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**Costa, Margherita. *The Buffoons, A Ridiculous Comedy: A Bilingual Edition*. Ed. and trans. Sara E. Díaz and Jessica Goethals**

Sheena Jary

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that God would only intervene to defend the republic when all else was lost. The increasing emphasis on devotion, religious celebrations, and moralistic laws as the situation grew worse was the most obvious sign that the conflict was being managed on the basis more of faith than of reason.

In summary, the book provides a detailed and comprehensive treatment of the subject which also includes minor events and lesser-known historical figures. Anglophone readers might find it surprising that there is no conclusion, but they will be amply rewarded by a very thorough work based on a wealth of primary sources and accompanied by extensive footnotes, an interesting appendix of documents, and many high-quality colour illustrations. Alessandro Cecchi's new book is a must read for anyone interested in this crucial historical moment.

STEFANO DALL'AGLIO

The Medici Archive Project

**Costa, Margherita.**

**The Buffoons, A Ridiculous Comedy: A Bilingual Edition.** Ed. and trans. Sara E. Díaz and Jessica Goethals.

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 63 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 535. Toronto: Iter Press / Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018. Pp. xv, 368 + 9 ill. ISBN 978-0-86698-592-5 (paperback) US\$54.95.

I am wonderfully indebted to Sara E. Diaz and Jessica Goethals for introducing the first English translation of Margherita Costa's theatrical production, *The Buffoons, A Ridiculous Comedy* (1641)—the first female-authored comedy in Italy's Seicento, a century known for its hostility to female authors (1). This bilingual facing-page play text is framed with a comprehensive introduction that outlines the cultural context of the Seicento, including the baroque aesthetic and the network of patrons and political figures associated with Costa's writing, but equal care is given to Costa's casting of buffoons and dwarves. The editors note that Costa's audience would have been fascinated by buffoons and dwarves for their exotic appeal, which is likewise the case with Costa's choice to set the play in Morocco.

The central plotline focuses upon the marital discord between Prince Meo of Morocco and his wife, Princess Marmotta from the kingdom of Fessa. Over the play's three acts, readers encounter an "unconventional" cast composed of buffoons, dwarves, and hunchbacks, all of whom perform a role that satirizes the public figures of Medicean Florence under the rule of the grand duke, Ferdinando II. Diaz and Goethals note that this risqué and slapstick caricature is fitting, given the Medici's "predilection" for dwarf entertainment—a fashionable *divertissement* for courtiers and princes, who would host wrestling and fighting matches in which dwarves were stripped half-naked, so the audience could marvel at the "freaks of nature" (34–40). The editors have woven a selection of images into their critical introduction, and what I found especially intriguing was the image of *Meo Matto* (Mad Meo), a painting that Diaz and Goethals have cited as a possible inspiration for Costa's *Buffoons*. Justus Sustermans's *Portrait of a Buffoon* is a part of a sequence of paintings commissioned by the Medici, and it depicts the "blotchy skin, hooded eyes, opened mouth, and suspended hands" of the "Florentine madman" supported by the grand duke (40). It thus seems fitting that Prince Meo—who seems more concerned with chasing a prostitute than ruling a nation—is characterized after the image of a buffoon-madman.

Following the Prologue debate between ancient comedy and buffoonery that ultimately names buffoonery the salt of a good meal, act 1 commences with an argument between Prince Meo and Princess Marmotta that is clearly a continuance of an earlier conversation. Marmotta complains that Meo has forsaken his conjugal duties in favour of pursuing "other pleasures," one of which being Ancroia—a prostitute and the lover of Baldassare, the "Italianized Spaniard," buffoon, and lost brother of the princess. Marmotta resolves to leave Meo with the intention to succeed her father as heir to the kingdom of Fessa, but upon learning that Baldassare is indeed her brother she reconciles with Meo and remains in Morocco. Baldassare agrees to rule Fessa, while Marmotta's buffoon-by-marriage vows to fulfill his conjugal duties and remain true to her, but only to follow his attempted seduction of Tedeschino—the "Little German" who disguises himself as Ancroia by Marmotta's request. Tedeschino refers to himself as "the prettiest and most well-made skirt of them all" (2.11.43), but soon realizes that his disguise is too convincing when Meo mistakes him for the prostitute Ancroia. Though Marmotta fails to trick her husband into

homosexual relations, she still manages to banish the discord between herself and Meo, and remains in Morocco.

Diaz and Goethals have taken great pains to place the play within the historico-cultural framework of the Seicento, and pay special attention to patrons like the Medici and the Barberini and to other Italian writers from the period, including Lucrezia Marinella, Veronica Franco, and Sarra Copia Sulam. The provided context would be quite helpful to English readers with non-expert knowledge of seventeenth-century Italian literature and culture, though I am confident that English readers will easily detect the contentious figure of the courtier, who is likened to a buffoon on the grounds that both share the same function of pleasing the prince. The witty banter over the courtier and the buffoon also brings to mind Pietro Aretino, who was known to mock male courtiers by portraying them as figurative prostitutes.

The editors' attention to detail is apparent in the critical Introduction, which is followed by notes on the translated text, the stage direction, the Italian text, and their transcription of the first of two manuscripts of the *Buffoons*. In fact, Diaz and Goethals have gone so far as to provide an explanation for their use of Latinate words in the English text, especially in reference to Baldassare, whose "Italianized Spanish" has been translated into English with certain Spanish cognates remaining in-text, and in regards to a few other characters like Michelino, whose German accent Costa amplifies with botched conjugations of verbs and noun/adjective agreement.

Costa's incessant puns and wordplay are what make this *comedia ridicola* so unbelievably hilarious, and Diaz and Goethals have artfully preserved the humour with their English translation, which is appropriately glossed and whose language is unambiguous. I am certain that *The Buffoons* would capture the interest of scholars and graduate students alike, though I imagine that taking this play into a classroom would bring its own challenges. I say this in reference to my own reading experience, which suggests that ceaseless laughter would trump discussion, and I am confident I would not be alone. Diaz and Goethals have done such an extraordinary job making this play available to a larger reading audience, and for good reason: Costa's *Buffoons* is a comedic masterpiece on which readers simply cannot miss out.

SHEENA JARY

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