e del tragico nel teatro del XVII secolo* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2003), 251.

19. On this trip and transition, see, for example, Alessandro Lazzeri, *Il principe e il diplomatico: Ferdinando II tra il destino e la storia* (Florence: Edizioni Medicea, 1996), 12–14.

20. Margherita Costa, *Istoria del viaggio d’Alemania del serenissimo Gran Duca di Toscana Ferdinando Secondo* (Venice: n.p., n.d. [after 1628]), 5.

commentators to accuse her of not having actually authored this or, by extension, any of her texts, though with no explanation as to why a work so intertwined with Ferdinando's political identity would have been attributed to a new female transplant from Rome if she truly had no hand in its composition.

Costa's arrival in Florence thus coincided with Ferdinando's assumption of power, and while the next few years witnessed trimmer offerings for musical and theatrical productions compared to those under his parents Cosimo II and Maria Maddalena, the period proved immensely fruitful for Costa as a writer.²¹ After an initial gap in her print activity, by the end of 1630s she returned to the presses with a veritable torrent of works: eight full published texts in half as many years, as well as an elegant gift manuscript and individually printed poems. The first two of these works recall Costa's musical career in their titles as well as in much of their contents: *La chitarra* (The Guitar) and *Il violino* (The Violin), printed in 1638.²² Several factors indicate that with these volumes, and especially with *La chitarra*, Costa sought to signal her belonging to elite cultural circles. First, and most prominently, she dedicated them to the grand duke himself, lauding his court for providing the kind of repose and creative leisure Rome had denied her.²³ *La chitarra* supplements this acknowledgement of Ferdinando's protection and patronage with the dedication of individual poems to members of the grand duke's household (some of whom would themselves become the dedicatees of Costa's subsequent works), as well as important personages Costa would have met in both Florence and Rome. She lent further legitimacy to her publishing enterprise in both volumes by including male-authored celebratory poetry composed on her behalf by academicians, poets, and librettists from Florence and beyond (including Ottavio Tronsarelli), as she would also do for her collections of poetry and letters of the following year.²⁴ Finally, *La chitarra* features a portrait of Costa, one fashioned by the most renowned Florentine draftsman and etcher of the day,

21. On the drop in Medici-sponsored musical theater and festivities after 1628/1629, see Kelley Harness, *Echoes of Women's Voices: Music, Art, and Female Patronage in Early Modern Florence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 195.

22. Margherita Costa, *La chitarra, canzoniere amoroso* ([Frankfurt: Daniel Wastch], 1638); *Il violino* ([Frankfurt: Daniel Wastch], 1638). Both the publisher and place are likely false. The only other work published by Wastch the editors could locate is Girolamo Fantini's *Modo per imparare a sonare di tromba*, also dedicated to Ferdinando II in 1638.

23. See the dedicatory letter in Costa, *La chitarra*.

24. These men were: Alessandro Adimari, Andrea Barbazza, Bernardino Biscia, Oviedo Spinosa, Tronsarelli, Ferdinando Saracinelli, and the prince of Galliciano (typically identified as Pompeo Colonna), as well as anonymous (but assumedly male) poets. In addition to some of these same figures represented in *La chitarra* and *Il violino*, the *Stipo* includes two poems in Spanish by Juan Silvestro Gomez and Miguel de Silveira. The *Lettere amorose* contain poems by several of these same figures, as well as Francesco Roncone, and unattributed poems in Spanish and, interestingly, Portuguese.

Stefano della Bella (1610–1664), who contributed to many of Costa's works published during her time in Florence.²⁵

This portrait (Fig. 1) fuses Costa's musical and emerging poetic identities. Set within an ennobling cartouche whose inscription heralds her as a "most excellent lady" (*ad efigiem [sic] ex[cellentissi]mae Dominae Margheritae Costae*), Costa rests her crossed hands across what is likely a book.²⁶ An elegiac couplet by Alfonso de Oviedo Spinosa (who also contributed two celebratory poems to the volume) likens her to a tenth muse who, to the objections of her readers, is pictured without the laurel wreath she so merits (*Cernere laurigero quereris sine crine poetam factum quod decima haec visa camena foret*). The epithet "tenth muse" was a common means of praising early modern women writers, but it also bore longstanding associations with Sappho, famous as both a poet and a lover.²⁷ This ambiguity between the lofty and the lowly is reflected in the inclusion below Costa's bust of musical part books and, in harmony with the volume's title, baroque guitars. As Costa underscores in her letter to Ferdinando, the guitar's ignoble origins did not impede it from becoming immensely popular in this period.²⁸

A versatile though at times criticized instrument, the guitar's repertoire could oscillate from "boisterous street music to the elegance of courtly performance"—much like Costa herself.²⁹ A protean writer, Costa often defies in both circumstance and content the standard classifications of women's literary engagement. As would be the case in many of her works, in *La chitarra* and *Il violino* she simultaneously elevates her status in a manner akin to predecessors like Isabella Andreini and rejects such pretenses by incorporating genres, language, and

25. On Stefano della Bella, see Phyllis Dearborn Massar, "Presenting Stefano della Bella," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (1968): 159–76; Massar, *Presenting Stefano della Bella: Seventeenth-Century Printmaker* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1971); Alexandre Baudi de Vesme and Phyllis Dearborn Massar, eds., *Stefano della Bella: Catalogue raisonné*, 2 vols. (New York: Coll. Edition, 1906, 1971); and Charles Johnson, *Stefano della Bella, Baroque Printmaker: The I. Webb Surratt, Jr. Print Collection* (Richmond, VA: Marsh Art Gallery, University of Richmond Museums, 2001). Della Bella's contemporary biographer, Filippo Baldinucci, describes the portrait as a "ritratto al naturale di Margherita Costa." Her name appears directly above that of Emperor Ferdinand II in his list of Della Bella's most notable works; Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie de' professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua* (Florence: Santi Franchi, 1681), 1:231.

26. All translations are the editors' own unless otherwise indicated.

27. On the portrait, and its Sapphic undertones, see Amy Brosius, "'Il suon, lo sguardo, il canto': The Function of Portraits of Mid-Seventeenth-Century *Virtuose* in Rome," *Italian Studies* 63, no. 1 (2008): 29–32. Brosius argues that both this and a later 1639 portrait of Costa were based on painted portraits. This supposition is derived from conclusions about common practices, though there is no evidence that such a painting (or paintings) existed.

28. Costa, *La chitarra*, dedicatory letter.

29. Victor Coelho, "The Baroque Guitar: Players, Paintings, Patrons, and the Public," in *The World of Baroque Music: New Perspectives*, ed. George B. Stauffer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 169.



Figure 1. Stefano della Bella, portrait of Margherita Costa.
From *La chitarra* (Frankfurt, 1638).

themes generally deemed unsuitable for female audiences or authors in a manner that at moments recalls Veronica Franco.³⁰ Following the *Chitarra*'s dedicatory letter to the grand duke, portrait by a court artist, and celebratory poetry by culturally elite men—all of which would typically signal the high status of the work—are over two hundred sonnets, idylls, *canzonette* (playful songs), and octaves centered on almost exclusively amorous themes. Of these, nearly all are written from the perspective of a beautiful woman (*bella donna*) who addresses her lover. While the most prevalent theme is the separation of the lovers by distance, in other poems the *bella donna* targets, for example, a “lover who tries to procure her love through money and through one of her former lovers that she had already chased off” and “her lover who in his sleep would seem to love another woman.”³¹ In other poems, the *bella donna*'s audience is women; her advice ranges from warning them to abandon lovemaking for the spindle to encouraging them to let any desiring man kiss them lest he harm them.³² In many of the love laments, as in several of Costa's later publications, the lady addresses her cruel beloved as Tirsi, a shepherd common to the pastoral tradition who wrangles with issues of love.³³ Allusions to music abound, both in Costa's poems and those of her male commentators, as do references to the craft of poetry. These range from a sonnet in which the *bella donna* speaks to “her lover who is jealous that two men praise her poetry”³⁴ to a poetic acknowledgement that Costa's volume may face criticism, either for being of such good quality as to raise questions about its authenticity or for being inappropriate in language and style.³⁵ Costa would later redeploy extended passages from *La chitarra* in a manuscript that bills itself as a

30. On this poet and “honest courtesan,” see Veronica Franco, *Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. Ann Rosalind Jones and Margaret F. Rosenthal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

31. “Bella donna ad uno amante che procura ottenere l'amor suo per prezzo di danari e per via d'uno amante di lei già da lei discacciato”; “bella donna al suo amante mentre dormendo nel sogno li pare ch' egl'ami altra donna.” Costa, *La chitarra*, 280–84, 328–30.

32. Costa, *La chitarra*, 273–74, 544–45.

33. One of Costa's twentieth-century biographers expended a fair deal of ink trying to determine the historical identity of this “Tirsi” as one of Costa's lovers, but it is less likely to be an alias than an adaptation of the pastoral tradition. There are a variety of Tirsi-related works from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with notable examples including Castiglione's 1506 *Tirsi*, Tasso's 1573 *Aminta*, and Monteverdi's 1616 musical dance *Tirsi e Clori*. To give another example from Costa's oeuvre, *Il violino* contains a poetic exchange between Tirsi and Filli, figures who appear in Isabella Andreini's pastoral comedy *La Mirtilla* (which enjoyed multiple publications between 1588 and 1620) and Marino's *Egloghe boscherecce*. See Isabella Andreini, *La Mirtilla*, ed. Maria Luisa Doglio (Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 1995); and Giambattista Marino, *Egloghe boscherecce del cavalier Marino, cioè, Tirsi, Aminta, Dafne, Siringa, Pan, Elcippo, et i Sospiri d'Ergasto, con cinque canzoni ... et il Camerone d'istesso* (Milan: G. B. Cerri, 1627).

34. “Bella donna al suo amante ingelosito da dui signori che lodano le poesie di lei.” Costa, *La chitarra*, 485.

35. See the volume's first and final poems; Costa, *La chitarra*, 1–5, 567–73.

conversion narrative but that nonetheless offers a humorous take on early modern forms of divertissement.³⁶

Counterbalancing nods to her own talents and audacity are declarations of her humility as both a woman and a writer. While self-effacement was a pervasive rhetorical strategy, Costa blends gendered and grotesque images in verse and in dedicatory letters throughout her career. With *La chitarra*, for example, she professes to have “birthed an obscene and reprehensible monster,” a “crippled and malformed dwarf,” language she would later echo for her cast of misfit characters in *The Buffoons*.³⁷ In *Il violino*, as in *La chitarra*, Costa presents herself as prostrate before the feet of her benefactor and excuses herself for “staining paper with [her pen’s] crude and clunky scribbles.”³⁸ She pleads in verse for Ferdinando to “protect these *parti* [births/ labors] of mine and my stylus naked of all style.”³⁹ In the poem *La mia musa è svegliata* (My Muse Has Awakened), however, Costa also dramatizes her rough-and-tumble relationship with an almost savage muse. She emphatically rejects the artificiality and constraints of classicizing poetry and embraces her own original and brutally honest verse.⁴⁰

While *La chitarra* primarily features a female voice that speaks longingly or disdainfully of a male lover, in *Il violino* Costa primarily adopts a ventriloquized male voice that she would redeploy again in her *Lettere amorose* (Love Letters) the following year, though many of the volume’s most compelling poems feature women. This collection of amorous verse frequently assumes a light and at times satirical air, demonstrates Costa’s familiarity with predecessors like Tasso and Marino, and incorporates familiar pastoral characters such as Aminta, Tirsi, Filli, and Eurilla. The male, and occasional female, speakers explore themes of heart-sickness, jealousy, and death. While several poems present women in the clutches of sexual possessiveness, for instance, another presents a man who relishes in the sight of his beloved with other paramours, asking “what’s a beautiful woman worth if she doesn’t have a host of lovers before her?”⁴¹ One woman opts for suicide rather than lead a “servile life of proper obedience, docile and demure” after being

36. The work, *Le sette giornate o vero Il Viaggio di Loreto* (Seven Days, or The Journey to Loreto), held in the Doria Pamphilj Archive, is undated but was likely composed (or at least finished) around 1644, when Costa was back in Rome. Its dedicatee, called simply “Sir Count,” was probably Camillo Pamphilj. *Le sette giornate, o vero Il viaggio di Loreto della Signora Margarita Costa al S[ignor] C[onte]*. Fondo Archiviolo, XX, busta 122, fols. 268r–297v. For a discussion of this work, see Jessica Goethals, “The Bizarre Muse: The Literary Persona of Margherita Costa,” *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 12, no. 1 (2017): 48–72.

37. “partorito un sconcio e biasimevole mostro ... uno storpio e malformato nano.” Costa, *La chitarra*, dedicatory letter.

38. “machiar le carte degli suoi rozzi e mal correnti inchiostri.” Costa, *Il violino*, dedicatory letter.

39. Costa, *Il violino*, 7.

40. Costa, *La chitarra*, 1–5.

41. “Che pregio ha donna bella | se non vedersi avanti | le schiere degli amanti.” Costa, *Il violino*, 116.

scorned by her lover, while another in a male-voiced idyll parodying a Marino rape poem upbraids her assailant for ruining her purity before swiftly and “cruelly” taking up with a new lover.⁴² Costa interweaves male and female perspectives in a poem about a baby girl who transforms into a boy; rather than recoiling in surprise or horror, his mother envisions the happiness that adulthood can now afford him.

While in these first two poetic volumes Costa incorporates the voices of beautiful women, male lovers, and the occasional mother, in her next major publications she sharpens her comedic edge by showcasing a vast cast of satirical and grotesque characters. The *Lettere amorose*, dedicated to Giovan Carlo de’ Medici, Ferdinando’s brother, fall within a long tradition of the early modern Italian letterbook, which enjoyed such notable recent contributors as Isabella Andreini and Marino.⁴³ Costa’s text—introduced by the Della Bella portrait (though now without the original Spinosa epithet) and celebratory poems in Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese by her usual circle of male literary contacts—imitates the theatrical and “hermaphroditic” style of an Andreini in its impassioned debates between male and female lovers. Costa ultimately moves beyond the more traditional love concerns of her predecessor’s repertoire, however, transitioning from questions of fidelity and separation to an exploration of the burlesque underworld of lovemaking. With a fusion of prose and poetry, Costa pairs a beautiful lady and a dwarf, a hunchback and a cross-eyed lady, a sorceress and her bald lover, a chatterbox and his slovenly woman, and a syphilitic man and his scabies-ridden paramour, to give but a few examples. The publication won enough acclaim that it was published twice more, in 1643 and posthumously in 1674, and was sampled in a letter anthology first published in 1656.⁴⁴

At first glance, *Lo stipo* (The Cabinet) might appear to be a more typical case of panegyric, but this work too soon veers toward jocosity. Taking her title from the ornately decorated cabinets popular at the time, Costa structures her volume as a series of seven *cassettini* (drawers) of jewels, each associated with a certain

42. Costa, *Il violino*, 26 and 49. On Costa’s parody of Marino’s “I trastulli estivi” in the rape-fantasy poem, see Costa-Zalessow, “Margherita Costa,” 116; and Cox, *Women’s Writing in Italy*, 214–15.

43. Margherita Costa, *Lettere amorose* (Venice: n.p., 1639). The *Lettere di Isabella Andreini padovana, comica gelosa e academica intenta nominata l’Accesa* (Venice: Marc’ Antonio Zaltieri) were published posthumously in 1607 by Andreini’s husband Francesco, but she had begun assembling them a few years prior. On Andreini’s letters and influence on Costa, see Meredith K. Ray, *Writing Gender in Women’s Letter Collections of the Italian Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 156–83.

44. Margherita Costa, *Lettere amorose* (Venice: Li Turini, 1643); *Lettere amorose della Signora Margherita Costa Romana, con tutte l’aggiunte* (Venice: Giacomo Turini, 1674); *Scielta di lettere amorose di Ferrante Pallavicino, Luca Asserino, Margarita Costa Romana, Gerolamo Parabosco* (Venice: Giacomo Bortoli, 1656). The anthology was reprinted by multiple editors several times later that century. In *Voice of a Virtuosa*, her selection of Costa’s verse, Costa-Zalessow lists three editions of the *Lettere*; however, we have yet to independently verify the existence of the listed 1652 edition.

class of poetic object. The first of these include laudatory and occasional poetry honoring the extended Medici family and their happenings, but later drawers feature more risqué personalities such as an aging dandy, a syphilitic astrologer, and a procuress who lost her nose “in the service of love.”⁴⁵ In other words, while the volume has all the trappings of an endeavor aimed at its author’s social ennoblement—a dedication to Ferdinando’s uncle Lorenzo de’ Medici, as well as male-authored celebratory poetry and a new refined portrait (see Fig. 2)—in the final pages Costa embraces the ribald. She also dedicates a series of poems to the various Florentine academies, including the prominent and powerful Accademia della Crusca and Accademia del Disegno.⁴⁶ In the volume’s captivating and autobiographical final poem, Costa grieves as some of her verses are burned and swears herself to a silence that, prolific writer that she is, she soon breaks.⁴⁷

The following year was not only the most productive of Costa’s literary career but also the start of her partnership with the prominent Florentine publishing team of Amadore Massi and Lorenzo Landi.⁴⁸ With an elegy collection, a drama, a multi-canto poem, and a manuscript libretto for an equestrian ballet, 1640 was also the year in which Costa best displayed her versatility with respect to genre. Curiously, in her writing from this period she set aside the burlesque and amorous tropes so prevalent in her other poetry and letters and returned instead to the political and dynastic concerns that had motivated the *Istoria*.

La selva dei cipressi (The Cypress Forest) is a volume of lamentation poetry occasioned by the premature demise of two sons of Charles de Lorraine, duke of Guise, who would himself die a French exile in Florence later that year.⁴⁹ Introduced by a possible Stefano della Bella frontispiece depicting the eponymous cypress forest, a symbol of death, the volume bewails the loss of prominent Italian and European figures.⁵⁰ In addition to the Lorraine men, these include members

45. “ne’ servigi amorosi.” Margherita Costa, *Lo stipo* (Venice: n.p., 1639), 194–221.

46. Costa, *Lo stipo*, 86–116. The volume also reproduces a poem on a fire in Palazzo Pitti that Costa had published separately the previous year. See Margherita Costa, *Per l’incendio di Pitti* (Florence: Stamperia nuova, 1638). Costa published a handful of poems individually; known extant cases are *Al Serenissimo Ferdinando II, Gran Duca di Toscana, per la Festa di San Gio. Batista* (Venice: n.p., n.d.); *Alla Serenissima Vittoria della Rovere, Gran Duchessa di Toscana, per la Festa di San Gio. Batista* (Venice: n.p., n.d.); *Alla Serenissima Margherita de Medici, Duchessa di Parma, per l’arrivo in Fiorenza* (Venice: n.p., n.d.); and *Al Serenissimo Principe Gio. Carlo di Toscana, per la carica di generaliss. del mare conferitagli dalla M. Cattolica* (Florence: Massi e Landi, n.d.); *All’Altezza Serenissima di Ferdinando Secondo Gran Duca di Toscana nel giorno della sua nascita* (Florence: Nella Stamperia de Landi, 1655).

47. Costa, *Lo stipo*, 288–304.

48. Roberto Bruni, “Editori e tipografi a Firenze nel Seicento,” *Studi secenteschi* 45 (2004): 325–419. At 386, Bruni presents Costa as a representative example of Massi and Landi’s activity.

49. Margherita Costa, *La selva di cipressi, opera lugubre* (Florence: Massi e Landi, 1640).

50. The two most prominent Della Bella scholars disagreed on the *Selva di cipressi* attribution; see Baudi de Vesme and Massar, *Stefano della Bella*, 1:146.



Figure 2. Portrait of Margherita Costa, from *Lo stipo* (Venice, 1639).

of Ferdinando's and Vittoria della Rovere's families (Ferdinando I, Cosimo II, and Francesco I de' Medici, and Francesco Maria della Rovere), the Florentine court (the librettist Ferdinando Saracinelli), and prominent generals in the Thirty Years' War (Ambrogio Spinola, Albrecht von Wallenstein).⁵¹ In addition to a *lamento storico* in which a personified Italy deplores her loss of peace, the publication also revisits pastoral themes, such as a poem in which the aforementioned Tirsi has been stabbed in the neck, and concludes with a poem on Costa's own professional hardships.

Costa's biographers have traditionally associated her operatic equestrian ballet, the *Festa reale per balletto a cavallo* (Royal Celebration for a Horse Ballet), primarily with her 1647 Parisian period. While Costa did bring the work to press while performing in France, it is definitively the product of her time in Florence

51. Costa also alludes to a member of the Spinola family, surely Ambrogio, in *The Buffoons*. See I.vii.97.

and first appears in a handsome gift manuscript dedicated to Ferdinando.⁵² A performative genre popular from the late sixteenth through the seventeenth century, equestrian ballet had particularly strong roots in Florence and dazzled audiences at key socio-political court events such as Medici weddings. The first female-authored libretto of its kind, the *Festa reale* is a spectacular pageant of two golden chariots and sixty colorfully attired horsemen, accompanied by splendidly liveried attendants, who together perform dressage movements to instrumental and vocal music before being lifted by theater machinery into the heavens to become constellations.⁵³ Classical deities (Jove, Mars, and Apollo) simultaneously transform into planets that form the shape of the Medici coat of arms, which Costa—alluding to Galileo's nomenclature for his 1610 discovery of Jupiter's moons—calls the “Medicean stars.”⁵⁴ While throughout this lofty work Costa buttresses her patron family's claims to influence and authority, she would demonstrate her protean range in *The Buffoons* of the following year by satirizing many of the *Festa reale*'s themes, from dressage to astronomy.

In the ballet's dedicatory letter to Ferdinando, Costa states that she presents him the manuscript alongside her *Flora feconda* (Fertile Flora).⁵⁵ This poem celebrates the birth of Ferdinando's and Vittoria della Rovere's first son. Originally organized into nine cantos, one dedicated to each month of the grand duchess's pregnancy, this mythological tale adapted from Ovid depicts Zephyr's and Flora's journey to the oracle of Jove in order to conceive a male heir. In addition to shrewdly selecting a conceit already popular with Ferdinando and associated with his reign, Costa packs the work with dynastic imagery associated with both the Medici and the Della Rovere family lines.⁵⁶ Because the child died after three short days, however, Costa found herself needing to amend the poem. She did

52. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF), Florence. MS II II 371: Margherita Costa, *Festa reale per ballo de' cavalli* (1640). The work is later published under the title *Festa reale per balletto a cavallo* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1647). On the transition from manuscript to print, as well as the centrality of equestrian themes to Costa more broadly, see Jessica Goethals, “The Patronage Politics of Equestrian Ballet: Allegory, Allusion, and Satire in the Courts of Seventeenth Century Italy and France,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 1397–448.

53. The Florentine composer Francesca Caccini (1587–after 1641) wrote the first female-authored musical score for an equestrian ballet with her 1625 *La liberazione di Ruggiero*. See Suzanne Cusick, *Francesca Caccini at the Medici Court: Music and the Circulation of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 191–246.

54. “stelle medicee.” Galileo Galilei, *Sidereus nuncius, magna longaeque admirabilia spectacula pandens* (Venice: Baglioni, 1610).

55. Margherita Costa, *Flora feconda, poema* (Florence: Massi e Landi, 1640).

56. A poem entitled *La celeste Flora* (Francesco Campani, 1610) was composed on the occasion of Ferdinando's own birth, and the first organized festivities of his grand dukedom, celebrating his sister Margherita's 1628 marriage to Odoardo Farnese of Parma, included the opera *La flora, overo Il natal de' fiori* (Florence: Pietro Cecconcelli, 1628), libretto by Andrea Salvadori, music composed by Marco

so by appending a tenth canto in which Jove claims the infant boy for the stars, and, later that year, by refashioning the work as a drama entitled *La flora feconda*, which she dedicated to Vittoria.⁵⁷

If in these four works Costa concentrated her energies on the serious stuff of courtly message making, she pivoted drastically with *Li buffoni* the following year. As shall be discussed at greater length below, this irreverent drama takes satirical aim at the pastimes and personages of Medicean Florence. Hers is a comedy of misfits and base occupations, one peppered with *double entendres*, slapstick, and caricature. With this court parody, Costa fully embraced the vulgar burlesque with which she had already been experimenting in works like *La chitarra*, *Lo stipo*, and especially the *Lettere amorose*. Importantly, this penchant for the grotesque is particular to Costa's Florentine period. While in subsequent years spent in other cities she would continue to experiment with genre, as well as explore amorous and gender themes, Costa seems to have found in Florence the liberty to pursue racier subjects alongside the panegyric texts she composed throughout her career.

At some point around 1644, and for unspecified reasons, Costa returned to Rome.⁵⁸ After an approximately sixteen-year hiatus from the Eternal City, she renewed her relationship to the Barberini family. Her overtures to these important patrons are exemplified by the dedication of her first and only major Roman publication, *Cecilia martire* (St. Cecilia, Martyr), to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, the pope's nephew.⁵⁹ This four-canto hagiographic poem, also available in a manuscript version, focuses on the life, death, and legacy of this second-century Roman martyr and patron saint of music.⁶⁰ Cecilia's piety and the Barberini's power are

da Gagliano and Jacopo Peri. Though the singers' names were not recorded, it is conceivable that Costa herself could have been part of this production, as she likely arrived in Florence that year.

57. Margherita Costa, *La Flora feconda*, drama (Florence: Massi e Landi, 1640).

58. Costa-Zalessow hypothesizes in *Voice of a Virtuosa and Courtesan*, 22, that Costa was run out of town on account of a scandal caused by the *Buffoni*. This seems inconsistent with both the existence of multiple versions of the text and with the assistance the Medici continued to offer her, both discussed below. It had been previously hypothesized that Costa left after the death of the buffoon Bernardino Ricci, dedicatee of the *Buffoni* and once imagined to be Costa's husband, but since Ricci actually died more than a decade later, this could not have been the case. For more on their relationship, see below.

59. Margherita Costa, *Cecilia martire*, poema sacro (Rome: Mascardi, 1644). An edition of the poem held at the Biblioteca Giovardiana di Veroli bears the slightly modified title *La Santa Cecilia*, poema sacro and—though the publisher and city remain the same—a publication date of 1630. However, both these cover page details are written by hand on a seemingly pasted-in title page. This fact, and the uniformity of the texts themselves, indicate that the Giovardiana version likely originated with the 1644 printing and that the cover page was subsequently replaced or concealed, though the reason for the anticipated publication date is unclear.

60. Though not as fine as the *Festa reale* manuscript, the *Cecilia martire* manuscript (BAV Barb. lat. 4069) is a good copy meant for circulation. It does not contain the print edition's *Allegoria* section, and it diverges in twenty consecutive stanzas, though it includes the alternative text at the end.

highlighted in a pair of elaborate etchings: one showing the saint's grace as the executioner's blade swings toward her unguarded nape, the other a heroic Minerva upon whose shield fly the Barberini bees.

Any progress Costa made with the cardinal and his kin was cut short by the pope's death in July. The family's power quickly dissipated, and Francesco and his brothers fled to France in 1645 and 1646 after having made crucial miscalculations in the new papal politics. Surely on the hunt for more stable benefactors, Costa spent the first part of 1645 performing for Marie Christine of France, the duchess and regent of Savoy. While Costa's twentieth-century biographer Dante Bianchi presumes that her arrival at the northern court was for a carnival production, it would seem just as likely that Costa was called into service for the special sequence of festivities sponsored by the duchess during that winter and spring.⁶¹ After the resolution of the 1639–1640 Spanish-French siege that had torn Turin apart a mere two years after her assumption of power, Marie Christine set about restoring the city and signaling her legitimacy through patronage projects.⁶² In the first months of 1645, she organized a series of celebrations, ballets, and other spectacles with an enthusiasm certainly heightened by the departure of the last of the French troops in March and the triumphal re-entry of her son, Charles Emmanuel II, in April. It is conceivable, even likely, that the duchess or her agents extended an invitation to Costa for the purpose of these festivities so crucial to the dynastic messaging of the court. Costa remained in Turin for a relatively brief period, despite being generously remunerated for the performance of chamber operas.⁶³ The relationship seems not to have soured, however, as three years later Costa continued to court the duchess's favor with a volume of verse, *La selva di Diana* (The Forest of Diana). This publication flatteringly fashions Marie Christine as the titular goddess and opens with a thirty-eight-octave poem lauding her former patroness with the very terms and themes predominant in the 1645 celebrations, including representations of her as the ruler of the Alps.⁶⁴

61. Bianchi, "Una cortigiana rimatrice," 29:188–89.

62. See Martha D. Pollak, *Turin, 1564–1680: Urban Design, Military Culture, and the Creation of the Absolutist Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), esp. the chapter "The Regency of Cristina: Dynastic War and the Creation of Piazza Reale," 108–50.

63. A court document licenses the annual payment of one thousand lira to Costa "as our chamber musician from the start of this year and for the duration of our pleasing." For this contract in the context of court musicians, see Gaudenzio Claretta, *Storia della reggenza di Cristina di Francia, Duchessa di Savoia: Con annotazioni e documenti inediti*, 3 vols. (Turin: Civelli, 1868–1869), 2:536. For a fuller citation of the document, see Alessandro Ademollo, *I primi fasti della musica italiana a Parigi, 1645–1662* (Milan: Ricordi, 1884), 38. The *avvisi* of Rome suggest that Costa may have been back in town by August 1645; see Bianchi, "Una cortigiana rimatrice," 29:188.

64. Margherita Costa, *La selva di Diana* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1647). On 1645 representations of the duchess, see Pollak, *Turin, 1564–1680*, 134–36.

In 1647, Costa left Italian shores in pursuit of opportunities and accolades in France. The Parisian court had opened its stages to Italian performers, composers, and theater designers a few years prior when the death of Louis XIII and the youth of his son created a vacuum of power into which stepped Cardinal Jules Mazarin (Giulio Mazzarino), the Italian-born chief minister. The cardinal, who had come of political age in Barberini Rome, had a taste for Italian music and theater that he increasingly sought to import to France.⁶⁵ With the approval of the regent, Queen Anne of Austria, whose ear he held, he put his agents in Rome, Florence, and Venice to the task of attracting the appropriate talent. In 1645 an Italian opera opened in France, and two years later the first Italian production composed specifically for a French audience debuted. It was to join the cast of this work, Luigi Rossi's *L'Orfeo* (Orpheus), that Costa, together with her sister Anna Francesca, traveled abroad.⁶⁶

While Mazarin's scouts (Giovanni Bentivoglio in France, Cornelio Bentivoglio in Florence, and Elpidio Benedetti in Rome) recruited both sisters specifically to satisfy the queen's tastes in chamber and theater music, the successful enlistment of Margherita does not appear to have been a sure thing.⁶⁷ Although the initial invitation arrived in September, she seems to have accepted only in December.⁶⁸ During the intervening months, Benedetti wrote concerned updates to Cornelio Bentivoglio about whether Costa would agree to join the cast or if they would need to replace her with one Signora Felice who, he noted with optimism, was not only available but also had the added benefit of being thirty years Costa's junior.⁶⁹ When the *Orfeo* premiered to great applause in March,

65. On Mazarin's Italian-centered cultural policy, see Hammond, *The Ruined Bridge*, 153–89. On his life and influence, as well as backlashes against his sponsorship of extravagant Italian performances, see Geoffrey Treasure, *Mazarin: The Crisis of Absolutism in France* (London: Routledge, 1995); as well as Jeffrey Merrick, "The Cardinal and the Queen: Sexual and Political Disorders in the *Mazarinades*," *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 3 (1994): 667–99.

66. Anna Francesca had already sung in Paris two years prior as part of the cast of *La finta pazza*, followed by a performance in the 1646 opera *Egisto*. On the sisters', and especially Anna Francesca's experience in Paris, see Megale, "Il principe e la cantante."

67. "Since the Queen has resolved to have a good number of musicians for both the chamber and the theater in Paris this winter, write to Signora Francesca Costa and her sister Signora Margherita Costa" (Havendo la Maestà della Regina risoluto di volere havere in Parigi quest'inverno una buona mano de musici tanto per la camera quanto per il teatro, si scrive alla S.ra Francesca Costa et alla Sig.ra Margherita sua sorella); September 28, 1626, letter from Giovanni Bentivoglio in Fontainebleau to Cornelio Bentivoglio in Sergio Monaldini, *L'orto dell'Esperidi: Musici, attori e artisti nel patrocinio della famiglia Bentivoglio, 1646–1685* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2000), 5.

68. December 1, 1646, letter from Elpidio Benedetti to Cornelio Bentivoglio, in Monaldini, *L'orto dell'Esperidi*, 11.

69. "[Felice's] advantage is as great as the difference between the ages of 17 and 47" (*tanto vantaggio quanto grande è la differenza dall'età di 17 a quella di 47*); October 29, 1646, letter from Benedetti, in Monaldini, *L'orto dell'Esperidi*, 9.

however, the all-star cast included both Costa sisters, with Anna Francesca playing the part of Eurydice and Margherita that of Juno.⁷⁰

Costa's success as a performer in the *Orfeo* came at the expense of her achievements as a dramatist, however. Plans were initially at hand to stage another Italian work following Rossi's production. Giovan Battista Andreini's musical comedy *La Ferinda* was a contender, as was Costa's *Festa reale*, which she reworked to better fit its new French context. Mazarin ultimately deemed the equestrian ballet too technologically difficult for production and, still charmed by the *Orfeo*, he opted to extend Rossi's production schedule to include an additional six performances through May. Never able to see her grandiose ballet on the stage, Costa settled for seeing it in print with a 1647 Parisian edition dedicated to the cardinal himself. While later commentators such as Henry Prunières have looked upon this as a failure on Costa's part, the seventeenth-century music and dance theorist Claude-François Ménéstrier instead commended her "genius and talent for poetry."⁷¹

No neophyte to courtly politics and the stratagems of securing patronage, Costa coupled her entrée into Parisian theater circles with an additional pair of 1647 publications honoring her new hosts. Though the aforementioned poetic volume *La selva di Diana* bears a dedication to the duchess of Savoy, its focus on the largesse and virtues of Costa's assorted benefactresses makes it an appropriate forum for a poem thanking Queen Anne for her favor and generosity. In this nineteen-octave homage to the regent, Costa professes that in France "the Golden Age has been reborn."⁷² Another publication dedicated to Anne herself, *La tromba di Parnaso* (The Trumpet of Parnassus), centers on the Parisian court. Setting aside the comedic and amorous themes that had peppered some of her other poetry publications, she concentrates her energies on extolling "the glories of such a great queen," the munificence of Mazarin (the "patron to the world"), and the cultural wealth of their court.⁷³ The volume highlights the constellation of desirable personages associated with the royal family, from Henrietta Maria, Anne's sister-in-law and the queen of England, down to her ladies-in-waiting. Several poems recall the memory of Pope Urban VIII and laud the Barberini, benefactors to whom Costa and Cardinal Mazarin shared a longstanding connection.

70. One of the two manuscript copies of *Orfeo*'s scenario held at the Vatican Library (Barb. lat. 4059, fol. 131v–137v) includes a full cast list, on which both sisters' names appear. The manuscript is transcribed in Hammond, *The Ruined Bridge*, 182–89.

71. Henry Prunières, *L'opéra italien en France avant Lulli* (Paris: E. Champion, 1913), 130; Claude-François Ménéstrier, *Des représentations en musique anciennes et modernes* (Paris: Rene Guignard, 1681), 232.

72. "Qui vi rinasce il secol d'oro." Costa, *La selva di Diana*, 81.

73. "le glorie di sì gran regina"; "mecenante al mondo." Margherita Costa, *La tromba di Parnaso* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1647), dedicatory letter and 30. The volume was later transcribed in full in two nineteenth-century manuscript volumes: BAV, Codices Ferrajoli 125, cc. 53–118; Codices Ferrajoli 128, cc. 247–431.

Concluding the volume are poems celebrating the court's most recent triumph, the *Orfeo* opera. Within a publication devoted to eulogizing the royal French court, these poems addressed to Rossi, the singer-actor Marc'Antonio Pasqualini, and the librettist Francesco Buti effectively attribute that eminence in no little part to the talents of Italian artists and authors.⁷⁴

While Costa's modern biographers have suggested that little can be known about her movements after 1647, it would seem that by at least 1650 she had moved to Venice with recommendations from her former Medici patrons in hand. In an August letter, the Florentine ambassador Francesco Maria Zati assured Giovan Carlo de' Medici that he would provide her all necessary assistance in that city.⁷⁵ Shortly thereafter Costa's name appears in the account books of the librettist and impresario Giovanni Faustini.⁷⁶ Detailing her hire dates and pay, these records indicate that Costa sang as a leading lady in two operas composed by Francesco Cavalli and performed at the Teatro Sant'Apollinare in 1651–1652: *La Calisto* and *L'Eritrea*, which Faustini called his “twin princesses.”⁷⁷ It appears from her comparatively high salary and bonuses that Costa may have performed the titular roles in both of the Sant'Apollinare operas: the nymph Calisto who happily lets herself be seduced by a Jove disguised as Diana (who meanwhile is off saving her beloved, the shepherd Endymion, from danger) and the princess Eritrea who rules Assyria in the guise of her dead brother and who “marries” the princess for whom her former lover had scorned her.⁷⁸ In addition to the financial support they provided, it is easy to see why works so characterized by “rapid shifts

74. On these poems, see Ademollo, *I primi fasti*, 36–39. Apparently motivated primarily by a moralizing objection to Costa's sexual activities, Ademollo writes dismissively that in the *Tomba di Parnaso* Costa “celebrated in ugly Italian verse the entire French kingdom and court,” works that “today, without any merit, receive the honor of being remembered as historical documents.”

75. Sara Mamone, *Serenissimi fratelli principi impresari: Notizie di spettacolo nei carteggi medicei: Carteggi di Giovan Carlo de' Medici e di Desiderio Montemagni suo segretario, 1628–1664* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2003), #919 (442).

76. Faustini papers, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Scuola Grande San Marco, b. 112.

77. These accounts, made by Faustini's brother Marco, were recently discovered and analyzed by Beth L. Glixon and Jonathan E. Glixon, *Inventing the Business of Opera: The Impresario and His World in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 198, 203, 345, 347. For the citation and a discussion of these works, and especially *La Calisto*, see Francesco Cavalli, *La Calisto*, ed. Jennifer Williams Brown (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2007), xiii–xliii, citation at l; Wendy Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence: Opera and Women's Voices in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 178–219; and Herbert Lindenberger, *Situating Opera: Period, Genre, Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 223–28.

78. Glixon and Glixon, in *Inventing the Business of Opera*, 203, suggest that “Margarita da Costa” was the *seconda donna* in these operas, but they also show that she and the other soprano (Caterina Giani) received equal salaries. In contrast, Jennifer Williams Brown argues that Costa was the *prima donna* on the basis of a handsome set of gifts she received as a bonus. See Cavalli, *La Calisto*, xxiv.

from serious to comic, from sensual to frenetic, from divine to earthly” would have caught the eye of a figure like Costa.⁷⁹

A poem by the Vicentine poet Paolo Abriani celebrates Costa’s performance in another Cavalli-Faustini collaboration held in the same venue, the 1651 *La Rosinda*. Hailing the soprano’s captivating voice, he describes her as the “ethereal siren ... from the Tiber.”⁸⁰ Though there have been initial hesitations over whether the soprano listed as “Margarita da Costa” in the Faustini account books and our singer-author were really one and the same, Abriani’s allusion to her Roman origins, as well as her Florentine period, clears away all doubt.⁸¹ Costa likely met or already knew Cavalli and Faustini through her Medici contacts or her sister, Anna Francesca, who had starred in the 1646 Parisian staging of their opera *L’Egisto*.⁸² Moreover, this may not have been Costa’s first visit to the Serenissima. When Mazarin’s agents were coordinating her journey to France in the fall of 1646, they described her as then being stationed in Venice.⁸³ On the basis of this letter, Ellen Rosand has hypothesized that Costa may have been performing in one of the Venetian operas of that season, such as Monteverdi’s *Incoronazione di Poppea*.⁸⁴ Costa’s collaboration with Cavalli likely began before 1651. The Lucchese poet Isabetta Coreglia, an admirer and something of an imitator of Costa, wrote in praise of her performance as Queen Isifile in a production of *Giasone*.⁸⁵ The renowned opera, composed by Cavalli in collaboration with the Florentine librettist Giacinto Andrea Cicognini, premiered in 1649 at Venice’s Teatro San Cassiano before traveling to Florence and to Lucca in 1650, perhaps the city in which Coreglia saw Costa sing. A December 1652 letter to Giovan Carlo de’ Medici’s secretary similarly places Costa in Venice during this period; it is a request, sent to Florence from Venice by one Giovanna Vittoria Costa, that

79. Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence*, 190.

80. “Dal Tebro, o Costa ... Sorgi eterea sirena.” In “Alla Signora Margarita Costa, nel Teatro S. Apollinare, Nerea la maga.” Paolo Abriani, *Poesie* (Venice: Francesco Valvasense, 1663), 20.

81. Glixon and Glixon expressed this doubt in *Inventing the Business of Opera*, 195n2, but they rely on Capucci’s and Carter’s biographies, neither of which link our Costa to Venice, and apparently had not yet encountered the other documentation placing Costa in the city.

82. Anna Francesca received the part thanks to the recommendations of Leopoldo and Giovan Carlo de’ Medici; see Megale, “Il principe e la cantante,” 215.

83. “Si scrive alla S.ra Francesca Costa et alla Sig.ra Margherita sua sorella, che si ritrova in Venetia.” Monaldini, *L’orto dell’Esperidi*, 5. Costa’s biographers tend to place her exclusively in Rome during this time (in part due to Costa’s poem in the *Selva di Diana* about her 1647 departure from the Eternal City), but this letter—together with others from Elpidio Benedetti who wrote from Rome itself about awaiting a response letter from Costa—suggest that she may have spent part of that year in the Veneto.

84. Ellen Rosand, *Monteverdi’s Last Operas: A Venetian Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 126.

85. “Raccolta di varie composizioni della signora Isabetta Coreglia,” Biblioteca Statale di Lucca, MS 205 c. 21v. On the relationship between the two women, see Cox, *Women’s Writing in Italy*, 215.

the other Medici-backed singer Anna Maria Sardelli (“la Campaspe”) be made to stop diverting male opera patrons away from “my lady mother.”⁸⁶

Maintaining such relationship with influential audience members was of the utmost importance. Performances like those for Cavalli (or her work in Venice more broadly) would have helped Costa catch the attention of her final dedicatees and likely patrons: the Brunswick-Lüneburg dukes Georg Wilhelm, Ernst Augustus, and Johann Friedrich. These German brothers shared a passion for Venetian opera, of which they became lifelong supporters and which they sought to import and imitate back home, competing with one another to establish the premier center for northern performance.⁸⁷ Italian librettists and artists did not overlook this important source of financial support; at least thirty libretti were dedicated to the dukes in as many years, from 1654 to 1688.⁸⁸ With the 1654 publication of her own libretto, *Gl'amori della luna* (The Loves of the Moon), Costa numbered among the first to approach them as benefactors.

In the *apologia* to the reader that introduces this libretto, Costa defends her “lowly style” by professing that she composed the work in a mere fifteen days after a four-year period of literary inactivity.⁸⁹ She further states that she now finds herself under “foreign skies,” suggesting that she may have been one of the singers that moved between Venice and the brothers’ German courts, though it also is conceivable that she may have meant Venice itself.⁹⁰ When choosing a conceit for her three-act pastoral opera, Costa settled on an adaptation of the story of Diana (goddess of the moon) and Endymion, two of the figures recently portrayed in *La Calisto*. For the publication itself, she turned to Andrea Giuliani, who printed

86. Mamone, *Serenissimi fratelli principi impresari*, #971 (464). The letter also mentions the author’s sister, Vittoria Maria Costa. In a 1657 letter discussed below, Costa discusses her two daughters, albeit not by name. Costa-Zalessow has instead identified the subject of the letter as Anna Francesca, and Giovanna Vittoria and Vittoria Maria as Anna Francesca and Margherita’s sisters; however, the former would require evidence of Anna Francesca’s activity in Venice, and the latter is contradicted by the several mentions of their mother. Costa, *Voice of a Virtuosa and Courtesan*, 20n5. On the Medici’s role in bringing Sordelli to Venice, see Sara Mamone, “Most Serene Brothers-Princes-Impresarios,” Theater in Florence under the Management and Protection of Mattias, Giovan Carlo, and Leopoldo de’ Medici,” *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music* 9, no. 1 (2003); <<http://sscm-jscm.org/v9/no1/mamone.html>>.

87. On the connection of the Duchy of Brunswick-Lüneburg to Venetian opera, see Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), passim; Lorenzo Bianconi and Thomas Walker, “Production, Consumption, and Political Function of Seventeenth-Century Opera,” *Early Music History* 4 (1984): 267–70; and Louise K. Stein, “How Opera Traveled,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 850–51. On their efforts back home in Germany, see John Warrack, *German Opera: From the Beginnings to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 29–30.

88. Stein, “How Opera Traveled,” 851.

89. “[il] mio rozzo stile.” Costa, *Gl'amori della luna*.

90. “Sotto cielo straniero.” Costa, *Gl'amori della luna*.

the majority of Venetian libretti in the 1650s, including *La Calisto* and *L'Eritrea*.⁹¹ Though free from the risqué language and imagery of *Li buffoni*, *Gl'amori della luna* recalls Costa's early comedy through its incorporation of music, dance, and games, as well as its thematic focus on a woman's unrequited affections. Here an enamored Diana despairs that Endymion does not return her ardour, so overcome is he with the continual lethargy of sleep, until finally Cupid intervenes, Slumber is overcome, and love prevails.

Though this libretto was Costa's final full-length work, she continued to circulate her verse. In 1655 she renewed her ties with the Florentine publisher Landi in order to print a twelve-stanza poem in honor of Ferdinando II's birthday. This *foglio volante* allots equal space to aggrandizing the grand duke and explicitly petitioning for his favor. While she had found happiness in Florence, Costa writes, she deleteriously followed another path that ultimately led her astray. Now she runs back to Ferdinando's feet, entreating him to accept her and to "nourish [her] work."⁹² It is unclear whether Costa's supplication met with any renewed patronage, but it appears that by early the following year she was back in Rome. The city was abuzz with the arrival of Queen Christina of Sweden, a generous patron of the arts who had publicly converted to Catholicism and abdicated her throne before establishing a new residence in the Eternal City. The city's elite staged elaborate spectacles on her behalf, including three operas and an operatic equestrian tournament put on by the Barberini.⁹³ Costa contributed to the commemorative literature on these events, dedicating a broadsheet sonnet to the sponsor and star performer of the tournament, Maffeo Barberini.⁹⁴

Costa's last known appearance is in a 1657 letter in which she solicited the assistance of Mario Chigi, referring to herself as a "widow and poor *virtuosa*" struggling to support two daughters."⁹⁵ Of Costa's family circumstances we have scant details—this letter is a departure from her general reticence about her role as mother or spouse—but she was married at least once before finding herself a widow by 1645, when the documents for her contract in Turin refer to her as

91. Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 120.

92. "Nudrire il mio lavoro." Costa, *A Ferdinando Secondo nel giorno della sua nascita*, unnumbered pages, stanza vii.

93. Hammond offers a detailed analysis of all four Barberini works; *The Ruined Bridge*, 207–43.

94. "Sonetto stampato di Margherita Costa all'ecc. principe di Palestrina per la festa a cavallo fatta da S. E. alla maestà di Cristina Regina di Svezia," BAV, Archivio Barberini Indice 1 1088. The Barberini Archive possesses three identical copies of this printing. A transcription (though with an error in line breaks) is available on the website *Scritture di donne (secc. XVI–XX): Censimento degli archivi romani maintained by the Università di Roma "La Sapienza"* <http://212.189.172.98:8080/scritturedidonne/Vaticana_ArchBarberini/scritturedidonne.jsp>.

95. BAV, Chigi I.VII.273, fol. 125r, letter dated May 4, 1657. Also see Capucci, "Costa, Margherita"; Costa, *Voice of a Virtuosa and Courtesan*, 24.