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# **REPRESENTING STROZZI: A CRITICAL AND PERSONAL RE-EVALUATION OF HER LIFE AND MUSIC**

CN LESTER

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2019

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## Abstract

This study explores the life and music of seventeenth-century composer Barbara Strozzi, and the changing cultural representations and understandings of these over time. Despite a modest growth of interest in Strozzi since Rosand's 1978 "rediscovery," gaps in the research remain. Broader cultural representations of Strozzi pose troubling questions of accuracy and stereotyping. The objectives of this study are fourfold: to discover more of Strozzi's life in context; to consider the ways in which she has been represented; to analyse her music; and to explore the relationship between performer and composer, researcher and research subject, linked through voice and gendered reception.

A review of discussions of Strozzi throughout the musical literature is undertaken, supported by a literature review of the major works of feminist musicology. A new translation of one of the major contemporary texts discussing Strozzi, *Satire, et altre raccolte per l'Accademia de gl'Unisoni in casa di Giulio Strozzi*, supports an investigation into Strozzi's social position, comparing the historical data with later cultural representation. Musical analysis of thirty-three of Strozzi's works illuminates the hallmarks of her style, and comparative analysis of her music alongside relevant examples from Monteverdi, Cavalli, and Bembo shows how Strozzi responded to and developed the musical language of seicento vocal music. This musical analysis proceeds from a foundation of practical musicking and embodied understanding. As the basis for my engagement with this study, and as critical factor in understanding Strozzi's music, performance features in two ways: as recordings to develop and support the musical analysis, and as a live performance to highlight the reality of the relationship between myself and Strozzi, and to demonstrate the importance of display and rhetoric in her work. The autoethnography emerges from this musicking relationship and examines the personal re-evaluation of the self provoked by engagement with the research subject.

On the basis of these investigations, this thesis makes five claims. First, that the majority of representations of Barbara Strozzi are at best incomplete and at worst inaccurate. Second, that the ways in which Strozzi has been represented are emblematic of broader trends in the representation of women musicians. Third, that rather than repeatedly situating Strozzi through the unanswerable asking of whether or not she was a courtesan, it is more fruitful to consider her family relationships through the seicento practice of concubinage. Fourth, that Strozzi's compositions prove a vital step in the development of seicento vocal music. Fifth, that through an examined involvement, insights as to the supposed neutrality of the researcher may be revealed, and possibilities for further scholarly and performance development found.

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## Introduction

Since the publication of Ellen Rosand's article "Barbara Strozzi, 'virtuosissima cantatrice': The Composer's Voice" in 1978, awareness of and interest in Barbara Strozzi has, slowly, grown throughout musicological and broader musical cultures. Born in Venice in 1619, and working as both performer and composer, Strozzi published eight solo composer volumes before her death in Padua in 1677. Subsequently named the inventor of the cantata form, her works were held in collections throughout Europe. Despite this, her music had fallen out of practice until a revival in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. 2019, the year of her 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary, has seen a record number of concerts and media items featuring her works – although it must be noted that this number is still small in comparison to performances of more "traditional" repertoire.

While Barbara Strozzi left a wealth of musical material for future generations, the established biographical facts of her life are few. As such, a variety of gendered cultural narratives have served to fill in the gaps: to represent and make sense of Strozzi – singer, composer, woman – through specific musical and sexual framings. This thesis aims to tackle one of the largest gaps in current Strozzi research by examining these representations: tracing their history, their factual foundations, and their broader meanings and implications. In so doing, I hope to further a more nuanced and grounded understanding of Strozzi in compositional and sociocultural context.

This thesis is an interdisciplinary work, combining musical history, reception study, autoethnography, performance, and feminist musicology as both guiding philosophy and academic discipline. Musical performance serves not only as an aspect of this work, but as research tool and site of investigation; I, as singer-composer, working with and through the singer-composer Strozzi.

Chapter One begins with an overview of the methodologies employed in this thesis and the relevant musicological framings that inform and boundary the work as a whole. It continues in examining the specific musicological and musical performance questions and concerns necessary for situating and understanding Strozzi: the barriers and possibilities faced by composing women in early modern Italy, the idea and implication of musical canon(s) and canonicity, and the specific gendered tropes of the composing/singing woman.

Having established a general foundation, Chapter Two moves on to the specific study of the life and subsequent representations of Strozzi. This chapter collects together the biographical materials so far available on Strozzi, traces mentions and descriptions of her through the historical musical record, and collates and analyses Strozzi scholarship from Rosand to the current moment. The second part of this chapter is a reception study of popular representations of Strozzi: articles, radio programmes, concert programmes, reviews, a museum exhibition, a novel, recordings, and online information. Finally, this chapter considers the most widespread and contentious of modern Strozzi framings, what I have termed the “courtesan question” – was she, or was she not, a sex worker? In seeking to understand this question – its cultural function (intentional and unintentional) as repeated focus – this chapter works from the first draft of a new, full translation of the *Satire contro gli Unisoni*, filling a vital gap in current research, and presenting ideas for a more ambiguous, nuanced approach to representing Strozzi.

Chapter Three analyses Strozzi’s compositional career and musical style from a performance perspective. Strozzi’s music is considered both in isolation and in comparison with works by her father’s collaborator Claudio Monteverdi, her teacher Francesco Cavalli, and her fellow student Antonia Bembo. What are the features and hallmarks of Strozzi’s style? How do her works sit within the Italian cantata tradition, and the tradition of chamber performance? And how does her choice and use of texts correspond to the fashions and interests of the Venetian intelligentsia of her era?

The final chapter of this thesis is an autoethnography of the performer and researcher. It serves as an examination of personal bias in, and the personal benefits of, academic research, through immersion in research material, journaling, and self-analysis. In particular, I examine the potential meanings and gendered implications of the singing voice, and the gendered position of the composer of the song. From this examination, I draw out specific points for further research and musical work – for myself, and for others.

This thesis concludes with a summation of the work, and with suggestions for future research and performances. The written component of this study is supported by a recording of a live performance, and a recording of a rehearsal session, highlighting both Strozzi's music and the aural presence of the performer-researcher, culminating in a live performance before final examination. Throughout, this work aims to question the assumptions made not only of Barbara Strozzi, but of the broader gendered categories of composer, performer, musician – and to suggest alternative methods of musicking and building musical/musicological cultures.

## **Chapter One: Methodologies, Foundations, Approaches, Framings**

### **Introduction**

Before moving on to the specific considerations of Barbara Strozzi's life and music, and the representations thereof, it is necessary first to make clear the aspirations and boundaries of this study, its methods, and its approaches. This chapter consists of four subsections: the first an overview of the methodologies used in this work; the second an exploration of the general foundations upon which this study has been built; the third an examination of the specific approaches used by this researcher, most importantly those explored in the work of Nancy Tuana; and the fourth a detailing of three specific framings applied to the figure of the musical woman, essential to bear in mind when approaching Strozzi. Rather than an exhaustive overview, this chapter is designed to serve the specific needs of this particular thesis, and is based on a review of both academic and wider literature.

### **Section One: Methodologies**

This doctoral thesis is an interdisciplinary study which makes use of a variety of methods: literature review, reception study, new engagement with primary sources, performance, analysis from performance, and autoethnography. My experience as a performer of Strozzi's music – as a guest soloist, in lecture-recital, in teaching and coaching, and with my feminist early music ensemble *Ursula's Arrow* – and as the producer and organiser of many of these performances, is the practical foundation and critical lens from which my approaches, experiences, insights, and methods flow. From this foundation arises one of the key components of this thesis: an examination of the more popular, and more generalist, sources of information and cultural exchange regarding Barbara Strozzi and gender in music, and of the gap of understanding between those "in the know" and those, like many of my colleagues in professional performance, music administration, the media, and education (both secondary and higher education, as students and as teachers) who frequently rely on

more elementary sources such as *Grove Music Online*, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, *Wikipedia*, and second-hand interpretations and hearsay provided by their colleagues. This gap, and these latter forms of knowledge (or ignorance) acquisition and reproduction, have a profound and concrete impact both on my work, and on the broader ways in which Strozzi is represented, programmed (or not programmed), performed, taught, and experienced. For this reason, this study makes use of information from more general and popular musical sources, textbooks, and more informal modes of information transmission (reviews, blog posts, radio programmes, online marketing) – the sources used by so many of my musical colleagues – as well as more specialised academic literature.

My literature review surveys a broad range of anglophone musicological, musical, and/or feminist works, particularly those concerned with gender and music, early music, performance, and canonicity; this element of the review serves as a guiding approach for the thesis as a whole, and highlights from this section are presented later in this chapter. Chapters Two and Three present the crucial points of the specific literature surrounding Barbara Strozzi, in music encyclopaedias, surveys, and musicological articles and books, and more general works on performance and early music, and Chapter Four uses a literature review of autoethnographic theory and practice, particularly as demonstrated by musicians, as instruction and grounding principle before my own autoethnographic experiment. Throughout my literature review, I have contrasted specialist works with more popular discourse, in service to the research concern outlined above.

A broad-based reception study of the representation of Barbara Strozzi across time, cultures, and through different forms of media forms a key component of Chapter Two. This study includes examples from radio programmes, concert programming and marketing, concert and recording reviews, CD liner notes, online information, a museum exhibition, and a novel. With this study it is possible to examine how awareness of Strozzi, both as an historical figure and through her works, is created, maintained, and spread. There is a frequent disconnect between what is actually known of Strozzi's life and works, and the Strozzi presented to listeners, viewers, and

readers. These representations are often built, in turn, upon previous representations rather than on the examination of her works or the known facts of her life and culture, and demonstrate key preoccupations and anxieties around the concept and practice of the musicking woman. This reception study, in conjunction with the literature review, allows for an interrogation of the most popular presentation of Strozzi: “the courtesan question.”

This interrogation would not be possible without an engagement with the primary sources. I have made use of previous researchers’ findings and translations, in particular those of Ellen Rosand, Beth Glixon, and Wendy Heller. My own, initial translations of Strozzi’s dedicatory texts have been superseded by those given to me by musicologist and linguist Matteo Dalle Fratte, quoted in Chapter Two, and included in full in the appendix. In addition, this thesis makes a new contribution to the knowledge of Barbara Strozzi’s life and environment in presenting the first draft of a full translation of the *Satire contro gli Unisoni*, photographed and transcribed by Dr Candace Magner, transcribed and translated by Dr Gregorio Bevilacqua, and made possible by funding from the University of Huddersfield. This translation calls out for further refinement, and to transform this early draft into a full critical edition is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, even in this initial stage, access to the contents of the full *Satire* texts provides essential new information not only on Barbara Strozzi herself, her family, and her intellectual and musical culture, but on the ways in which she has been repeatedly and cumulatively misrepresented.

As my primary way of engaging with Strozzi, performance features in this study both as underlying approach and research practice, and also as an aural complement to the written work. I engaged with Strozzi as a singer before I engaged with her in an academic musicological context: I was never introduced to her works through my taught musical education (secondary, BMus, MMus, or singing instruction and coaching), but only through self-directed doctoral work following on from, and growing out of, my professional work as a performer and concert producer. This doctoral research has been accompanied by ongoing professional development – practising, rehearsing, and receiving coaching on Strozzi’s works – and performing in

a range of different modes and situations. The aural component of this PhD is presented as a recording of the musical elements of a modern recreation of an Accademia meeting, through a recording of private exploratory rehearsal for East Cork Early Music Festival (now cancelled due to COVID-19, but for which I was asked to contrast and combine my work as singer-songwriter with Strozzi's works, singing while I accompany myself on the piano), and through a lecture-recital with *Ursula's Arrow* presented before my Viva Voce examination. As a transgender performer, I have often been marginalised; my performances of Strozzi's works are therefore highly gendered, and these experiences feed into the autoethnography of Chapter Four, and do much to explain the relationship I have developed with the figure and works of Barbara Strozzi.

My analysis of Strozzi's music, therefore, proceeds from my perspective of engaging as a performer, rather than as a music theorist. My training in musical analysis, at university and as a singer and pianist, has been within the framework of "musical analysis for performers." Rather than trying to position myself as a music theorist, it is important to underscore the fact that the musical overview of Chapter Three stems from my day-to-day grappling with Strozzi's music. Chapter Three aims to serve as an introduction to Strozzi's style, in isolation and in context, and contains a case study analysis of two contrasting pieces, matched because of their oppositional lyrics, and rehearsed, analysed, and recorded together, in an effort to highlight both complementary and contradictory compositional elements.

It is impossible for me to engage with Strozzi without addressing *why* I engage with Strozzi. This is partly a reflection of the social process of undertaking this particular doctoral project; to study a marginalised and poorly understood composer is to be asked, regularly, why that study is necessary, and what such 'niche' research and music aims to achieve. Partly, addressing the *why* of my research is a way of owning and exploring my bias(es), and of mining my experiences for further insight: my position, my understanding of Strozzi's position, and the relationship I have formed between the two. To that end, elements of autoethnography feature in the case study of Chapter Three, and the full final chapter of this thesis is an

autoethnography, initially inspired by Judith Peraino's essay "I Am An Opera"<sup>1</sup> and guided by the works of Carolyn Ellis and Brydie Bartleet,<sup>2</sup> and Laurel Richardson.<sup>3</sup> It is important for me to note here, in a moment of autoethnographic vulnerability, the way in which that autoethnographic enquiry has affected the structure of this study. As I explore in Chapter Four, to be trans is very often to be perceived as "navel-gazing" and self-obsessed. Works from trans creators are often miscategorised as memoir, and judged to be nothing more than a limited and sectarian exposing of the self. Having experienced these misreadings, as well as other forms of discrimination and othering, in my creative career, and particularly in classical music, I both feel the need to include autoethnographic exploration in my doctoral work, and fear the risks involved in such a venture. Because of this, I want to balance the inclusion of an autoethnographic chapter – and my inclusion here and elsewhere in the thesis of personal reflections and insights – with a structure that first demonstrates other elements of my research process, and that acknowledges my proficiency as a performer.

## Section Two: Foundations

How feminist musicology is defined varies enormously by era, country, language, and specific musical field. Lucy Davies, writing in the 2011 online-only edition of *The Oxford Companion to Music*, edited by Alison Latham, gives a narrow starting point, defining it as "scholarship dedicated to the role of women in music," with much of the work produced by that scholarship focusing on women composers.<sup>4</sup> Even in definition, a gap immediately emerges between a popular assumption that feminist musicology is focused solely on women, demonstrated by a description in a work relied upon by many non-specialists, and the feminist musicology (feminist musicologies?) which in practice can and do embrace multiple approaches, methods, and intersections. Feminist approaches and philosophies are to be found throughout

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<sup>1</sup> Peraino, "I Am An Opera," 99-131.

<sup>2</sup> Bartleet and Ellis, *Music Autoethnographies*.

<sup>3</sup> Richardson, "Evaluating Ethnography," 253-255.

<sup>4</sup> Davies, "Feminist Musicology."

the many different fields of music scholarship: musicology working from early to contemporary musics, ethnomusicology, music theory, performance practice, compositional practice, historical rediscovery and reconstruction, editing and anthology creation, and the study and practice of musical pedagogy. While some feminist musicians and scholars focus on the concepts of “woman,” “female,” and “the feminine” as essentialist categories, many others note the plurality of gendered terms and meanings, and the multiple experiences of gender as explained through intersectional analysis and critical race theory, the social model of disability, and the like. Analysis along gendered lines is equally relevant to men, and feminist analysis has been fruitfully applied not only to women’s music, but to that by men, including to repertoire at the heart of the Western musical canon. While feminist musicology has been slow, in comparison to the other humanities, in admitting of trans feminist discourse and research potentials, this element of feminist scholarship is also beginning to receive attention. Feminist musicology is an ever-expanding, complex field containing multiple disciplines and approaches that vary by culture, country, and generation.

Much of the most influential work on Barbara Strozzi, notably the rediscovery work of Ellen Rosand, fits into the categories of compensatory and contributory feminist (musical) history. Pioneering feminist historian Gerda Lerner describes the first as the charting and describing of the women “missing” from conventional histories.

While necessary, compensatory history could also prove lacking:

The resulting history of “notable women” does not tell us much about those activities in which most women engaged, nor does it tell us about the significance of women’s activities to society as a whole. The history of notable women is the history of exceptional, even deviant women, and does not describe the experience and history of the mass of women.<sup>5</sup>

Contributory history develops on from this stage to “describing women’s contribution to, their status in, and their oppression by male-defined society.”<sup>6</sup> Lerner hopes for a further stage in feminist historical scholarship, consisting of the

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<sup>5</sup> Lerner, “Placing Women in History,” 5.

<sup>6</sup> Lerner, “Placing Women in History,” 5-6.

recording of the history of women “*on their own terms*”<sup>7</sup> – a challenge gradually taken up by feminist musicologists in general throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, and one which I use as a guiding principle to my work on Strozzi’s life and works in Chapters Two and Three .

Another key feminist musical practice, one which drives my reception study work of Chapter Two, is the analysis and assessment of the impact (or lack of impact) of feminist musical scholarship on the general fields of musicking and musicology. Feminist musicologists demonstrate a range of opinions as to the extent of the broader movement’s success. In the 2000 work *Music and Gender*, editors Pirkko Moisala and Beverley Diamond state: “few would now deny the impact of gender-related explorations on virtually every aspect of music study.”<sup>8</sup> However, Marcia Herndon, writing in the same volume, notes that feminist concerns, the study of gender, and inclusion of women in musical history and practice are still commonly understood as side, rather than central, issues in music. Although writing specifically about ethnomusicology, Herndon’s words resonate with comparable situations in other musical fields: “The situation results in no small part from a determined lack of interest and understanding among theorists who prefer to focus their research efforts only on men instead of grappling with the complexities of whole, functioning musical systems.”<sup>9</sup>

These ongoing assessments of the impact of feminist music scholarship on the broader musical world are linked to two further points vital for this thesis. The first is the belief that feminism in music is not of interest to younger generations; this point is made below in relation to the work of Sally Macarthur and Susan McClary. The second is the ongoing question as to whether feminist music scholarship has reached beyond the bounds of musicology to impact on the music industry – the classical music industry in particular for this work – and, if so, what change has it effected? How much work lies ahead in order to reach full gender equity in music? To bring

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<sup>7</sup> Lerner, “Placing Women in History,” 7.

<sup>8</sup> Moisala and Diamond, *Music and Gender*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Herndon, “Epilogue,” 347.

this question back within the specific bounds of this project: has the research into Barbara Strozzi filtered through to how she is understood and how she is performed (if she is performed) in non-academic musical spaces?

I include these points because of my position as a young feminist musicologist, and because of the specific problems encountered during this study of Barbara Strozzi: a lack of embedded change, the tension between building on previous knowledge versus asking the same questions over and over again, and a failure to implement, disseminate and popularise the full breadth and depth of knowledge acquired through feminist scholarship.

Sally Macarthur's *Towards a Twenty-First-Century Feminist Politics of Music*, first published in 2010, charts a movement in decline. Setting the scene for the rest of the work, Macarthur writes: "In the 1990s, a wealth of research on women's music became available. The first decade of the twenty-first century, however, saw the early demise of that work."<sup>10</sup> Not only was feminist musicology dead; it was rotten: "Ultimately, at this juncture, before it has had a chance to fully compose itself, the feminist narrative begins to decompose."<sup>11</sup> Nor does Macarthur see any revivification of this approach in the later 2000s: "it seems to be the case that feminist research on women's classical music has all but disappeared."<sup>12</sup>

McClary, writing in 2009, describes this decline as a consequence of generational change:

According to many of my students, problems concerning gender now reside in the past. Some of them graciously conceded that there might have been inequities relating to gender back when I was young (they humor me, in other words). But they believe quite firmly that for a woman to continue to talk about gender is not only tiresome but also means positioning herself as a victim.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Macarthur, *Twenty-First-Century Feminist*, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Macarthur, *Twenty-First-Century Feminist*, 99.

<sup>12</sup> Macarthur, *Twenty-First-Century Feminist*, 90.

<sup>13</sup> McClary, "Why Gender Still Matters," 49.

Not every more seasoned feminist musicologist believes in this decline and lack of interest. Marcia J Citron, in her 2007 follow-up article to her 1993 book, “Women and the Western Art Canon: Where are we now?” writes that there has been “noticeable change...These include the place of social history, modelings of reportorial and disciplinary canons, and actual musical dissemination.”<sup>14</sup> Citron is hopeful about the integration of music by women into the standard performing and pedagogical repertoires, and states that questions of women musicians, and of gender in music, have been “thoroughly assimilated into the field.”<sup>15</sup>

From the perspective of this researcher, and this project, I note that many of the most useful materials for this thesis have been produced within the last two decades. Both in terms of resources available to me, and in regard to my own network of professional musicians (mentors, colleagues, and fellow students) based in the feminist musicology tradition, it is hard to understand this as a field either dead or out of fashion. But Macathur and McClary’s words do highlight an important factor in the representation of Strozzi, which will be explored in detail in the following chapter: that of a resistance to the changes proposed by feminist musicology, and an ongoing replication of gender-based tropes and readings in preference to a more critical re-appraisal and re-presentation. More than that, Macarthur lays down a challenge:

for feminist musicology to make a come-back, it would want to be appropriately vigilant but would also compose itself as a musicology of assemblages, intent on exploring the connections between zones and territories in the discipline with the purpose of inspiring new ways of thinking about women’s music. It would be a musicology of action.<sup>16</sup>

To that end, I note that this thesis arises from my own musicology of action, is enriched by it, and feeds back into it to further strengthen it, in two linked and fundamental ways. Firstly, that my research on Strozzi is not separate from my professional and educational engagement with her music, her representations, and

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<sup>14</sup> Citron, “Where are we now?” 207.

<sup>15</sup> Citron, “Where are we now?” 213.

<sup>16</sup> Macarthur, *Twenty-First-Century Feminist*, 108.

global issues of music, gender, and equality, but is an active part of that work. I have been performing and promoting Strozzi's music for a decade, situating her works within an intersectional feminist approach, and introducing her, as both composer and historical figure, to audiences politely described as "non-traditional" by funding bodies. My academic research betters my performance and outreach efforts, and vice versa. Some of my performances of Strozzi are overtly political, such as my work with the United Nations He4She campaign, and some, like my work on Strozzi for BBC Radio Four's *Front Row*, is part of my ongoing effort towards educational outreach. Secondly, my drive to complete my doctoral studies in Strozzi scholarship is an aspect of my musicology of action, a very deliberate part of challenging misogynistic misrepresentations of her life and the meaning thereof, and of increasing performances/knowledge of her music. As an often marginalized and undermined "other" I am well aware of the use of a doctorate not only as a tool with which to contribute to the world's knowledge, but also as a tool for the legitimization and acceptance of the subject and scholar in question. While I accept the moral questions that the open acknowledgement of this legitimization raises, the practical use of this tactic remains; my doctoral studies further not only my research, but the ability for that research to enter the public arena, and to be listened to seriously. My engagement with Barbara Strozzi, and my promotion of her works, does not end with this thesis, but is furthered and expanded by it.

Returning to the question of assessment: to situate and understand the reception study of Chapter Two, it is necessary to consider the impact of feminist scholarship on the representation of musicking women, particularly the performance of women's compositions, in our current classical music culture. Are women composers, historical and modern, being programmed, studied, performed, and received equally?

Learning about women composers is still often an add-on, or small component, to/of the main curriculum. Vicki Baker, writing in 2003 about the inclusion of women composers in teaching materials, states: "Studies reveal that the vast increase in information about women composers is not reflected in the content of elementary

and middle school music textbooks.”<sup>17</sup> As of 2019, this situation appears much the same. It was only in 2015 that exam board Edexcel agreed to change its A level syllabus, comprising of sixty-three men composers and no women, to include set works by five women – and that small change only after sustained public pressure from then-17 year old student Jessy McCabe.<sup>18</sup>

The belief that women are fundamentally incapable of composing is still being reported. Cecelia Hopkins Porter, a musicologist with a long career as music critic for *The Washington Post*, and well-versed in public responses to and engagements with classical music, writes in 2012: “Women are still seen in some quarters as lacking the mental capacity to compose large-scale musical works or conduct an orchestra.”<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Fowler, discussing the pushback she received following her investigation into the lack of women composers performed at and commissioned by The Proms, writes: “During the debate the term ‘positive discrimination’ kept cropping up. Why? My article was suggesting that the Proms had not been representing women fairly. Not that women wanted special consideration. I think there is a confusion here. For most people the norm is men composers. The inclusion of ANY women then seems ‘positive’.”<sup>20</sup>

New research from the Donne – Women in Music project shows the extent to which women composers are systematically sidelined in classical performance. Analysing the content of 1,445 classical concerts for the year 2018/2019, the researchers found that 95% of concerts featured *only* music by men, that of all music performed only 2.3% was written by women, and that the pieces performed by women were shorter than those composed by men.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Baker, “Inclusion of Women Composers,” 8.

<sup>18</sup> Nadia Khomami, “A-level music to include female composers after student’s campaign,” *The Guardian*, 16 December 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Hopkins Porter, *Five Lives in Music*, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Fowler, “Where are the Women?”.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Brown, “Female Composers Largely Ignored by Concert Line-Ups,” *The Guardian*, 13 July 2018.

Music reviewer Linda Hirsch, in her 2008 article “Lend Me a Pick Ax” provides information about the training of women composers, and the reproducibility/revival of works. At the time of writing, Hirsch found that only around 30% of composition students at North American universities and conservatoires were women. In addition, of the very small number of contemporary women composers performed in concerts through the US, barely any of those women composers were represented by more than one piece. In contrast, of living composers John Adams had 18 individual pieces performed in one year, and of the historical, Tchaikovsky had 44.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, Susanna Eastburn, Chief Executive of national new music organisation Sound and Music, reflects in a 2019 article that even when women composers are included, they are demeaned and marginalised within the industry, in a variety of ways: “Some are more obvious, such as the young black composer who was told that she ‘didn’t look like a composer’ in her first year at conservatoire, or the established figure told that she couldn’t have written her large orchestral piece ‘without help’.”<sup>23</sup>

There are certainly ongoing initiatives that seek to challenge this ongoing inequality. The Proms, Aldeburgh Festival, and Sound and Music have all announced a drive for a 50/50 gender balance in new commissions in the coming years as part of the international Keychange Initiative, led by Reeperbahn Festival, PRS Foundation and Musikzentrum Öst. Performance projects such as Trinity Laban’s Venus Blazing<sup>24</sup> and King’s Place Venus Unwrapped<sup>25</sup> aimed to correct this imbalance from an historical, as well a contemporary, perspective.

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<sup>22</sup> Hirsh, “Lend Me a Pick Ax.”

<sup>23</sup> Susanna Eastburn, “Take Note – Why do Women Composers Still Take Up Less Musical Space?” *The Guardian*, 8 March 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Venus Blazing was a multi-genre celebration of women’s compositions, particularly those of contemporary composers, that ran for the 2018-2019 academic year, in which half of all the music programmed by Trinity Laban was by women. In addition to performances, the Venus Blazing initiative increased the conservatoire library’s collection of works by, and on, women composers.

<sup>25</sup> Venus Unwrapped was a 2019 series at King’s Place highlighting works by women composers, both historical and contemporary, across a variety of genres: classical, folk, and jazz.

It is, however, impossible to enter into a study of Barbara Strozzi and her music without an acknowledgement and awareness of the ongoing gender imbalance in musical teaching, programming, performance, and understanding.

The final main foundation of my study into the representation of Barbara Strozzi is the scholarship on and information available about other musicking women of the early modern period: the successes they enjoyed, the barriers they faced, the social worlds in which they navigated. This research makes it possible to situate Strozzi within her own contemporaneous culture of intellectual, performing women, and brings this thesis closer to its stated aim of meeting an historical woman on her own terms.

One of the most common arguments made to justify the gender imbalance in education and programming is that, given the real and substantial historical barriers to access faced by creative women, there were simply very few women making music at all; of those few, barely any achieved the level of accomplishment necessary to work as professionals. Sophie Fuller, in her entry for “Women in Music” for *The Oxford Companion* (online), is unequivocal in her rejection of this idea. Fuller writes:

Women have always been involved in music-making, though their contributions to the many different musical worlds in which they have worked have sometimes not been fully acknowledged. In spite of their absence from many traditional histories of music, there has never been a period in which women's voices have been entirely silent, and their vibrant contributions as instrumentalists, singers, composers, educationists, and patrons have been of great significance to the history of Western musical culture.<sup>26</sup>

It is not that the barriers faced by women – intersecting with and compounded by additional barriers caused by racism, classism, and other forms of oppression – could simply be ignored, or overcome through sheer force of will. Instead, these barriers and these women musicians co-existed and interacted through the ever-evolving cultural landscapes of the Western art music tradition. The admittance of the first is

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<sup>26</sup> Fuller, "Women in Music."

no denial of the latter, but rather demonstrates the need to situate each composer fully in their own cultural environment and approach their works in context.

The barriers faced by historical women composers were barriers of belief and of practical access. Sophie Fuller, again: “The history of women’s work as composers of classical music is largely one of spirit and persistence in the face of a widespread belief that writing music was simply not something women should or could do.”<sup>27</sup> Both *should* and *could* not; where one injunction failed, the other could be called upon to diminish a composer’s efforts.

Access to a career as a composer meant access to appropriate musical training and suitable avenues of employment. Both of these necessary ingredients were routinely denied to women. As Jill Halstead notes in *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition*, the need for a specialised education meant that, of the historical women composers known to us, “most were from families of musicians.”<sup>28</sup> Where then to take that training? Anna Beer, in the introduction to her 2016 work *Sounds and Sweet Airs: The Forgotten Women of Classical Music*, demonstrates the stifling lack of opportunities faced by these budding composers: “They created their music in societies that made certain places off-limits for a woman, from the opera house to the university, from the conductor’s podium to the music publisher – societies where certain jobs, whether in cathedral, court or conservatoire, were ones for which they could not even apply.”<sup>29</sup>

Still, by Strozzi’s era it was possible, if not necessarily easy, for a woman to work as a composer. Anthony Newcomb, in the pivotal 1986 work *Women Making Music*, writes:

music as an honorable profession, especially within the confines of the court, became much more accessible to women during the sixteenth century... By 1600 the change was virtually complete: a woman could actually aim for a career in music (or

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<sup>27</sup> Fuller, *Pandora Guide to Women Composers*, 29.

<sup>28</sup> Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, 179.

<sup>29</sup> Beer, *Sounds and Sweet Airs*, 1.

be aimed there by an ambitious relative) as an alternative to a career as an unpaid handmaiden of the Church or as the manager of her husband's household.<sup>30</sup>

In Jane Bowers' accounting, this time and place emerges as a transformational site for women musicians:

More women emerged as composers in Italy between 1566 and 1700 than in any previous period in Western music history – indeed, than in all of that history taken together. During those years women also composed in a greater variety of musical genres than their predecessors, and their music circulated to a larger extent than that of any women before them.<sup>31</sup>

The composer most commonly linked to Strozzi in this context is Francesca Caccini, but she was not the only early modern Italian composing woman to publish, and whose publications are still available to us now. Maddalena Casulana, Caterina Assandra, Claudia Sessa, Lucia Quinciani, Paola Massarenghi, Vittoria Aleotti, Cesarina Ricci de Tingoli, Sulpitia Cesis, Lucrezia Vizzana, Francesca Campana, Claudia Rusca: all published composers from Strozzi's era, from Italy, and although it is beyond the scope of this study to enter into comparison of their professional lives and compositional styles, such a comparative analysis has the potential to yield fascinating insights.

These published composers represent only a part of the compositional practice of women musicians at this time. The women *virtuose*, to give one example, had reached a key point of popularity and musical influential by the turn of the seventeenth century. Beth Glixon writes:

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, *virtuose* were sought at many courts in Italy, following the example of the *concerto di donne* at Ferrara; at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Italy could claim such famous singers as Francesca Caccini, Vittoria Archilei and Adriana Basile. But during this period, most women performed vocal music intended for the chamber, a tradition which continued with Basile's daughter Leonora Baroni.<sup>32</sup>

Part of the role of the *virtuose* was compositional, as explained here by Jane Bowers: "Many women who were well known as singers are reported to have composed

<sup>30</sup> Newcomb, "Courtesans, Muses, or Musicians?" 92–93.

<sup>31</sup> Bowers, "Emergence of Women Composers in Italy," 116.

<sup>32</sup> Glixon, "Private Lives of Public Women," 510-511

music for their own use, though much of it may never have been written down.”<sup>33</sup> It is important to remember, therefore, that for every printed manuscript from a woman composer that has survived to our present moment, there will be other compositions either lost or, like modern compositions in certain improvisational traditions, never intended for notated publication.

It is also important to note that the more famous examples listed above do not represent the totality of Italian women’s musicking at this time. Laurie Stras, writing of women’s music making in sixteenth-century Ferrara, points out the ways in which singular examples of women musicians can obscure wider musical traditions and communities of musical women when taken in isolation by musicologists:

The existence of the Ferrarese *concerto delle dame* is well known to modern musicologists despite this lack of hard practical evidence, and the group has been frequently invoked in discussions of patronage, performance, embellishment, professionalism, courtliness, gender, and genre. Nonetheless, they were neither the first nor the only female musicians to be admired in Ferrara. Musical women had graced the court in generations past, and beyond the *castello*, the city’s convents had a long history of musical excellence.<sup>34</sup>

The question of composing women in Strozzi’s culture was itself a highly popular, and divisive, topic. It was part of a broader literary and societal debate about the nature and role of gender, and the abilities and tendencies of women. Some of this debate was highly misogynistic, and some was deeply proto-feminist.<sup>35</sup> All of it signals to a society not only in the midst of a shift in gendered understandings of music making, but one highly conscious of that shift and eager to engage with it, whether negatively or positively.

All of these facts – the extent of women’s musicking, the publication of women composers, the pan-Italian debate on women’s equality and abilities – must be considered alongside historical gendered barriers to a compositional career in the

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<sup>33</sup> Bowers, “Emergence of Women Composers in Italy,” 120.

<sup>34</sup> Stras, *Women and Music in Sixteenth Century Ferrara*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Bowers, “Emergence of Women Composers in Italy,” 134.

study of Barbara Strozzi. To do otherwise is to fall into one of the popular errors of framing of women composers, examined in the fourth section of this chapter.

### **Section Three: Approaches**

Beyond these wider foundations, I have structured my research investigations along two main approaches: those modelled by Nancy Tuana in her work on the epistemologies of ignorance; and those modelled by Suzanne G. Cusick and Matthew Head in their works on Francesca Caccini and eighteenth-century German conceptions of gender and music, respectively.

Philosopher Nancy Tuana's 2006 article "The Speculum of Ignorance: The Women's Health Movement and Epistemologies of Ignorance" is essential to my work as a trans feminist, uniting both my academic focus as feminist musicological researcher and performer, and my campaigning methods as a queer/trans feminist activist and public educator. Tuana's main argument is that it is necessary to study and to understand ignorance in order to study and understand (and propagate) knowledge. Using case studies of the women's health movement in the 1970s and 1980s, Tuana asks how ignorance is produced, and how the answers to that question might be used to combat ignorance and, eventually, transform it. The women's health movement was not only concerned with uncovering new knowledge, and disseminating existing information, but also with correcting and challenging falsehood and erasure. Tuana writes:

if we are to fully understand the complex practices of knowledge production and the variety of factors that account for why something is known, we must also understand the practices that account for *not* knowing, that is, for our *lack* of knowledge about a phenomenon or, in some cases, an account of the practices that resulted in a group *unlearning* what was once a realm of knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

Every one of the methods of ignorance that Tuana finds and defines have informed my understanding of the ignorance surrounding musicking women, other gendered

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<sup>36</sup> Tuana, "Speculum of Ignorance," 2.

'others' in music, and the treatment of Barbara Strozzi. Understanding these methods has enabled me to undertake the literature review and reception study crucial to this thesis, and to make sense of my findings. Tuana explains the ways in which some forms of knowledge are not seen as worthy of investment and/or investigation, that some forms of knowledge are out of bounds because "we do not even know that we do not know,"<sup>37</sup> that some ignorance is deliberately cultivated through structural and institutional means, that some ignorance is wilful because of common drives towards continual avoidance and ignoring, and that some people and groups are deemed essentially untrustworthy and incapable of having or producing knowledge.

Finally, Tuana examines a different form of ignorance: loving ignorance, the humility and curiosity of not knowing that we are able to extend to one another in the desire for, and reception of, knowledge. It is this loving ignorance that I wish to extend to Barbara Strozzi throughout this thesis; not to make assumptions about her, or to fill in the sizable gaps in the data with unsupported theories designed to appear as truth, but instead to defer to her own words, her own music, the insights gained through a study of her culture, and the inevitability of incomplete and ambiguous answers. To that end, this study must sometimes question more than it answers, as an approach designed to lead to (eventual) further knowledge, rather than falling back on and spreading previously received and reproduced ignorance. As a foundational approach, this loving ignorance informs and guides additional strategies inspired by Cusick and Head as complement, rather than contrast.

It is in Chapters Three and Four that the approaches demonstrated in Cusick's 2009 work *Francesca Caccini at the Medici Court: Music and the Circulation of Power* have proven most useful to me. Cusick makes use of multiple methods and frames, utilising contemporaneous framings as well as contemporary, in her rethinking of how to write and how to understand musical history. Of particular importance to me is Cusick's modelling of the use of critical imagination, from a research position, in

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<sup>37</sup> Tuana, "Speculum of Ignorance," 6.

exploring the person of the composer and the multiple temporal phenomena of the composer's creations. Cusick imagines the different ways in which Caccini's music would have been used, how it functioned in relationship between the composer and others: what the music *did*, what it does, what it can do. Her work is deeply grounded, even as it makes use of a kind of "learning through play" imaginative approach. I have been inspired by this approach, though I have not attempted to mimic it, in my analysis and recording of two contrasting songs as a case study in Chapter Three. In seeking to work with both Cusick and Tuana, I have allowed this imaginative process to suggest likely and fruitful possibilities, rather than fixate on a singular (and possibly erroneous) "certainty." More generally, Cusick's approach has helped me to clarify my autoethnographic intent, and to increase my own presence in this text.

Matthew Head, in his 2013 work *Sovereign Feminine: Music and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, has also been instrumental in modelling the inclusion of the examined self into the research project as a research approach. Head's open acknowledgment of his hopes and doubts, his motives and methods, have supported me in my decision to openly acknowledge myself in this study. Furthermore, his move away from dichotic readings of historical women as either oppressed or liberated, preferring instead to examine the meanings, methods, and uses of conditional power in relation to musicking women, informed my examination of Strozzi's social position, both in relation to her musical life and her personal and family relationships.

#### **Section Four: Canonicity and Framings**

Finally, this thesis highlights the common framings used to present musicking women, framings that must be recognised and understood in order to be able to

make sense of the figure(s) of Barbara Strozzi. These framings arise from the intersection of research between canon studies and canonicity, and gender studies in music. Several key examples and insights from the examination of gender in music through the lens of canon studies have proved formative as a critical approach to this research subject, and as a way of understanding and, hopefully, transforming misogynistic representations of Strozzi's life and works. These approaches have not only guided my reception study, and later examination of readings of Strozzi's life and music, but have helped me to make sense of my own experiences, through my autoethnographic work. Works on canonicity by Joseph Kerman, J. Peter Burkholder, Carl Dahlhaus, Bruno Nettl, and Don Michael Randel have all proved deeply useful to me. Marcia J. Citron's work in particular has guided my approach here. Citron writes:

Canon formation can be thought of as a subtle interplay between the individual and the group. The individual is located within the societal framework and partakes of societal assumptions and ideologies. But the individual is also a source for those assumptions and ideologies. The shifting relationships among those postures make for a complexity that cannot be easily separated into either individual or group.<sup>38</sup>

To this end, the study of the canon must also include the study of reception; by studying the reception of Strozzi in Chapter Two this thesis aims to make clear how and why she has been excluded from the canon, and how the gendered ideas around the canon affect the representation of her and other women composers.

There are three specific areas of canonicity in which gendered tropes and barriers clearly intersect with canon formation and maintenance. The first is the foundational question of musical worth, and the ways in which music by women composers is assumed to be unworthy of the canon. Rhian Samuel, co-editor of *The Norton/New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*, recounts in 1995: "A critic told me he didn't agree with the idea of a dictionary of women composers because 'in promoting lousy female composers of the past as if only anti-feminism stops them being played today, you simply confirm the worst opinions of the genuinely hostile'."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 166.

<sup>39</sup> Rhian Samuel, "Women Who Call the Tunes," *The Guardian*, 26 May 1995.

The relationship between concepts of musical worth and inclusion in the canon is a co-dependent one, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; when entry into the canon is believed to be determined solely by musical worth, then any music in the canon is worthy, and any music excluded is unworthy. Writing in 1997, Jill Halstead notes that some people refuse to acknowledge gendered discrimination in music because “it has long been believed that music is an abstract medium which transcends cultural or social issues. Many commentators are adamant that no factors other than qualitative or directly musical ones can affect the standing or success of a piece of music, or of a composer.”<sup>40</sup>

The second specific area of canonicity of direct relevance here is that of content, form, and what “counts” for canonic inclusion/exclusion. While Joanna Russ’s essential 1983 feminist text, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*, is based on the writing of literature and not music, Russ’s chapter by chapter breakdown of the methods with and through which women’s writing has been suppressed also proves useful from a musical perspective. The most relevant method here is what Russ terms The Double Standard of Content. Russ defines this double standard as the process by which the value of a work is determined not by its content, but by how that content is understood through gendered interpretation: “Not only is female experience often considered less broad, less representative, less important, than male experience, but the actual content of works can be distorted according to whether the author is believed to be of one sex or the other.”<sup>41</sup> The same kind of work acquires a different categorisation, reading, and meaning depending on the gender of the creator – put simply: “Plath’s work is ‘confessional’; Allen Ginsberg’s is not.”<sup>42</sup>

This double standard plays out in musical culture in two ways: in the framing of a composer’s works for their instrument (and the linked question of personal/functional musics versus absolute music), and also in the meanings

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<sup>40</sup> Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, 139.

<sup>41</sup> Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Russ, *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*, 31.

assigned to the scale of musical works, both as that concept relates to size of forces employed and as it relates to size of audience.

When it comes to composers writing for their own instrument, the meanings ascribed to women and men vary significantly. Diane Peacock Jezic writes:

many of the historical composers shared in common being first a performer, usually a singer or a pianist, who became well known for her virtuosity and performing skills before being accepted as a composer; performing or having her works performed in the private sphere such as home concerts of vocal, piano, or chamber music; writing in genres considered acceptable for females – keyboard or chamber ensembles, solo song, or vocal chamber works – which could be performed with a small number of people; and, when setting secular texts to music, preferring such ‘female subjects’ as romantic love or the praise of nature.<sup>43</sup>

It is instructive to consider the differences in treatment between, for example, Robert and Clara Schumann’s use of small forms and of piano writing, of the male *melodie* and *lieder* traditions versus the female, of Chopin’s exploitation of personal virtuosity and private display with Strozzi’s. It is beyond the scope of this study to enter into a reception study of this double standard throughout musical history and musicological writing, but necessary to bear this concept in mind, particularly as it applies to later analysis of Strozzi’s works and their representations. While small-scale and “personal” works by men composers are often described in terms of the genius of the miniature form, similar small works by women are, according to Sophie Fuller, often understood as being lacking in both complexity and the intellectual rigour of larger scale pieces.<sup>44</sup>

Lucy Green sites this double standard in the perceived gender binary of use of technology: “Within patriarchy, man is constructed as being in control of nature through the harnessing of technology, woman as a part of the nature that man controls.”<sup>45</sup> Through this reading, a woman composer’s use of her own instrument in the compositional process is understood as “natural,” and lacking the elements of

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<sup>43</sup> Peacock Jezic, *Women composers*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Fuller, “Women in Music.”

<sup>45</sup> Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 29.

intellectual and physical mastery ascribed to men composers working within the same genre.

Jill Halstead notes that whether a woman writes small-scale works and is seen as appropriately feminine, or whether she writes larger scale works and is considered masculine, she is still being understood as either proving her essential feminine nature or attempting to go beyond it and, in so doing, emphasising it. The woman composer is, whatever she does, defined by her gender in a way that men composers are not. This framing serves a function: “Moreover, the music could be judged and discussed in terms different from male composers’ work, so denying it entry into the normal discourse of musicological debate.”<sup>46</sup>

By contrast, male musicians are allowed to succeed in and be defined through the ideas of “pure” music; pure of the social factors in a way that women never can be, and embodying instead the idealised ideas of what only men could be: powerful, commanding, transcendentally intellectual.<sup>47</sup> Citron shows how this creates a “no-win” situation for women composers, with male reviewers locking women out by “on the one hand for being too feminine in their music and not meeting male qualitative standards, and on the other for trying to be too masculine and thereby abandoning their natural feminine sweetness and charm.”<sup>48</sup>

The third intertwining of gendered tropes with ideas of canonicity comes through the idea of originality, authority, and agency. “Genius” is a category and concept frequently put forward as an entry requirement for admittance into the canon, and originality, individuality, and agency are key aspects of this concept. For women composers, this requirement is at odds with the popular historical trend of representing women musicians as the helpers and supporters of men, rather than as creators in their own right. Joanna Russ classifies this as the denial of agency, the

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<sup>46</sup> Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, 143.

<sup>47</sup> Hallstead, *The Woman Composer*, 190-191.

<sup>48</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 187.

way in which a woman creative's output may be diminished and negated as "their contributions to art may be absorbed into a man's and recategorized as his."<sup>49</sup>

In her vital interdisciplinary work *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*, philosopher Christine Battersby illustrates the ways in which composing is presented as an essentially male enterprise, with composing women by necessity subsumed into that dominant reading:

Over Christmas 1986 the BBC broadcast a radio series called *Wives of the Great Composers*. The assumption underlying these supposedly humorous talks was that the great composers had lives that mattered, and wives (and mistresses) who also mattered – but only to the extent that they helped the great geniuses of music father their timeless progeny. Clara Schumann featured; but it was her husband's music that was played, not her own.<sup>50</sup>

Even when women's compositions are considered, they can be represented as belonging, essentially, to men. Of the women composers of Strozzi's era, Anna Beer writes:

virtuoso female musicians were expected to write music to display their own virtuosity, whether as a servant of the Church (and thus to the ultimate glory of God) or a servant to a prince (and thus to the ultimate glory of the patron) or a precocious daughter (and thus to the ultimate glory of the family).<sup>51</sup>

Beer also demonstrates the continuance of this viewpoint in musicological understandings of later historical composers, relating an experience described by Marcia J Citron. Citron recalls a comment made to her in 1986, on the subject of Fanny Hensel, by Rudolf Elvers, the director of the archives in which Hensel's manuscripts were kept: "She was nothing. She was just a wife."<sup>52</sup>

Highlighting this framing was an important element of early feminist musicology, as demonstrated by Wood in 1980: "What is common to many studies is the discovered pattern of the supportive, secondary roles that history allots to musical women: as wives of composers, as lesser siblings, as bearers rather than creators of musical

<sup>49</sup> Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, 50.

<sup>50</sup> Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 12.

<sup>51</sup> Beer, *Sounds and Sweet Airs*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Beer, *Sounds and Sweet Airs*, 2.

traditions.”<sup>53</sup> Nearly forty years on, and it is hard to determine what progress has been made in challenging this way of representing women composers. A 2019 article from *The New York Times* on Clara Schumann’s 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary notes that the house in which both Clara and her husband worked, now a museum, is named the *Robert Schumann* house, although the museum claims that its “mission is equally devoted to Clara Schumann.”<sup>54</sup> It is interesting to imagine whether this claim would hold in the reverse, should the museum be renamed *The Clara Schumann House*.

Even when a woman composer is not openly portrayed as serving primarily as a man’s helpmeet or shadow, there are subtler ways in which her agency and authority can be questioned. Richard Taruskin’s multi-volume *Oxford History of Western Music*, a standard university textbook, describes thus the careers of Francesca Caccini and Barbara Strozzi: “It was on their fathers’ coattails that the daughters could find an outlet for their talents.”<sup>55</sup> It is instructive to compare this framing – the lack of worth and drive implicit in the “riding of coattails” idiom – with Taruskin’s descriptions of fellow Italian Baroque composers Domenico Scarlatti and Antonio Vivaldi, both sons of musical fathers. While the younger Scarlatti is introduced with reference to his father, the choice of language, and emphasis on Domenico’s talent, creates a strikingly different effect to that provoked by the description of Caccini and Strozzi. Taruskin writes: “The son of Alessandro Scarlatti, one of the giants of the opera seria, Domenico Scarlatti was at first groomed for a career in his father’s footsteps, for which he showed a precocious aptitude.”<sup>56</sup>

Turning to Vivaldi: from Michael Talbot and Nicholas Lockey’s article on Vivaldi in *Grove* we learn that Antonio’s father, Giovanni Battista, worked as a violinist, was engaged as such at San Marco in 1685, toured widely with his son playing the violin at church festivals, worked as a music teacher at the Ospedale dei Mendicanti, branched out to act as an opera impresario, may well have composed an opera

<sup>53</sup> Wood, “Women in Music,” 287.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas May, “Clara Schumann, Music’s Unsung Renaissance Woman,” *The New York Times*, 28 August 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Taruskin, *History of Western Music Volume 2*, 80.

<sup>56</sup> Taruskin, *History of Western Music Volume 2*, 390.

performed in Venice, and, it is believed, supported his son's compositional career by acting as his copyist from the mid-1710s to the mid-1730s.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, Taruskin does not once mention the father in his telling of the son's life and career. The only male composer in this volume to be described by Taruskin in the same terms as Caccini and Strozzi is Farinelli's brother, Riccardo Broschi, in this throwaway line: "a minor Neapolitan composer who has ridden his sibling's coattails into the history books."<sup>58</sup>

Examples of these three gendered functions of canon are not only to be found in musicological discourse, but in popular musical writing. One recent example of music journalism demonstrates these concepts in practice, reinforcing the idea and reality of the canon as male-only.

The 2015 *Spectator* article "There's a good reason why there are no great female composers" relies heavily on the idea of worth and authority. The writer begins by dividing music by men from music by women through an interrogation of excellence: "How good is their music compared with that of male composers?"<sup>59</sup> The rest of the article forms a justification of a negative answer, that women composers are *not* as good as men: "Fanny Mendelssohn, sister of Felix, has also been suggested for the new syllabus. She, too, wrote a G minor Piano Sonata and it's bloody awful. Whether it's worse than Clara's sonata I can't say, because that would mean listening to them again. But we can be pretty sure that neither of them would have been recorded if they had been composed by a man."<sup>60</sup> Women composers are depicted as lacking the musical talent to be remembered and performed without special pleading, and are also depicted as lacking in agency, with both Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn described as having "traded on their surnames."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Talbot and Lockey, "Vivaldi, Antonio."

<sup>58</sup> Taruskin, *History of Western Music Volume 2*, 169.

<sup>59</sup> Thompson, "No Great Female Composers."

<sup>60</sup> Thompson, "No Great Female Composers."

<sup>61</sup> Thompson, "No Great Female Composers."

If women composers are then, for the most part, excluded from the main musical canon, how then are they represented in musicology and broader musical cultures? I believe that there are three widespread framings through which women composers are presented, received, and understood. Barbara Strozzi has been, and continues to be, represented through the use of each one of these tropes in turn, an essential fact to bear in mind throughout Chapters Two and Three, and in situating Strozzi in the broader context of the history of women composers.

The first of these framings is that of the Exceptional Woman: the sole woman to succeed in joining the ranks of her male contemporaries. Inevitably, this trope is created through an isolating narrative that separates one woman composer – such as Strozzi, or Hildegard of Bingen – from her musical culture, erasing the existence of other women composers of her era to present instead a story of a rare exception to the rule of male dominance. This framing serves two different functions. First, as Sophie Fuller explains, the Exceptional Woman narrative further normalises the concept of male supremacy and female insignificance: “The many women who did not conform, from Joan of Arc and Elizabeth I to Hildegard of Bingen and Ethel Smyth, only serve by their ‘otherness’ to reinforce that stereotyping.”<sup>62</sup> Secondly, the existence of the Exceptional Woman can and is used to deny the existence and/or importance of misogyny and cultural patriarchy, i.e. “if she did it, the only reason why more women didn’t do it is because they didn’t try hard enough/care enough/are not generally capable of doing so.”

The second trope, particularly relevant to the historical singer-composer, is that of the Embodied Woman, in which women’s musicking is understood as an extension of the body, of physical beauty, and as a tool of seduction, in stark contrast to the framing of men’s compositions as outpourings of intellect and “absolute” artistry and logic. Fuller explains: “Women’s association with singing and song, the form of musical expression most closely and directly associated with the body, is long-standing and appropriate or perhaps inevitable in a culture that relates male

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<sup>62</sup> Fuller, “Women in Music.”

creativity to the mind and female creativity to the body.”<sup>63</sup> Whether a composer was also a singer, like Strozzi, or not, she is inevitable associated with a bodily, rather than mental, creativity. Wood finds the Embodied Woman in representations both of women composers and women performers: “her performing style might be judged by ‘genderized’ physical attributes – where strong and forceful, she ‘plays like a man’; where her ‘feminine’ style seems to shun the physical, the violent, and excitable, the heroic, it may, by implication, be unsuited to performing the ‘great’ works.”<sup>64</sup> Such is the strength of this association between women and the “natural” body, that one may ask if women can be understood as composers at all within this framing. Citron explains that the way “woman” is socially constructed as embodied, in direct contrast to the elevated mind, means that there is an oppositional clash between the category of “woman” and the category “composer.” Citron writes: “‘Composer’ conjures up images of the mind, not the body; of intellectual purity as opposed to base sexuality.”<sup>65</sup>

When a woman composer is both singer and composer, this framing grows even stronger. The woman singer, according to Lucy Green, occupies both a dangerous and a powerful position. Both of those positions mark her through gendered interpretation; the woman singer is overwhelmed by her own body, but simultaneously has the power to overwhelm her audience:

The singing woman is, literally and metaphorically, in tune with her body. At the same time, she is prey to its vicissitudes, which are dangerously present in the ready susceptibility of the voice...The woman singer, in her self-possessedness and her ability to lure, is invested with a power that is unavailable to onlookers.<sup>66</sup>

This image, of the woman musician as seductive, dangerous siren, is completely at odds with the canonical figure of the genius, “pure” male composer.

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<sup>63</sup> Fuller, “Women in Music.”

<sup>64</sup> Wood, “Women in Music,” 292.

<sup>65</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 184.

<sup>66</sup> Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 28.

The third and final framing common to representations of women composers, and used specifically in the representation of Strozzi, is that of the Virgin/Whore Dichotomy.<sup>67</sup> This trope impacts on what a woman was “allowed” to have composed, how her compositions are received, how her biography is written, understood, and taught, and how her music is programmed and performed. It is highly linked both to the framing of the Embodied Woman, and to the denial of women’s agency frequently encountered in canonical presentations of women musicians.

Jill Halstead explains the long history and use of this framing:

The association between music and female sexuality is both powerful and long-held. Indeed, the widespread cultural vision which identifies women as either virgins or whores can be applied also to the broad stereotypes of women musicians current until the twentieth century. On the one hand, women composers emerged from the convent, just as later (especially in Britain and America) women were allowed access to music because it was considered a force which could create and preserve moral and religious purity. Directly opposing this concept is the role music has played as a signal of female availability (as a skill which enhanced the position of prostitutes who were sexually available or in young single women who were maritally available). On a professional level we encounter the female musician (usually a performer), who was considered brazen and sexually promiscuous by the mere fact that she “exhibited” herself to the public.<sup>68</sup>

The origin of the link between musicking women and sex, and its development over time, is explained by Sophie Fuller:

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<sup>67</sup> Luce Irigaray’s essay “Women on the Market” in *This Sex Which is Not One* enriches the Virgin/Whore dichotomy by presenting a three-part model – Virgin/Mother/Prostitute – to explain how women are valued/devalued and bargained away by men under patriarchy. There is certainly potential for examination of Strozzi through this lens, particularly with regard to her relationships with her father Giulio, and with the father of her children, Giovanni Paolo Vidman. I leave this for future work because the additional space required to work through Irigaray’s theories of property and gendered ownership from an intersectional feminist basis (the foundational approach of this thesis) is beyond the scope of this project. Irigaray’s theory includes the claim that “all the social regimes of ‘History’” are based upon the exploitation of one ‘class’ of producers, namely, women,” and would benefit from exploration alongside works of Black and intersectional feminist scholars. This is important as a way of making sense of Strozzi’s place within Venice’s mercantile culture, given that Venice was of the most important early centres of the European slave trade. See Irigaray, “Women on the Market,” where the quotation is from p. 173.

<sup>68</sup> Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, 180.

In ancient Greece female professional musicians were usually slaves and prostitutes, such as the highly educated *hetairai* who often sang and accompanied themselves on the lyre. This association of music-making with the profession of courtesan (which continued into the Renaissance) was to have far-reaching implications for the respectability of female musicians, a theme that echoes throughout the centuries.<sup>69</sup>

The link between women musicians and sex is such that, as Anna Beer writes, each historical woman composer worked “in the shadow of the courtesan, her sexual life scrutinized, her virtue questioned.”<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Wood makes it clear that this link, and this division between pure and impure, is not inevitable or incidental, but a product of a misogynistic male gaze.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, Lucy Green understands this virgin/whore dichotomy as connected to the public/private dichotomy of unacceptable/acceptable women’s musicking – an interpretation of enormous importance to the study of Strozzi. Green explains that acceptable private music making for women is linked to a mother singing to her baby, whereas public musicking is linked to display and payment for services rendered by the body.<sup>72</sup>

## Conclusion

With this chapter, I have identified the parameters, methods, frames, approaches, and foundations to this thesis. I have also demonstrated an essential point for this study as a whole: that, given the extent of cultural misogyny and gendered framings within musical cultures, it is insufficient to attempt to study a woman composer (arguably, *any* composer) without first investigating the gendered readings to which that composer has been subject, both in academic and popular musical cultures.

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<sup>69</sup> Fuller, "Women in Music." 1

<sup>70</sup> Beer, *Sounds and Sweet Airs*, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Wood, "Women in Music," 295.

<sup>72</sup> Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 29.

## **Chapter Two: The life, reception, and interpretation of Barbara Strozzi**

### **Introduction**

This chapter aims not only to provide a new understanding of the life of Barbara Strozzi, but to explore and analyse the multiple ways in which she has been represented. Through this examination, I hope to come closer both to the truth of her life and to a deeper understanding of how women musicians are and have been presented and received in academic and broader musical cultures.

This chapter is broken into five subsections, beginning with a biographical sketch. The second section traces mentions of Strozzi (and her works) through the musical record in the centuries after her death, and the third provides an overview of Strozzi scholarship following on from Ellen Rosand's late 20<sup>th</sup>-century "rediscovery." Section Four is a reception study of popular representations of the composer; through this study, I trace commonalities of representation, and consider the meanings and implications of said commonalities. Section Five presents an in-depth analysis of what I have termed "the courtesan question" – the framing that haunts the majority of representations of Strozzi. This section considers the most common claims of evidence put forward in support of the repeated asking of this question – a painting by Bernardo Strozzi and the *Satire contro gli Unisoni* – working from a new, initial translation of the *Satire* and situating what is known of Strozzi's life in the gendered, sexual and economic context of seicento Venetian life. Finally, this section turns its attention to the courtesan question itself, interrogating the functions and implications of this repeated, unanswered asking.

In Nancy Tuana's work on the epistemologies of ignorance she highlights the role of cultural *unlearning*: the ways in which knowledge is obscured and forgotten in favour of ignorance reproduced along dominant cultural lines. Ignorance becomes a self-perpetuating system, as incorrect assumptions and framings are reproduced

without analysis or investigation. In returning to the source material, working from Strozzi's own presentation of her self, situating her both in her contemporaneous moment and through contemporary feminist analysis, and breaking down the ways in which she has been misrepresented along gendered lines, this thesis hopes to challenge the unlearning of Barbara Strozzi and make a new contribution to existing scholarship. Ultimately, I argue in favour of presenting Strozzi not through the reductive lens of the "courtesan question," nor as lone and extraordinary woman, but as a composer and performer in a concubinary relationship, navigating systems of gendered power and familial relationship just as any Venetian seicento woman must, actively shaping her own public representation through words, music and action, and through her ambitious pursuit of a musical career.

## **Section One: A biographical sketch**

### Background

La Serenissima – the Republic of Venice into which Barbara Strozzi was born and where she lived the vast majority of her life – was a city state marked by contradictions. One of the world's leading centres for trade and culture, Venice had, by the early seventeenth century, already begun its steady decline in international power and influence. Joanne M. Ferraro describes the seicento city thus: "Venice's position as a European state and a global commercial force after 1630 lies in the shadow of its medieval and Renaissance glory. No longer a dominant Mediterranean power, the Republic also began to lose its status as a first-rank European state."<sup>1</sup> Still, as Ferraro later explains, Venice still held considerable cultural and social power, particularly in regards to its nascent tourist industry.<sup>2</sup> Her position is echoed

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<sup>1</sup> Ferraro, *Venice: History*, 174.

<sup>2</sup> Ferraro, *Venice: History*, 176.

by Mario Infelise, who writes:

Other European metropolises were growing, especially as the capitals of great territorial states and empires that extended far beyond the confines of Europe and the Mediterranean. However, the decline of Venice was slow and not always perceived as such by those who experienced it. Between highs and lows, Venice remained one of the richest, most cosmopolitan, and most culturally vibrant cities on the continent until the fall of the Republic at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a must-see destination on every “grand tour,” and with an overall publishing output that lived up to its reputation.<sup>3</sup>

During Strozzi’s lifetime the city experienced not only the various highs and lows of papal conflict, challenges to international trade, and prolonged warfare (with subsequent losses and gains of conquered territory), but also one of the most devastating plagues ever to hit the city. The 1630-1631 outbreak of bubonic plague resulted in more than 46,000 deaths,<sup>4</sup> around a third of the total population, a tragedy that many historians believe contributed to the ultimate decline of the city, and which, one imagines, would have been an ordeal to live through.

Still, the Venice of Strozzi’s lifetime provided one of the most stimulating artistic environments available in early modern Europe, in which musical debates and developments flowed within broader artistic and intellectual movements and communities. Edward Muir’s work on this subject demonstrates the existence of a small but enormously influential “republic of letters,”<sup>5</sup> bound by ties of family, business, and friendship, with deep links to the University of Padua (Giulio Strozzi’s alma mater). Muir explains: “Venice’s official university at Padua remained until the 1620s the most prestigious in Europe. English and German Protestants, Polish, Jewish, and other ‘nations’ in the student body also made Padua a pan-European, not just a local Venetian, university.”<sup>6</sup> From this specific environment emerged the Incogniti (and, later, Unisoni) who, as Muir makes clear, were not simply a local debating society, or dissipated social group, but a deeply influential organisation with international reach, whose Libertine philosophy went far beyond a simple

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<sup>3</sup> Mario Infelise, “Book Publishing,” 658.

<sup>4</sup> Eamon, “Science and Medicine,” 730.

<sup>5</sup> Muir, *The Culture Wars*, 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Muir, *The Culture Wars*, 5.

defence of sexual freedom, as shown by their championing of religious liberty, scepticism, and new forms of scientific enquiry. The Incogniti, and other Venetian writers and scholars, were uniquely positioned to take advantage of their city's pre-eminent publishing industry.<sup>7</sup>

Women were certainly not missing from these intellectual movements. Sarah Gwyneth Ross, in 2009 work *The Birth of Feminism*, writes that, by Strozzi's era: "Women intellectuals from a variety of backgrounds and in a wide range of languages and media participated in literary culture. And their feminism became more consistently explicit."<sup>8</sup> The academy form was crucial to women's involvement; Ross details the tradition, dating back two centuries before Giulio Strozzi's founding of the Unisoni, of learned fathers setting up domestic academies to promote the careers of their learned daughters, a tradition associated with family honour and virtue.<sup>9</sup> This form of academy literally placed women into the heart of literary society, so that by the generation before Strozzi's birth, intellectual and artistic women were a small but embedded part of Italian cultural life. Other women worked away from the protection of fathers and father-patrons to participate in mixed gender intellectual gatherings. Androniki Dialetti, in 2011 article "Defending Women, Negotiating Masculinity in Early Modern Italy," states that:

In Venice, the cultural role of the literary salons, where the city's intellectuals gathered, resembled that of the courts. In contrast to traditional masculine institutions, such as universities, literary salons, like courts, were ideal places for mixed conversation. The Venetian patrician Domenico Vernier's salon, in Santa Maria Formosa parish, is well known for such mixed conversation...Salons were often kept by women, such as that of Beatrice Pia degli Obizzi in Padua, where "learned and virtuous men" frequented to discuss "useful, honest, and pleasant matter".<sup>10</sup>

It was not only that some women were a part of the Venetian intelligentsia, but that the *concept* of women was a vital part of early modern European cultural life. The *querelle des femmes* was a centuries old, pan-European debate on the nature and

<sup>7</sup> Muir, *The Culture Wars*, 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, 193.

<sup>10</sup> Dialetti, "Defending Women, Negotiating Masculinity," 18.

worth of women (and, through comparison, of broader questions of gender). The *querelle des femmes* was initially argued by men, pro and contra: “From the fifteenth century, besides the stereotypical misogynist discourse, which mostly drew on classical and medieval tradition, new arguments emerged suggesting women’s physiological, intellectual, and moral excellence, or even superiority to men.”<sup>11</sup> However, Dialetti explains, the very nature of this debate helped to pave the way for women writers to come to their own defence – and, in the decades immediately preceding Strozzi’s birth, three Venetian women writers did so in spectacular fashion. Of Moderata Fonte (Modesta da Pozzo), Lucrezia Marinella, and Arcangela Tarabotti, Margaret L. King writes:

At around the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, three female authors boldly challenged prevailing attitudes towards women; extraordinary, for a single city, for a brief moment, to produce this concentrated message of female resistance, unequalled, if at all, until later in the century when the salons of France and the drawing rooms of England also yielded a harvest in their different genres of female expression.<sup>12</sup>

Satya Datta, in 2003 work *Women and Men in Early Modern Venice*, takes an even stronger position on these three writers and their works: “These feminist works constituted a turning point in the Italian *querelle des femmes* in the sense that it was women themselves who were now defending the honour of their sex – and doing so in a way that made the anti-feminists choke with bile.”<sup>13</sup>

Both Fonte and Marinella’s treatises on the worth of women were published in 1600 (posthumously, in Fonte’s case). Fonte’s *Il merite delle donne*, well-received by the Venetian literari,<sup>14</sup> was a polemic in dialogue form which will be considered in greater depth later in this chapter. It argued against the tyranny of marriage, and called for women’s freedom on their own terms. Marinella’s work, as demonstrated by its full title *La nobiltà, et l'eccellenza delle donne, co' difetti, e mancamenti de gli huomini (The Nobility and Excellence of Women and the Defects and Vices of Men)* not only defended the worth and honour of women, but openly attacked the

<sup>11</sup> Dialetti, “Defending Women, Negotiating Masculinity,” 3.

<sup>12</sup> King, “The Venetian Intellectual World,” 599.

<sup>13</sup> Datta, *Women and Men*, 158-159.

<sup>14</sup> Rosenthal, “Venetian women writers,” 126.

misogyny and immorality of many men. She died in 1653, having published ten major works, the majority of which expounded on feminist themes. Arcangela Tarabotti, meanwhile, had a particularly close – sometimes combative – relationship with the intellectual men of Strozzi's sphere, particularly Giovanni Francesco Loredano. Enclosed in a convent against her will, her self-determination curtailed, Tarabotti's works argue passionately for all women's right to agency, liberty, and education.<sup>15</sup> Tarabotti connects the subjugation of women through religious institutions with the subjugation of women through marriage, family, and sexual life. Ferraro notes that: "Among her works were *Monastic Hell*, *The Purgatory of Poorly Married Women*, and *Paternal Tyranny*. *Paternal Tyranny*, also titled *Simplicity Deceived*, published shortly before her death, denounced the abuses of paternal power. It was immediately attacked and placed on the Index of Banned Books."<sup>16</sup>

That Venetian cultural life was dominated by men is unquestionable – but that dominance was neither total nor uncontested. Venetian women's active participation in the arts is seen even in the supposedly closed off world of the city's many convents. Christine Scippa Bhasin explores the potential permeability of these environments, and their importance as sites of entertainment and learning. She writes: "by the late seventeenth century, Venetian female monasteries had been providing visitors, male and female, religious and lay, with theatrical entertainment for nearly two centuries."<sup>17</sup> These entertainments were not solely religious; Bhasin details the complaints made against Venetian nuns for their performances of secular plays, their cross-dressing, and for their use of lavish and luxurious costumes.

Barbara Strozzi's father, Giulio Strozzi, provided her with the opportunity and training with which to enter into this vital, volatile intellectual world. Giulio was the illegitimate son of Roberto Strozzi, an outcropping of the Venetian branch of the powerful Florentine line. He was later legitimised by his father, a crucial fact which will be expanded upon below. Giulio graduated in Law from the University of Padua,

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<sup>15</sup> Datta, *Women and Men*, 167.

<sup>16</sup> Ferraro, *Marriage Wars*, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Bhasin, "Prostitutes, Nuns, Actresses," 19.

set up the Accademia degli Ordinati while in Rome, and rose to the rank of Apostolic Prothonotary in the church before resigning from his position and moving back home to Venice. A writer of all kinds, Giulio Strozzi's Venetian works include *La finta pazza Licori*, *Proserpina rapita*, and various song texts for Monteverdi, *Veremonda* for Cavalli, and the wildly popular *La finta pazza* ("the most widely travelled work of its time...a model of the new Venetian genre to the world at large"<sup>18</sup>) for Francesco Sacrati. John Whigham describes him as "one of the most original, important and influential members of the small group of librettists involved in the creation of Venetian opera."<sup>19</sup> He was an active participant in the *querelle des femmes*, championing a pro-woman position; while the majority of his *Elogii delle donne virtuose del nostro secolo* is now lost, part of it exists in his published celebration of noted singer Anna Renzi, whom he praises not only for her great musicality but for her courage and intelligence.<sup>20</sup> It is against this background that Barbara Strozzi's life must be situated.

### The life of Barbara Strozzi

The surviving facts of Barbara Strozzi's life are few; it is with an awareness of this paucity of information that any consideration of her must proceed. Rather than giving a narrative account of her life, I have condensed what little is known into a timeline (see Figure 2.1), so as to provide a clear reference point for the discussions that follow. Particular academic discoveries, such as Glixon's work on Strozzi's sources of income, will be dealt with in Section Three of this chapter.

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<sup>18</sup> Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 112.

<sup>19</sup> Whigham, "Strozzi, Giulio."

<sup>20</sup> Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 232-233.

Figure 2.1. A timeline of the life of Barbara Strozzi

**1619, August 6:** Baptised in the church of Santa Sofia in the Cannaregio. Born to Isabella Griega, named as Giulio Strozzi's servant and heir-designate in his will of 1628, and an "incerto" father.

**1628:** Named as Barbara Valle in Giulio Strozzi's will. Isabella named as Isabella Garzoni.

**1635:** Nicolò Fontei publishes Book 1 of *Bizarrie poetiche poste in musica*, for one to three voices. Written for Barbara Strozzi, all texts by Giulio Strozzi, dedicated to Giovanni Paulo (note spelling) Vidman.

**1636:** Nicolò Fontei publishes Book 2 of *Bizarrie poetiche poste in musica*, for one to three voices. Written for Barbara Strozzi, majority of texts by Giulio Strozzi, dedicated to Giorgio Nani.

**1637:** Giulio Strozzi founds the *Accademia degli Unisoni*.

**1637:** Creation/distribution of the *Satire contro gli Unisoni*

**1637/8:** Creation/Publication of the *Veglie de' Signori Unisoni*, dedicated to Barbara Strozzi.

**1641:** Giulio Strozzi dedicates *La finta pazza* to Giovanni Paolo Vidman.

**1641:** Son, Giulio Pietro, born.

**1641/2:** Daughter, Isabella, born.

**1642:** Loans 2,000 ducats to Giovanni Paolo Vidman (repaid with nearly 10 percent interest after his death).

**???:** Son, Massimo, born.

**1644:** Daughter, Laura, born.

**1644:** Publication of Opus 1.

**1646:** The Vidmans purchase their nobility.

**1648:** Death of Giovanni Paolo Vidman.

**1650:** Giulio names Barbara his "figliuola elettiva" in his final will, and his sole heir.

**1651:** Publication of Opus 2.

**1651, December 11:** Barbara Strozzi petitions the Doge for tax exemption, mentions that she has been away from Venice.

**1652, March 31:** Death of Giulio Strozzi. He did not leave enough behind to cover his funeral costs, and asks Barbara to do so, “remembering how much I have done for her by raising her and setting her on the path of virtue.”<sup>21</sup> Barbara has him buried in the Santi Giovanni e Paolo (notable as the final resting place for many of Venice’s most important citizens) and goes beyond his modest request, instead providing a more lavish memorial.

**1653, July 31:** Death of Isabella Garzoni, now named in a contemporary record as Isabella Strozzi.

**1654:** Publication of Opus 3.

**1655, November 30:** Strozzi sends a book of compositions along with a dedicatory letter to Carlo II, Duke of Mantua, via Antonio Bosso. This may well be the missing Opus 4, which had previously been sent to France in an attempt to meet the Duke there.

**1655:** Publication of Opus 5.

**1656:** Publication of *Sacra Corona* (including music by Strozzi).

**1656:** Publication of *Arie a voce solo di diversi autori*, a collection by Francesco Tonalli (including music by Strozzi).

**1656, around July 8:** Isabella and Laura Strozzi enter the convent of Santo Sepolcro.

**1657, January 2:** Isabella Strozzi dies, after a three-month illness.

**1657:** Publication of Opus 6.

**1659:** Publication of Opus 7.

**1659, August 12:** Laura Strozzi takes the veil, adopts the religious name Lodovica.

**1661, March 30:** Laura Strozzi takes her final vows.

**1662:** Massimo Strozzi professes his vows, takes the name Giovanni Paulo (note alternative spelling Paolo), becomes a monk at Santo Stefano in Belluno.

**1664:** Publication of Opus 8.

**1672:** Martino Vidman, brother of Giovanni Paolo Vidman, leaves money to Laura Strozzi and Giulio Pietro Strozzi.

**1677, November 11:** Dies in Padua, aged 58. Believed to be buried at the church of the Eremitani in Padua (much of which was destroyed during the Second World War)

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<sup>21</sup> Rosand, “Barbara Strozzi,” 258.

In addition to these bare facts, a small number of contemporaneous mentions and descriptions of Strozzi, mostly concerning her musicality, have survived. The composer Nicolò Fontei's dedications of 1635 and 1636 are the earliest of these. The first, from Volume 1 of his *Bizzarie Poetiche*, demonstrates an ongoing problem in understanding descriptions of Strozzi: the ambiguous meaning of the Italian word *virtuosissima*. While nearly all modern Anglophone mentions of Strozzi have followed Ellen Rosand's example in translating this word as "most virtuosic," I have been informed by Dr David Bowe, citing the definition given in the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (the first dictionary of the Italian language, published in Venice in 1612), that *virtuosissima* (and its masculine equivalent) refers to both skilful excellence and to moral virtue.<sup>22</sup> The meaning is intertwined. With that in mind, Fontei's dedication, in which he dedicates his compositions to "la gentilissima, e virtuosissima donzella la Signora Barbara,"<sup>23</sup> might best be translated as describing her as "the most courteous, the most virtuous/virtuosic maiden."<sup>24</sup> Fontei goes on to say that she is like the tenth Muse, and describes her as a "pudica Sirena"(modest Siren.) Giulio Strozzi, who provided the texts for the works, is also highly praised. Gian Vincezo Imperiale, a Genoese writer, also likens Barbara to a Muse ("che fu stimata una delle Muse di Parnaso"<sup>25</sup>) in a description dating from 1635, after listening to her perform at the Strozzi household. The dedication to Fontei's *Bizzarie*

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<sup>22</sup> The concept of *virtù* was gendered along deeply binary, frequently oppositional, and misogynist lines: Pamela Benson's work *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman* gives a thorough overview of the types of quiet, domestic, biddable qualities deemed virtuous in women. The right, and the skill, to speak publically was typically reserved for men. However, Benson reports that there was some space in early modern Italian culture for a small and select number of women to demonstrate limited elements of masculine *virtù*, provided that those women were deemed exceptional by dint of social station, intellect, and/or courage. This category of woman – sometimes described as the *donna eroica* – is also discussed in Laurie Stras' essay "Le nonne della ninfa: Feminine Voices and Modal Rhetoric in the Generations before Monteverdi." In particular, Stras highlights the arguments of sixteenth century poet Torquato Tasso, who reasoned that some small number of women were born with a heroic spirit, which allowed them to posses elements of both masculine and feminine *virtù*. It is conceivable that Barbara Strozzi was understood by (some?) of her contemporaries to fit this select category.

<sup>23</sup> Fontei, *Bizzarie poetiche*, dedication.

<sup>24</sup> Translation my own.

<sup>25</sup> Glixon, "New Light," 327.

*Poetiche* Volume 2 in 1636, meanwhile, is the source of the famous description of Strozzi as the “virtuosissima Cantatrice” (most virtuous/virtuosic singer.)<sup>26</sup>

Giulio and Barbara are linked again in the 1637 publication of the *Glorie degli Incogniti*, which contains praise for Barbara’s singing in its biography of Giulio. 1637 also saw the production and distribution of the first parts of the *Satire contro gli Unisoni*, discussed in detail in Section 5 of this chapter. The *Veglie de’ Signori Unisoni* meanwhile (1637/1638, possibly produced in response to, or at least hastened to publication by the appearance of the *Satire*) celebrate the Accademia and, in so doing, praise Strozzi’s virtue, her musical talents, and her beauty:

With good reason one can consider that place a Paradise, in which the eyes delight in gazing at its beauties, and the ears enjoy the excellence of its singing.

These papers printed with ink will therefore bow before Your Ladyship, and they will be in shadow to the colours of your virtue; and while they (*compositions*) bear your name, they are sure to engender the admiration of your merits in every heart, just like the beauty of a Venus or the melody of an Angel.<sup>27</sup>

The three works making up the *Veglie* include sonnets in praise of Barbara, one anonymous, and one by Francesco Bello, along similarly vague and florid lines as the dedication – she is once again likened to a Muse. Rosand gives a translation of the description of Barbara’s voice in the *Veglie*, high praise which serves to reflect glory back to the rest of the Unisoni: “In the descriptions of the meetings themselves her voice is likened to that of Amphion and Orpheus and to the sound of the harmonies of the spheres, and her grace is compared to that of the figure of Primavera.”<sup>28</sup> It is interesting that Strozzi is compared to Amphion and Orpheus – powerful male creators of music – rather than female muses. Francesca Caccini was also publically likened to Amphion.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Fontei, *Bizzarie poetiche libro secondo*, dedication.

<sup>27</sup> Translation by Matteo dalle Fratte. The Italian text is taken from Rosand, “Barbara Strozzi,” 253.

<sup>28</sup> Rosand, “Barbara Strozzi,” 253.

<sup>29</sup> Cusick, *Francesca Caccini*, 26 (ebook position).

Two publications of 1638 give the same text: *Bizzarrie academiche* by Loredano and *La Contesa del canto e delle lagrime. Discorsi academici, Recitati dalla Sig. Barbara Strozzi nell' academia de gli Unisoni*. In this account of a Unisoni debate as to the relative value of song or tears in the arsenal of Love, Barbara supposedly speaks for herself – it is important to note that this account comes through the pen of a male writer(s), and cannot be verified as Strozzi's own. Translated here by Rosand, Barbara concludes: “I do not question your decision, gentlemen, in favor of song; for well I know that I would not have received the honor of your presence at our last session had I invited you to see me cry and not to hear me sing.”<sup>30</sup> A printed letter from Loredano, however, describes Barbara in a far less flattering light. Discovered by Wendy Heller, it is worth bearing in mind Loredano’s frequent recourses to misogyny found throughout his works while reading:

About the ball at the house of N., when Signora Barbara presented her hand to Signore Giulio, he, observing it was full of rings, said (I do not know whether it was to avenge himself or to show his ingenuity): “I would take the jewelry but leave the hand.” Signora Barbara, irritated, perhaps because her black and dry hands deserved this reproach, took him by the chain that he wore (which made him recognizable as a cavalier) and ripped it from his neck and said: “And I will take the halter, and let the beast go.” The loud voice of Signora Barbara and the superb manners of my friend [signor Giulio] inspired laughter in everyone.<sup>31</sup>

Still, in another undated letter, Loredano praised her musical talent: “che se fosse natta in altro secolo, haverebbe al sicuro o usurpato, o accresciuto il luogo alle muse” (that if she had been born in another time she would have usurped or enlarged the place of the muses).<sup>32</sup> Gian Vincezo Imperiale wrote of Strozzi again in 1638 (the *diceria* he dedicated to her is lost<sup>33</sup>), and two poems by a member of the Incogniti, Pietro Michiele, were written this year in praise of her beauty.

There then follows a gap in the descriptions, until a letter from 14 April 1644, written by Antonio Bosso to his employer Carlo II, Duke of Mantua, for whom Strozzi was

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<sup>30</sup> Rosand, “Barbara Strozzi”, 279.

<sup>31</sup> Translated and quoted by Heller, “Barbara Stozzi and the Taming,” 176.

<sup>32</sup> Translated and quoted by Rosand, “Barbara Strozzi,” 253.

<sup>33</sup> Glixon, “New Light,” 327.

dedicating/had dedicated a volume of compositions. This letter describes a gift given to Strozzi by the dedicatee of her Opus 5, the Archduchess of Innsbruck:

I will tell your most Serene Highness some curiosities that are not too serious. Barbara Strozzi dedicated to the Archduchess of Innsbruck some of her music; her Highness sent to her the other day a small gold box adorned with rubies and with her portrait, and a necklace, also of gold with rubies, which the said Signora prizes and shows off, placing it between her two darling, beautiful breasts (Oh, what tits!).<sup>34</sup>

Another letter from Bosso to Carlo II dates from December 4 of the same year, and gives further details as to the volume of music sent to the Duke, which had previously been sent to France in the care of the Venetian Ambassador Giustiniano Lolino, in an attempt to reach him there:

Signora Barbara Strozzi has asked me to send to Your Most Serene Highness (as I am doing) a book of her musical compositions. She says she sent them to you in France several months ago, having dedicated them to you. They were sent in care of the Venetian Ambassador Giustiniano, so that he could have the favor of presenting them to you securely. As fortune would have it, you had already left by the time the book arrived.<sup>35</sup>

Beth Glixon notes that, according to one Francesco Bulgarini, the volume “had arrived in Mantua by 7 December.”<sup>36</sup>

Two further mentions of Strozzi are found before the final notices of her death and a posthumous report (discussed in Section Three): the first, the appellation given to Strozzi in the tavola of the *Sacra Corona* collection of 1656, that of “Virtuosissima Signora.” The second I have been unable to locate; Sara Pecknold, speaking on BBC Radio 3’s programme *Composer of the Week*, mentions a 1659 letter describing a musical performance at the home of Barbara Strozzi, but does not include a reference to this letter in either of her two works on the composer.

What, then, of Strozzi’s own writings? Those known to have survived currently stand at the dedications of her works and a small number of letters – the letters,

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<sup>34</sup> Translated and quoted by Glixon, “New Light,” 322.

<sup>35</sup> Translated and quoted by Glixon, “New Light,” 334.

<sup>36</sup> Glixon, “New Light,” 334.

discovered by Beth Glixon, will be discussed later in this chapter. There are no documents such as diaries or personal letters that might provide a deeper understanding of Strozzi's interior life, but the surviving documents do, at least, provide information on her musical career, and give some indication of her personality. No previous work on Strozzi has given the dedicatory texts in full, and for this reason I believe it valuable to include them here, centring her own presentation of her self. Strozzi's dedications are written in the standard, elaborately courteous manner common to dedications of the time. Opus 1 (1644) is dedicated to Vittoria della Rovere, Grand Duchess of Tuscany, and the translation here (and all translations of the dedications that follow) is by Matteo dalle Fratte:

Your Royal Highness

I have always received so much kind assistance from one of Your Highness's generous and scholarly subjects, who guided me in the composition of these and many other pieces, that I must reverently dedicate my first work, which as a woman I produced so courageously, to Your Highness's most august name, so that under a gilded Oak it may remain safe from the attacks of those who are always so ready to criticise.

The choice of lyrics will help me very much; they are all written by the one who, since I was a small girl, gave me both my surname and my wellbeing, they will alleviate the boredom of anyone who isn't completely satisfied by my badly composed melodies.

However, supported by the coveted protection of Your Highness, I believe that there will be no one who will revile my compositions, if they get to be held in those royal hands and sometimes heard by those most prudent ears. They (*hands and ears*) will welcome with heroic mercy my devotion which, I vow, will be not lacking in affection and will not be inferior to anyone else in revering the great esteem of Your Highness.

Bowing sincerely to you, I pray to the sublime prerogatives of divine intelligence (*God*) for Your Highness's utmost happiness.

Venice, 12 October 1644

Your Highness's most humble and devoted servant,  
Barbara Strozzi<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> For the original Italian alongside Matteo dalle Fratte's translations, please see Appendix Four.

The most notable aspect of this letter may be Strozzi's confirmation of the slanders written against her – a pre-emptive move to cut off any impact the *Satire* may have made? Rosand, and several writers following her lead, see a certain self-consciousness and anxiety in Strozzi's references to her own womanhood in this dedication, and the following dedication to Opus 2, particularly in light of the more self-assured references of the Opus 5 dedication. There could, however, be another explanation for Strozzi's adoption of this authorial position. Patricia Pender's work *Early Modern Women's Writing and the Rhetoric of Modesty* examines the widespread adoption of the use of extreme modesty, apology, and disavowal in early modern women's writing. Pender sees this trend not as a capitulation to misogyny, and an acceptance of the idea that women should be silent, but instead as a deliberate literary strategy through which a woman could circumvent injunctions against her public, creative expression.<sup>38</sup> The concept of modesty as a tool of rhetorical and literary skill ties closely with Strozzi's displays of the same; I believe that this explanation is the most plausible way of understanding the modesty of Strozzi's dedications.

The 1651 dedication to Opus 2 was made out to Ferdinand III of Austria, The Holy Roman Emperor, and his third wife Eleonora Gonzaga. It contains vital information about Strozzi's training and the reach of her music: that she was taught by Francesco Cavalli, and that her music was performed for her patron by Adamo Franchi (Adam Franck), a castrato at the Austrian court.<sup>39</sup> The dedication reads:

Your Sacred Majesty

Dear Most Clement Lord

Such a small tribute of my most reverent deference does not deserve to be placed in the treasury of a king. The unworthy mine of a woman of little intelligence can not produce the metal needed to create the rich golden crowns that are fit for the august (*i.e.*, kings).

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<sup>38</sup> Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> I am unsure as to whether the text indicates that Strozzi herself visited (and performed at?) the Austrian court, or whether she is describing the arrival of her music; this question would benefit from further investigation, lying beyond the scope of this thesis.

I will be more worthy of mockery than applause when I appear in Your Majesty's court, presenting at your feet these worthless musical things, where at all times (*in the court*) the echoes of the most select maestros can be heard. But when there's a wedding even the most common people and plebeians are allowed to masquerade as high society and mingle with the most well known Knights and Dames, making the party even more varied and entertaining.

Encouraged by many professors of this beautiful art, and particularly by Mr. Francesco Cavalli, one of the most well known of this century and my tutor since I was a young girl, I have published to the world this second work of mine which, bearing with pride the joy of this happiest third wedding celebration of Your Majesty, needn't resort to any other divine protection than Your royal protection.

These boring compositions of mine, kindly brought to Your Majesty's clement ears by the divine voice of Mr. Adamo Franchi, will sound very different to what they really are: and when you enjoy them, I will consider myself happy and that I have achieved the desired outcome, which is to renounce myself only to Your most merciful Highness, for (*the premiere in*) Venice, 1 June 1651.

Your most humble and devoted servant,  
Barbara Strozzi

Opus 3 is dedicated only to the “*Ignotae Deae*” (both “to” and “of” “the unknown goddess”), a feminised version of the Incogniti motto “*Ignoto Deo*.” While Opus 4 is lost, Glixon suggests that Strozzi’s letter of 30 November 1651 to Carlo II reads like a dedicatory text, giving further information on performance potentials (and a visual clue to anyone on the look-out for the missing volume). Glixon translates the relevant portion of Strozzi’s letter as:

These poor compositions of mine, enriched by Your Highness's gracious ear, and in part by your own voice, should not enjoy the light of the world if not under those rays that shone on them previously. Sent to France in care of Ambassador Lolino, they have followed your return here to bow reverently before you. They bear on the cover a sun, certain not to find disfavor, all the more as they will have your gracious regard.<sup>40</sup>

Strozzi’s dedication to her Opus 5, addressed to Anna de’ Medici, the Archduchess of Austria, refers to her previous patron, Vittoria delle Rovere, and, amidst the modest rhetoric, makes reference to the fulfilment of her own ambitions:

Why, oh my heart, you who bravely took yourself to the highest heights (*highest levels of royalty*), why are moving so shyly towards the one to whom you have

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<sup>40</sup> Glixon, “New Light,” 323-324.

dedicated these papers (*compositions*)? I understand you (*heart*) because being a part of me, you can't have emotions that are hidden from me: You were invited on other occasions, and that hand that leads you up the path steadied your ascent: but you are no less careful this time, if you make sure that those feet don't stray, you'll proceed on a firm footing.

The chain of Fate, that comes from the stars and to the stars returns, shows that this order of things has its own structure, from which, to stay on the right track, one should not deviate. My first compositions were put under the protection of virtue, being received and appreciated by her Royal Highness of Florence. If my sacred first compositions found favour in the other Royal Court, that of the sister-in-law of Great Anna of Innsbruck, who can deny them a reasonable attempt at this (*additional*) rise to fame?

But what worries am I hearing from you (*my heart*)? There is no need (you tell me) to ponder the reasons, since there is a straight path that freely opens up the way to virtue: virtue is banished elsewhere and runs everywhere to finally find refuge with this new and great patron, who is not great simply for being royal, but because she herself, with the trumpet of true fame, shows the way to the most worthy shelter in happiness.

These are my heart's reasons: I welcome them with fear, I hear them with confusion, and now – not so much because I am held back by a woman's weaknesses, but rather that I do not wish to further put upon your Highness's tolerance – before these happy papers I rush to bow with devotion.

The dedication to Opus 6, directed to Francesco Carafa, Prince of Belvedere, indicates that they might have been commissioned by him ("made by royal mandate"), provides information on how she worked *with* a patron to produce some of her music, and demonstrates again the performance of Strozzi's works outside of Venice:

Your Excellency

It is not a vulgar glory that I promise myself that these compositions of mine (made by royal mandate, should pay very humble respect to Your Excellency's glorious name, since you so kindly invested in them when you so generously listened to them and gave them your noble seal of approval, and you didn't refuse to make them more visible and successful through hard work, adding the precious advantage of your signature with your poetical additions and ornamentations, which you sometimes spent time on purely for the enjoyment and pride you took in writing, this shows that what you learnt when you were young has ripened into a fruit of diligent virtue, a skill that matures with age even when it is not used all the time.

For these reasons Your Excellency can mercifully walk around the galleries of your ancestors, who are heroes not because of their fame, but because they are heroes of your family, paying your respects to them not as someone who has merely received something from them, but rather as someone who adds to their ornament and splendor.

For now, please recognise amongst your many virtuous pastimes these little compositions, and please humbly welcome them, generously please protect them, since I am sure that they will be happily listened to in the court of the Prince of Belvedere, and now, I bow to you with profound reverence.

Your most devoted and indebted servant,  
Barbara Strozzi

The dedication of Opus 7 to Nicolo Sagredo shows Strozzi in full rhetorical flight, and includes a tantalising reference to “Roman singers” – perhaps musicians employed by Sagredo?

Dedicated  
To the most Illustrious Excellency Lord Nicolo Sagredo  
Knight and Judge of San Marco and Special Ambassador to Pope Alessandro VII

Venice 1658

Your Excellency

The mysterious Egypt devoted languages to the God of eloquence, and I dedicate to a Mercury, who has the prudence of snakes not only with his moves but also with his mind, these compositions of mine, that are languages of the soul and instruments of the heart.

Did I say “to a Mercury”? In fact Your Excellency was so called more than once by the Germanic Jupiter (*the Emperor*), who to be worthy of the great merit of the Austrian Eagle (*symbol of the Austrian Empire*) needed a double role: for the same reasons Your Excellency, after the Government of Germany was promoted to the title of special orator at the Court of Rome, to show people that such a man was only worthy of appearing alongside kings (Caesar and Alexander):

It was a fairytale that Hermete Trimegato invented music, but it is true that even though your servant (*myself*) wasn't invented by a Trimegisto, she was magnified by a Hermete, having been blessed with the royal generosity of those who possess it (*her music*).

Bearing witness to this are my poor Lari (*simple household gods that protect the home and family*), favoured and protected by the generous grace of Your Excellency and the Roman singers, submerged like Sirens on the seas of grace, and so I offer these songs to your Excellency, and to God who protects me, and I beg you not to dislike them, but to welcome them with Your Excellency's kindness.

Because these arias will one day be spread hundredfold in the glorious name of Sagredo, as happened in the arcades of Olympia (*ancient Greek city*), where voices were multiplied seven times, and here I stop with complete humility.

Your most humble and devoted servant,  
Barbara Strozzi

Finally, the dedication of Opus 8 to Sofia, Duchess of Brunswick and Lüneburg, indicates that Strozzi performed for the Duchess while she was in Venice:

Venice, 1663. Care of Francesco Magni dello Gardano

Your Royal Highness

Your Royal Highness's name is soaring throughout Europe on the wings of immortality with so much acclaim that fame has no more trumpets and Glory has no more voices to announce it more widely: so it would not be a surprise if even a wise owl were to tremble at such a name, since Your Highness is so admired all around the universe, and you would even allow it to stay at your feet.

Since Wonder has had the good fortune to know Your Highness, it has never left the august lands of Hanover, and it has sworn that only in one Sofia has there ever been, in the past or present, so much heroism, majesty and grace.

So it is because of Your Highness's singular virtues that I desire to dedicate these compositions of mine to your royal genius, created thanks to the deity of your great merit, that by hosting muses in your royal palaces lets the Sirens of Adria hear the voices of the most delightful singers; enjoying them like your glorious ancestors who planted their palms and crowns to blossom below the skies of Britain and Germany, and as we also now enjoy admiring Your Highness's hair adorned with a crown of bay leaves.

I humbly beg you to enjoy this humble offering of mine, and grant them the approval of Your Highness's grace, I pray to the Heavens that Your Highness may long remain an ideal example amongst Princesses and Queens.

Your most humble, devoted and reverent servant  
Barbara Strozzi

Apart from the dedications, a letter from Strozzi to Carlo II speaks to an ongoing (or an attempt at an ongoing) patronage, and the fact that Strozzi not only dedicated her works to noble patrons, but may have written some of her works for their own

use. The letter, dated 30 May 1665, which provides proof that Strozzi was composing after the publication of her final (known) Opus, reads:

Only yesterday Marchese Santinelli gave to me the words to serve Your Highness, which I will immediately do with my weak talents. In the meantime, I found that I have some poetry by another Cavalier, that seemed to me suitable for a bass. In order to serve Your Highness, I have drafted the songs, and will send them to you.<sup>41</sup>

## Section Two: Historical traces

In the new forms of musical history, dictionary, and encyclopaedia that sprung up across Europe in the centuries following Strozzi's death, there are a number of relevant mentions of her life and works, and a few interesting omissions. The first mention comes not in an Italian text, but in a German, Johann Gottfried Walther's *Musicalisches Lexicon* of 1732, which includes her as Barbara Strozza or Strozzi, and lists her publications as her first book of Madrigals and second Opus *Cantate, ariette, e duetti*, of 1651, whose date of publication Walther lists instead as 1653.<sup>42</sup> However, there is no mention of Strozzi (or, to be fair, of many other Italian composers) in Johann Mattheson's 1740 work *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte*, and nothing in Johann Mseusel's *Teutsches Künstlerlexikon* (1778) nor in Johann Hiller's *Lebensbeschreibungen* (1784).

The first mention of Strozzi in English comes in John Hawkins' *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776), Volume IV:

Barbara Strozzi, otherwise Strozza, a Venetian lady, flourished towards the middle of the last century, and was the author of certain vocal compositions, containing an intermixture of air and recitative, which she published in 1653, with the title of "Cantate, Ariette, e Duetti," with an advertisement prefixed, intimating that she having invented this commixture, had given it to the public by way of trial; but though the style of her airs is rather too simple to be pleasing, the experiment

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted and translated by Glixon, "New Light," 324-325.

<sup>42</sup> Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon*.

succeeded, and she is allowed to be the inventress of that elegant species of vocal composition the Cantata.<sup>43</sup>

However Charles Burney, in Volume 4 of his *General History of Music* (1789), disagrees with Hawkins, giving the first use of the term cantata to a Venetian printing of Benedetto Ferrari da Reggio's *Muscihes varie a voce sola* "which is twenty years more early than the period at which the invention of cantatas is fixed by some writers, who have given the honour to BARBARA STROZZI, a Venetian lady, who, in 1653, published vocal compositions, under the title of CANTATE, Ariette, e Duetti."<sup>44</sup>

Ernst Ludwig Gerber's *Historisch-Biographisches Lexicon der Tonkünstler* of 1792 lists the same works as the earlier *Musicalisches Lexicon*, but goes into greater detail, noting that Strozzi "deserves a special place among the Italian composers."<sup>45</sup> The first mention of Strozzi in French comes not in Corneille's *Le dictionnaire des arts et des sciences* (1694), nor in Jean-Benjamin de la Borde's 1780 *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne*, but in Choron and Fayolle's 1811 *Dictionnaire historique de musiciens*, in which she is described as a noble Venetian lady, to whom the invention of the cantata is attributed.<sup>46</sup> I could find no mention of her in the Italian sources, neither Carlo Gervasoni's *Nuova teoria di musica* (1812) nor in Carlo Schmidl's *Dizionario universale dei musicisti* (1887-1889).

Strozzi is listed in the appendix to Upton's 1880 misogynistic *Woman in Music*,<sup>47</sup> and also in the final list of composers in Stephen S. Stratton's pro-woman "Woman in Relation to Musical Art."<sup>48</sup> Theodore Baker's 1900 *A Biographical Dictionary of*

<sup>43</sup> Hawkins, *A General History*, 91. Ellen Rosand notes in "The Voice of Barbara Strozzi," that as "none of her known works was published in 1653 and she makes no similar claim in any of her known prefaces, perhaps we are dealing here with another (or the same) lost work." (188). I suggest instead that UK copies of Strozzi's works may have included a newly dated advertisement prefix, hyping up the contents for an English market.

<sup>44</sup> Burney, *General History of Music*, Volume 4, 139.

<sup>45</sup> Gerber, *Historisch-Biographisches Lexicon der Tonkünstler* Bd.2, 602: "verdient besonders etz nen Platz undert den italienischen Komponisten." Translation my own.

<sup>46</sup> Choren & Fayolle, *Dictionnaire historique de musicians*, Vol 2 (M-Z), 350: "On lui attribue l'invention de la cantate, parce qu'elle publia, en 1653, des compositions vocals sous le title de *cantate, ariette e duetti*."

<sup>47</sup> Upton, *Women in Music*.

<sup>48</sup> Stratton, "Woman in Relation to Musical Art," 115-146.

*Musicians* does not include Strozzi (neither does the second edition of 1905, nor the third of 1919), but Otto Ebel's 1902 work *Women Composers* gives the following information:

Strozzi (Barbara). Italian composer, born at Venice about the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The following compositions appear in print:- "Il primo libro de Madrigali a 2, 3 e 5 voci" (Venice (1644); "Cantate, ariette et duetti" (Venice 1653); "Ariette a voce sola" (Venice 1658), and "Cantate a voce sola" (Venice 1660). An opera "Diporti d'Euterpe" was successfully performed at Venice 1659. Ricordi re-published two of her songs ("Amor e bandito", and "Amor dormiglione") in the collection of old Italian songs "Eleganti Canzoni ed Aria Italiane del Secolo XVII"<sup>49</sup>

Arthur Elson, in *Woman's Work in Music* (1903), also lists Opus 7 as an opera, comparing Strozzi to Francesca Caccini: "A later composer in the same field was Barbara Strozzi, whose opera, 'Diporti d'Euterpe,' was successfully received at Venice in 1659. In Ricordi's modern collection of old Italian songs are some charming examples of her skill in other directions."<sup>50</sup> Of the German works of that time, Volume nine of Robert Eitner's ten volume *Quellen-Lexikon* (1900-1904) contains a description of Strozzi as a noble Venetian and the adoptive daughter of Giulio Strozzi, including the "virtuosissima Cantatrice" appellation, and listing the surviving seven opuses with their correct dates and handful of the works without opus number.<sup>51</sup>

Barbara Strozzi is not included in *Grove* until the third edition of 1927, where she is listed thus:

Strozzi, Barbara, a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Venetian lady, the adopted daughter of the poet Giulio Strozzi. Nicolo Fontei, who composed his "Bizzarrie poetiche" for her in 1636, calls her a "virtuosissima cantatrice." She was herself a talented composer, who wrote 5 books of cantatas, ariettas and duets, 1 book of madrigals, 2-5 v., 1 book of sacred songs for one voice basso continuo, published between 1644 and 1664, also single numbers in collective volumes.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ebel, *Women Composers*, 134-135.

<sup>50</sup> Elson, *Woman's Work in Music*, 65.

<sup>51</sup> Eitner, *Quellen-Lexikon*, Vol. 9, 314-315.

<sup>52</sup> Colles, *Grove Dictionary*, 174.

The first change to the Grove entry comes in the fifth edition in 1954, in which “Venetian lady” is changed to “Italian 17<sup>th</sup>-century singer and composer.”<sup>53</sup> It is only after Ellen Rosand’s 1978 rediscovery work that Grove gives any further details, as will be considered below.

### **Section Three: Modern rediscovery**

#### 1970s

Ellen Rosand’s 1978 essay “‘Barbara Strozzi, virtuosissima cantatrice’: The Composer’s Voice” stands as the founding document of modern Strozzi research, shaping the majority of academic and popular representations that follow. A “rediscovery” essay, very much in the compensatory history mode prevalent in the study of women musicians at this time, Rosand’s focus is partly musical, partly biographical. She provides much of the data currently known, not only on Barbara Strozzi and her music, but on Giulio, the Unisoni, and the format and reception of their meetings/performance: a combination of debate and music, highlighting rhetorical skill and display.<sup>54</sup> Rosand cites Emmanuele Antonia Cicogna in setting forth the argument that the Unisoni were a short-lived, musical subgroup of the Incogniti, who must likely wound up their gatherings before 1645.

As the first major work on Barbara Strozzi, Rosand’s framing sets up the specific points of debate that dominate the conversation to this very moment, forty years on: Strozzi as exceptional woman, Strozzi as embodied singer composing for her own voice, and the first airing of the courtesan question. As an earlier musicological work, appearing at the beginning of the feminist musicological movement, it is perhaps inevitable that Strozzi appears rather in isolation. Rosand initially links her to Francesca Caccini, before describing her as:

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<sup>53</sup> Blom, *Grove Dictionary*, 150.

<sup>54</sup> Rosand, “Barbara Strozzi,” 244.

the only known woman among the many aria and cantata composers of seventeenth-century Italy, and, one therefore assumes, among the very few women of the period to have pursued a career as a composer and to have achieved some measure of public recognition.<sup>55</sup>

Later in the essay Rosand notes the existence of other women composers of Strozzi's era – Leonara Baroni, the unnamed daughter of Domenico Bassi, the Basile sisters – explaining the impression that the musicking women of Italy made on tourists.<sup>56</sup> It is unclear why these later mentions do not figure in Rosand's initial framing. As to the personal/bodily nature of Strozzi's compositions: Rosand describes Strozzi as a singer first, and a composer second, flavouring the representation to come. Later, in her musical examination, she writes: "Strozzi's music is empathetically singer's music conceived for the voice of the composer."<sup>57</sup>

Rosand's set up of the courtesan question begins by raising the possibility that Strozzi's mother, Isabella Garzoni, was a courtesan, before moving on to a consideration of the *Satire*. While Rosand does include some useful information on the documents as a whole – such as the possibility that it was authored by Busenello – she also cherry-picks a select few comments about Barbara from the rest of the text, including this quote which will go on to feature in many popular representations of Strozzi: "it is a fine thing to distribute the flowers after having already surrendered the fruit."<sup>58</sup> These comments, isolated in this manner, cannot be understood in context against the full and contradictory representation of Barbara contained in the *Satire* texts, nor in context with the depiction of the rest of the Unisoni. Rosand does not include the parts of the *Satire* which are claimed to have been written by Barbara and Giulio, dismissing them in passing in a footnote.<sup>59</sup> Rosand later suggests that Strozzi's setting of love poetry may indicate that she was a courtesan – before pointing out that this question may be unfair and/or unimportant. What is most striking, and pertinent for later representations, is that

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<sup>55</sup> Rosand, "Barbara Strozzi," 241.

<sup>56</sup> Rosand, "Barbara Strozzi," 255.

<sup>57</sup> Rosand, "Barbara Strozzi," 276.

<sup>58</sup> Translated and quoated by Rosand, "Barbara Strozzi," 251.

<sup>59</sup> Rosand, "Barbara Strozzi," 250.

Rosand asks whether Strozzi was a courtesan without providing any information on what that possibility might *mean*: how it would change or enrich our understanding of Strozzi as a composer and/or as an historical figure. It is also important to note that Rosand very much frames the courtesan question as a *question* – a distinction elided by many later writers citing Rosand as their source.

### 1980s

The 1980 edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie, shows the immediate impact of Ellen Rosand's work. The entry for Barbara Strozzi, written by Carolyn Raney, cites Rosand as the only English-language entry in its bibliography. It is notable that Giulio Strozzi is immediately mentioned (and, perhaps, that his entry in this edition of Grove is longer and more detailed than his daughter's). By the end of the sixth sentence, the sexualisation of the figure of Strozzi has begun: "She was clearly the leading singer – and apparently a seductive attraction in other respects – at the Accademia degli Unisoni, which met at Giulio Strozzi's house...Her deportment at the academy brought her some notoriety, and she was viciously satirized in the *Satire, e alter raccolte per l'Accademia de gli Unisoni*."<sup>60</sup> The choice of words is noteworthy – what Raney means by "deportment" is unclear. While Raney goes into some detail on Strozzi's compositional style – treatment of solo lines, treatment of basso continuo, and use of motivic development – she also damns her with faint praise as an "able composer."<sup>61</sup>

1981 saw the publication of another important article by Ellen Rosand, written in conjunction with her husband David: "'Barbara di Santa Sofia' and 'Il Prete Genovese': On the Identity of a Portrait by Bernardo Strozzi." In this work, the Rosands put forward the claim that's Bernardo Strozzi's *Suonatrice* painting is a portrait of Strozzi; this article, and its ongoing ramifications, will be considered in depth in Section Five.

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<sup>60</sup> Raney, "Barbara Strozzi," 294.

<sup>61</sup> Raney, "Barbara Strozzi," 294.

The 1986 work *Women Making Music* includes a great deal of material relevant to the study of Barbara Strozzi. The backlash the editors experienced even before publication gives an idea of how Strozzi was understood in some musical circles. Judith Tick, reflecting on the creation of the volume, recalls:

By the time we handed in the manuscript to the University of California Press, its academic board membership had changed. On to the board came a cranky composer. “The Voice of Barbara Strozzi”? he scoffed. “Why not ‘The Voice of Barbra Streisand’?” Thus he dismissed Ellen Rosand’s superb essay.<sup>62</sup>

“The Voice of Barbara Strozzi” is, in many respects, similar to Rosand’s 1978 essay, repeating much of the same material and keeping the same focus. The elements of musical analysis, in particular, are repetitions. The main presentation of Strozzi continues to be as an exceptional woman, repeating the claim that Strozzi was alone in pursuing (and being recognised in) her career as a composer.<sup>63</sup> Rosand continues to ask the courtesan question,<sup>64</sup> explaining that Strozzi’s performances of love songs in a male academy place her in “the tradition of the Venetian courtesan.”<sup>65</sup>

Rosand’s work is not the only essay in the volume to provide necessary material on Strozzi: Jane Bowers’ “The Emergence of Women Composers in Italy, 1566-1700” gives some vital background information on the conditions which made Strozzi’s career possible, particularly the rise and popularity of music printing. Bowers writes:

Because printed works generally circulated more widely and reached a broader spectrum of musicians than manuscripts, publication offered composers without church, court, or other professional appointments greater opportunities to get their works into the hands of musicians who could perform them. Access to music publication seems to have been another decisive factor in the development of Barbara Strozzi as a composer, for example.<sup>66</sup>

Bowers also considers the importance and potential influence of women creatives in visual art and literary in this period, the ongoing matter of the *querelle des femmes*,

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<sup>62</sup> Tick, “Reflections on the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary,” 134.

<sup>63</sup> Rosand, “Voice of Barbara Strozzi,” 168.

<sup>64</sup> Rosand, “Voice of Barbara Strozzi,” 172.

<sup>65</sup> Rosand, “Voice of Barbara Strozzi,” 184.

<sup>66</sup> Bowers, “Emergence of Women Composers,” 133.

and one of the factors by which women composers were denied opportunities in the new field of opera composition: the pipe-line of talent that moved composers with church positions into operatic positions, excluding women.

Finally, Diane Peacock Jezic's 1988 work *Women Composers: The Lost Tradition Found* contains an entry for Strozzi. Jezic combines a variety of different interpretations here although, noticeably, never once asks the courtesan question. Instead, Jezic links Strozzi to Francesca Caccini and notes her prolific output, while also framing her lack of operatic work as a failure, and categorising the *Unsioni* performances as taking place in an "enclosed domestic"<sup>67</sup> sphere.

### 1990s

How much of this rediscovery work had percolated through into more mainstream classical music culture? Examining *Five Centuries of Music in Venice* – a book and corresponding television series from 1991, gives one answer. Strozzi is included briefly, the only woman composer in the entire work, and (unsurprisingly in light of this fact) presented as a sole exceptional woman.<sup>68</sup> No details of her works are given; the focus is almost entirely on her appearance: "She was as talented as she was beautiful."<sup>69</sup>

It is also worth considering notable absences of information; Jane L. Baldauf-Berdes' 1993 work *Women Musicians of Venice*, despite its title, only examines the women musicians of the *ospedali*. Barbara Strozzi is mentioned only once, when Baldauf-Berdes wonders whether it would have been possible that Strozzi was educated at one of the Venetian *ospedali*. No evidence is provided to support this question.

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<sup>67</sup> Jezic, *Women composers*, 26.

<sup>68</sup> Landon and Norwich, *Five Centuries of Music*, 98.

<sup>69</sup> Landon and Norwich, *Five Centuries of Music*, 21 (illustrated pages).

To return to Rosand: the entry for Strozzi in the 1994 *New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* is a summation of the main points of her earlier research. Rosand gives details on the dedicatees of Strozzi's opuses and the known authors of her chosen texts, and repeats the claim put forward in her earlier essays (examined in Chapter 3) that Strozzi's music is "neither excessively virtuoso nor especially demanding as far as range or tessitura is concerned."<sup>70</sup>

A new edition of Opus 3 by Gail Archer, published in 1997, includes some biographical information in addition to the musical, the most important of which concerns the spread of Strozzi's influential during and just after her lifetime. Speaking of Charles Burney's *A General History of Music*, Archer notes the fact that Opus 2 and Opus 3 "had already been cataloged in the British Library at the time Burney wrote."<sup>71</sup> Archer suggests that Strozzi was educated at one of the celebrated Venetian *ospedali*, citing Baldauf-Berdes' *Women Musicians of Venice* as evidence. Archer asks and romanticises the courtesan question but does not attempt to answer it, immediately moving to re-centre Strozzi within her musical milieu, linking her to Monteverdi and Cavalli.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, twenty years after Rosand's initial research, Beth L. Glixon published two articles filled with significant new material on Strozzi's life, finances, family relationships, and death. The first, "New Light on the Life and Career of Barbara Strozzi" was published in 1997, and opens with a bold new framing, as Glixon describes Barbara first as a student of Cavalli, before stating: "she was the most prolific composer – man or woman – of printed secular vocal music in Venice around the middle of the century."<sup>73</sup> The importance of understanding the Strozzi as a family is highlighted, as Glixon details Giulio's career, and investigates the financial situation of both father and daughter:

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<sup>70</sup> Rosand, "Barbara Strozzi," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*.

<sup>71</sup> Archer, *Opus 3*, vii.

<sup>72</sup> Archer, *Opus 3*, viii.

<sup>73</sup> Glixon, "New Light," 311.

Her financial activities, however, at least those registered in the acts of Venetian notaries, far surpassed those of her father; indeed, they show her to be a savvy investor. It is significant that all but one of the notarial documents that concern Barbara Strozzi were drawn up in the comfort of her own home. This fact alone may point to a certain level of status, as most common people probably had to visit the notary's office in order to obtain services. (The noblewomen of Venice, as well as the resident female opera singers, also shared that status.)<sup>74</sup>

Glixon gives evidence of Barbara's government investments (and her profits), her broader business relationships, and the financial back and forth between the Strozzi and Vidman families: Barbara lent Giovanni Paolo Vidman a very large sum of money, on which she collected interest, and the Strozzi's rented a house from Lodovico Vidman, Giovanni Paolo's brother. The article relates where Strozzi lived and with whom; in her letter to the doge, dated 11 Decemebr 1651, Strozzi reveals that she is living with her "four children in addition to my aged mother."<sup>75</sup>

It is Glixon who uncovered the letters that link Strozzi with Carlo II, Duke of Mantua, showing that she wrote for the bass voice, suggesting a location for the missing volume (Opus 4?), and suggesting also that she may have written to order: "we see her almost in the process of composing for the duke rather than presenting to him a finished publication. Did Strozzi often compose for patrons on demand, and could she have been paid for such services?"<sup>76</sup> Glixon cautions against presuming that the surviving volumes of Strozzi's music are all that she composed and/or published, and discovers that Strozzi was composing after the publication of Opus 8.

The second of Glixon's articles, "More on the Life and Death of Barbara Strozzi", was published in 1999, and provided further information on Strozzi's children, her relationship with Giovanni Paolo Vidman, and her death. Glixon reveals that Strozzi was still living in Venice in 1677, before travelling to Padua, for reasons unknown. Glixon writes:

some time after 8 May 1677, Barbara Strozzi travelled to Padua, where she eventually succumbed to her final illness. The civic death register there records

<sup>74</sup> Glixon, "New Light," 314.

<sup>75</sup> Translated and quoted by Glixon, "New Light," 318.

<sup>76</sup> Glixon, "New Light," 325.

Strozzi's passing: "11 of the same month [November 1677] Signora Barbara Strozzi, 70 years old, ill for one month, seen by the Excellent Marchetti, [in the] parish of Santa Soffia in the houses of the Michiel family."<sup>77</sup>

Glixon explains the importance of Strozzi's age being incorrectly recorded in the registering of death: it is likely that there was no one there who knew her well enough to have knowledge of her real age. Glixon then records the information given in the parish death register: that Strozzi was ill for three months, died suddenly, and was buried in the Eremitani. After her death, Strozzi's inheritance was claimed by her son Giulio Pietro, who is named in the official record as the son of Barbara Strozzi and Giovanni Paolo Vidman – who are described as husband and wife (Vidman was, in fact, married to another woman).

Last but not least, Glixon uncovers a record from a visitor to Venice – two letters signed in an illegible hand – which gives a vital insight into how Strozzi may have been received by her contemporaries. The letter dates from the year after Strozzi's death, 24 September 1678, and is a report regarding the potential purchase of Giulio Strozzi's portrait and manuscript, mishandled by Barbara's son Giulio Pietro. Glixon names the author as 'X' – who writes:

I have learned that [Giulio Strozzi] had, with one of his servants, a daughter, who died the past year. She was celebrated as a singer, and also as a poet, and her name was Barbara Strozzi. She was raped by the Count Vildman [sic], a Venetian nobleman, and had a son who bears the name Giulio Strozzi.<sup>78</sup>

Two important facts emerge from this new source: that Strozzi was celebrated as a poet, making her the most likely author of (some? all?) of the unattributed texts she set to music, and that her relationship with Vidman was described as rape, a statement that will be considered in detail in Section Five of this chapter.

Vidman, father of three of Strozzi's four children, and almost certainly the father of the fourth, had numerous ties with the entire Strozzi family: Giulio named Vidman as

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<sup>77</sup> Glixon, "More on the Life," 134.

<sup>78</sup> Translated and quoted by Glixon, "More on the Life," 136.

the first potential buyer of his portrait in his will of 1638.<sup>79</sup> Vidman's relationship with Barbara was a long-standing one, and his widow, Camilla Grotta, paid the spiritual dowry for both of Barbara's daughters. Glixon notes the age difference between Strozzi and Vidman. He was fourteen years older which, according to Joanne Ferraro, was slightly less than the standard age gap in Venetian marriages at this time; Barbara was twenty-one or twenty-two years old when their first child was born, significantly older than the average age of marriage for a Venetian girl, which was fifteen.<sup>80</sup>

Glixon notes one final implication to emerge from the discovery of these letters: the fact that Giulio Pietro did not take care of either Giulio's portraits nor his manuscripts. Did the rest of Barbara's documents meet a similar end? Or, perhaps, might they still be waiting to be found in the Venetian archives?<sup>81</sup>

## 2000s

In 2001 *Grove's* entry for Strozzi was updated to reflect the new discoveries of Glixon's research. This new entry, jointly written by Rosand and Glixon, presents Strozzi in a different light; the courtesan question is not asked, and attention is drawn to her music, her dedicatees, and her role in the Unisoni.

Robert L. Kendrick's 2002 article "Intent and intertextuality in Barbara Strozzi's sacred music" was a significant step forward in the study of Barbara Strozzi, being the first musicological work to focus on her religious pieces. While Kendrick does raise the courtesan question, he attempts to find a more detailed answer that takes into account both her secular and sacred output:

the circumstances of the composer's life have often been considered in relation to the flashy but tenuous social milieu of Venetian *cortigiane*...Whatever Strozzi's actual status – and it does not seem that the category of a *cortigiana* does justice to the complexities and subtleties of her position – the issues of her own sentiment

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<sup>79</sup> Glixon, "More on the Life," 137.

<sup>80</sup> Ferraro, *Marriage Wars*, 62.

<sup>81</sup> Glixon, "More on the Life," 136.

and the effect of her sacred works offer perspective on her own character and on her possibilities to intervene in Venetian sacred music – what would seem a conjunction, personal and social, of the semi-marginal and the sacred.<sup>82</sup>

This searching for alternative ways of understanding is underscored by Kendrick's analysis of the Bernardo Strozzi *Suonatrice*, which he considers may be linked, through the representation of the bared breast, to the figure of *Caritas*.

*The Oxford Companion to Music* included its first entry for Strozzi in 2002. Written by Tim Carter, it subsumes musical information into the representation of Strozzi as courtesan and feminine physical presence: "She was the adopted (perhaps illegitimate) daughter of the Venetian poet Giulio Strozzi, and in her life occupied a difficult space somewhere between patron and courtesan. She was known in Venetian intellectual circles both for her beauty and for her singing."<sup>83</sup> Dates and titles for her works are not provided.

Mauro Calcagno's 2003 essay "Signifying nothing: On the Aesthetics of Pure Voice in Early Venetian Opera" was another significant step forward in Strozzi scholarship, placing Strozzi in musical context alongside Monteverdi and Cavalli, and within the specific cultural and philosophical worlds of the Unisoni and Incogniti. Strozzi is starting to be considered, by some writers at least, as a composer of her time and place, and not only as an exceptional woman.

Susan J. Mardinly's 2004 doctoral thesis for the University of Connecticut, *Barbara Strozzi and The Pleasures of Euterpe*, focuses partly on the music and partly on biographical interpretation. An unusual feature of this work is Mardinly's interpretation of Strozzi's "spirituality" and what she describes as Strozzi's "complex ideology."<sup>84</sup> Strozzi is considered in comparison with and to Artemisia Gentileschi, Veronica Franco, and Arcangela Tarabotti; and the unevidenced claim that

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<sup>82</sup> Kendrick, "Intent and intertextuality," 66.

<sup>83</sup> Carter, "Barbara Strozzi."

<sup>84</sup> Mardinly, *Barbara Strozzi*, abstract.

Gentileschi knew Strozzi is forwarded.<sup>85</sup> In Mardingly's asking of the courtesan question, we see an exaggeration of Rosand's claims:

The *Veglie* also reveal that Barbara was eager to honor Venus by portraying herself as Flora, the patron of courtesans. Barbara distributed flowers to her audience, thus lending substance to the view that the debates and musical sessions of the *Unisoni* were preludes to lovemaking. Consider also what Sappho writes: "the plucking of blossoms...describe girls about to lose their virginity."<sup>86</sup>

Mardinly then considers the question settled: "Barbara evidently viewed the exchange of sexual favors as an inroad to the pleasures of artistic and intellectual freedom."<sup>87</sup> This thesis contains several claims which are hard to reconcile with the evidence provided by scholars of early modern Venice, such as the claim that married women were kept illiterate,<sup>88</sup> and Mardinly's representation of Strozzi's death plays into broader misogynist cultural myths around the aging and decaying body of the fallen woman.<sup>89</sup>

Finally, the first full book on Strozzi was published at the end of the decade: Silvana Ruffier Scarinci's 2008 work *Safó Novella: Uma Poética do Abandono nos Lamentos de Barbara Strozzi, Veneza, 1619 – 1677*. As far as I have been able to ascertain, the work has had minimal impact on Anglophone Strozzi scholarship, which can be explained by the fact that it is only available in a pricy hardback import from Brazil, in the Portuguese original. Scarinci's work is divided between musical and biographical analysis, the former centred around Strozzi laments, in isolation and in comparison to Claudio Monteverdi and Francesca Caccini, and the latter highly coloured by the courtesan question. Scarinci places Strozzi in context with other famous women of Venice, namely Veronica Franco and Anna Renzi, and presents Strozzi as a paradox alongside the paradox of Venice its (her)self. Without providing an answer, Scarinci pointedly asks whether the "arts of the courtesan" were passed from "mother to daughter" from Isabella Garzoni to Barbara.<sup>90</sup> She characterises Loredano's mentions

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<sup>85</sup> Mardinly, *Barbara Strozzi*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> Mardinly, *Barbara Strozzi*, 24.

<sup>87</sup> Mardinly, *Barbara Strozzi*, 24.

<sup>88</sup> Mardinly, *Barbara Strozzi*, 25.

<sup>89</sup> Mardinly, *Barbara Strozzi*, 47.

<sup>90</sup> Scarinci, *Safó Novella*, 153. Translation my own.

of Strozzi as being written in a “suspiciously flattering and sensual tone,”<sup>91</sup> and uses Rosand’s famous quote from the *Satire*, of Strozzi giving away the flowers after the fruit had already gone.<sup>92</sup> For the sake of the completeness of this thesis, I note that there is nothing in Scarinci’s bibliography missing from mine.

### 2010s

On the whole, the majority of specialist academic texts in the second decade of the twenty-first century are more inclined to situate Strozzi in musical, rather than biographical, terms, with the works of Wendy Heller and Claire Fontijn providing stand out examples of this approach. As such, I have found their scholarship to be most useful for the work of Chapter 3. Wendy Heller’s 2015 essay “Barbara Strozzi and the Taming of the Male Poetic Voice,” while it contains the anecdote from Loredano about Barbara’s behaviour at a ball, not previously reported in Strozzi scholarship and discussed earlier, is mostly concerned with the word setting and social function of Strozzi’s music.

However, there was a significant shift in the courtesan question during the 2010s, even in academic texts, as those who asked moved from possibility to certainty. The clearest example of this approach comes in Sara Pecknold’s 2015 doctoral thesis, “*On Lightest Leaves Do I Fly*: Redemption and Renewal of Identity in Barbara Strozzi’s *Sacri musicali affetti* (1655), for The Catholic University of America. As Dr Pecknold is later presented by Radio 3 as a leading Strozzi expert for their *Composer of the Week* programme, it is important to understand the foundation of her work. Pecknold uses two main framings in support of her representation: the necessity of a courtesan reading and the virgin/whore dichotomy. Pecknold’s first description of Strozzi is as the ‘Venetian courtesan-composer.’<sup>93</sup> The Incogniti is described as “morally suspect”<sup>94</sup> and Giulio Strozzi judged for what he is *not* (a legitimate heir to a

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<sup>91</sup> Scarinci, *Safo Novella*, 151. Translation my own.

<sup>92</sup> Scarinci, *Safo Novella*, 152.

<sup>93</sup> Pecknold, ‘*On Lightest Leaves Do I Fly*,’ 2.

<sup>94</sup> Pecknold, ‘*On Lightest Leaves Do I Fly*,’ 6.

nobleman) and *cannot* provide (the large dowry that such a nobleman might provide for his daughter and the social isolation that might help her make an economically advantageous marriage.)<sup>95</sup> Pecknold implicates Giulio in his daughter's supposed sexual career with highly charged language: "it is hard to deny the very real possibility that Giulio Strozzi groomed Barbara to be a courtesan."<sup>96</sup>

Pecknold uses the *Veglie* in support of her argument, and expands Strozzi's role from that of *cortigiana* to one of a woman sexually available to all of the Unisoni.<sup>97</sup> Pecknold disagrees with Kendrick's attempts at alternative readings of the *Suonatrice*, and of Strozzi's life in general, and positions the report of rape in relation to the Strozzi-Vidman relationship as part of Strozzi's assumed project of public re-invention, from fallen woman to pious mother. Strozzi is referred to as "the courtesan" throughout the work, and Pecknold concludes that, even if Strozzi were not a courtesan, that fact should be treated as irrelevant:

It is, of course, possible that Strozzi never worked as a courtesan *per se*, and that she never received payment for sexual favours. Nevertheless, the portrait, the *Veglie*, and the satires render this possibility irrelevant. Regardless of her profession, Strozzi was considered by many of her contemporaries to be a promiscuous woman of questionable morals, whose voice and body were to be praised and objectified, but who could never make for a nobleman an honest wife.<sup>98</sup>

The final work considered in this section is Anna Beer's 2016 book *Sounds and Sweet Airs: The Forgotten Women of Classical Music*, which combines an academic foundation with a popular approach from a mainstream publisher. Each chapter tells the story of a woman composer; Strozzi is included alongside Francesca Caccini and Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre. Beer acknowledges the paucity of primary material from Strozzi's life, recognising that many of the gaps in any telling of her life cannot be filled with evidence, but only hinted at through informed guesswork, which she later supplies. Beer's examination of Strozzi's music serves as a general introduction,

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<sup>95</sup> Pecknold, 'On Lightest Leaves Do I Fly,' 10.

<sup>96</sup> Pecknold, 'On Lightest Leaves Do I Fly,' 47.

<sup>97</sup> Pecknold, 'On Lightest Leaves Do I Fly,' 13.

<sup>98</sup> Pecknold, 'On Lightest Leaves Do I Fly,' 25.

and she underscores Strozzi's use of new printing technology as a deliberate method of advancing her career and securing a legacy.<sup>99</sup> As to the biographical representation: while Beer acknowledges that there may be different readings, she comes down strongly in favour of the argument that Strozzi was a courtesan. Writing from the imagined perspective of Giulio Strozzi, Beer puts forward only two possible futures for Barbara – marriage or a convent – before proposing a third path, based on Beer's reading of the *Suonatrice*: "This portrait suggests that establishing Barbara as a musician was only the first stage of Giulio's plan for his protégée. If all went to plan, she would be musician, composer and courtesan."<sup>100</sup> Of Barbara's relationship with Vidman, and Giulio's pre-existing friendship with him, Beer writes: "Giovanni Paolo Vidman who, in 1641, accepted the twin gifts of Barbara's body and the dedication to Giulio Strozzi's *La finta pazza*".<sup>101</sup> Later admitting the possibility of a concubinage relationship between Barbara and Vidman, Beer nevertheless concludes, in loaded language, that Giulio "had prostituted her."<sup>102</sup> Notwithstanding Beer's praise for her music and drive to publish, she positions her thus: "Strozzi, just as so many other women of her time and place, was for much of her life a mere puppet."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Beer, *Sounds and Sweet Airs*, 82-83.

<sup>100</sup> Beer, *Sounds and Sweet Airs*, 57.

<sup>101</sup> Beer, *Sounds and Sweet Airs*, 58-59.

<sup>102</sup> Beer, *Sounds and Sweet Airs*, 64.

<sup>103</sup> Beer, *Sounds and Sweet Airs*, 86.

BY  
**CAROLINE CRAMPTON**

MUSIC & THEATRE 18 MAY 2016

## Unchained melodies: the forgotten women composers of Western classical music

*Sounds and Sweet Airs: the Forgotten Women of Classical Music*  
by Anna Beer reviewed.



Figure 2.2. *New Statesman* review of Beer's *Sounds and Sweet Airs*, featuring a section of the Bernardo Strozzi *Suonatrice*, 18 May 2016

## Section Four: Popular representations

### BBC Radio 3 and the BBC Proms

In this section, I will consider recent popular representations of Barbara Strozzi across a variety of different media: radio, recordings, concert programmes, print, online information (see Figure 2.2 for the *New Statesman's* treatment of the supposed portrait of Strozzi), and a museum exhibit. I would like to begin with the representations which, arguably, have had the greatest cultural impact in terms of both audience reach and received intellectual and cultural authority: two treatments of Barbara Strozzi by the BBC.

The first is BBC Radio 3's inclusion of Strozzi in one of their flagship programmes, *Composer of the Week*. First broadcast in 2016, and later repeated in 2018, *Composer of the Week* is a five-part series combining biographical discussion with musical extracts, presented by Donald Macleod with, in this instance, contributions from Sara Pecknold. It can still be accessed online,<sup>104</sup> but is not included in the overall *Composer of the Week* searchable database of featured composers. From the opening of the first programme, Strozzi is presented using the trope of the exceptional woman, as Macleod begins: "My composer this week is unusual."<sup>105</sup> He continues his explanation without the use of gendered pronouns, building up to the reveal: "What makes my composer this week exceptional for the time is that she was a woman."<sup>106</sup> This framing continues until the conclusion of the last episode, with Pecknold's final summation of Strozzi as exceptional woman, in those terms.<sup>107</sup> As such, Strozzi is isolated from her female contemporaries, and judged instead in comparison to men; the first episode's title is "In the Shadow of Monteverdi." A sexualised, even Orientalised flavour pervades the choice of text: "Dr Sara Pecknold joins Donald Macleod to help lift the veil on this elusive composer."<sup>108</sup> The courtesan question looms large, appearing in the second sentence of the programme

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<sup>104</sup> *Composer of the Week*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072hw4k>

<sup>105</sup> *Composer of the Week*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072hw4k>

<sup>106</sup> *Composer of the Week*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072hw4k>

<sup>107</sup> *Composer of the Week*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072hw4k>

<sup>108</sup> *Composer of the Week*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072hw4k>

description, not as a question but as a probable fact.<sup>109</sup> This framing continues, re-using Pecknold's previous use of the loaded term "grooming": "Giulio Strozzi was keen for his illegitimate daughter to be educated to increase her future prospects, but this may also have involved grooming her for the life of a courtesan."<sup>110</sup> Episode 3 is titled "An Object of Desire" and includes a few quotes from the *Satire*, without relevant context. There is a discussion as to whether Giulio "was pimping out his daughter,"<sup>111</sup> and the *Suonatrice* is explored through Pecknold's theory of the unchaste gaze (included later in this chapter). While the term concubinage is briefly mentioned, there is no exploration of what this form of relationship meant, or how common it may have been. In Episode 5, "Off to the Nunnery," Macleod describes Opus 5 as a biographical turning point, from which time Strozzi appears to have considered her former life full of "immoral pleasures"<sup>112</sup> – no source is given for this interpretation, nor any explanation as to how this reading can account for Opuses 6, 7, and 8, with their texts so similar to those of 1, 2 and 3.

In celebration of Strozzi's 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary, her works were included in one of the BBC Proms at Cadogan Hall, a lunchtime recital on 29 July 2019 titled "A Celebration of Barbara Strozzi," broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. The primarily framing of this performance was of Strozzi in comparison to her male contemporaries, describing her as "the pioneering Venetian composer, born 400 years ago, whose songs and madrigals stand alongside Monteverdi's as some of the greatest of the age."<sup>113</sup> The concert itself only features four pieces by Strozzi, with the rest of the programme being made up of works by Cavalli and Bembo, situating her in her specific compositional context, but denying her both a complete programme and the time needed for a full example of her different styles and use of forces. By comparison, the 2009 "Handel Celebration" Prom contained *only* music by Handel, in a variety of different styles.

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<sup>109</sup> *Composer of the Week*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072hw4k>

<sup>110</sup> *Composer of the Week*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072hw4k>

<sup>111</sup> *Composer of the Week*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072hw4k>

<sup>112</sup> *Composer of the Week*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b072hw4k>

<sup>113</sup> *Proms at Cadogan Hall 2*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000754k>

## CDs

In considering recordings of Strozzi, I have tried to make sure that my selection covers a broad range; the twelve CDs examined here span nearly thirty years of recording history, vary from solo composer to multi-composer collections, and range between those from feminist early music specialists such as *Musica Secreta*, to those by more generalist classical musicians.<sup>114</sup> I am primarily concerned here with the presentation of Strozzi through song selection, artwork, and, most importantly, liner notes. The information presented within those notes is overwhelmingly framed by the idea of Strozzi as an exceptional woman, as a highly sexual figure, or as both. This is clearly demonstrated in the first of these CDs, the 1990 recording *Concerto Delle Donne*, by the Consort of Musicke; Anthony Rooley, the author of the liner notes, isolates Strozzi from her female peers and forebears, and grounds her compositional talents within an embodied framework of “natural” womanly outpouring: “Barbara Strozzi – perhaps the first female composer of genius – naturally inclines to writing for female voices.”<sup>115</sup> A 1993 recording from the Ensemble Incantato, *Barbara Strozzi: Arie Cantate, & Lamenti*, immediately raises the courtesan question in the framework of the *Satire*, without further context.<sup>116</sup>

A small minority of recordings resist these framings: *Musica Secreta*’s 1994 recording *Barbara Strozzi: La virtuosissima cantatrice*, with liner notes by Deborah Roberts, places Strozzi’s achievements in context while still acknowledging the existence of other women composers:

In an age when singer/composers were relatively common, no single woman had as much of her music published as Barbara Strozzi. Indeed, compared even with the most prestigious of male cantata composers such as Carissimi and Rossi, most of

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<sup>114</sup> Many Strozzi recordings are now only available as extremely expensive, rare imports and/or collector’s items: the recordings I have selected are for the most part more accessible, as defined as being priced at £50 or under and/or available through the British Library Sound Archive. I note that many recordings of Strozzi are unavailable on online Streaming services – increasingly the most popular way for listeners to access music – and that even specialised music libraries in London hold no single composer Strozzi CDs.

<sup>115</sup> Rooley, *Concerto Delle Donne: Madrigali*, 3-4.

<sup>116</sup> *Barbara Strozzi: Arie Cantate, & Lamenti*, 12.

whose works remained in manuscript, the sheer quantity of her publications is remarkable.<sup>117</sup>

Roberts also places Strozzi's choice of poetry in context, highlighting her role in the Unisoni and her representation of her *self* through musical setting.<sup>118</sup> Paula Chateauneuf's liner notes for 1996 CD *To the Unknown Goddess: A Portrait of Barbara Strozzi* also provide some details of the cultural background to Strozzi's career, notably a mention of Giulio's role in proto-feminist debates and a translation of the description of Strozzi's singing contained within Fontei's *Bizzarrie poetiche*. Chateauneuf describes Strozzi's musicking and general representation in highly gendered terms,<sup>119</sup> and determines the worth of Strozzi's compositions through comparison with a male standard: "Barbara has a distinct compositional style, on a par with her male contemporaries."<sup>120</sup>

The liner notes for the 1997 recording of the majority of Strozzi's Opus 1 by early ensemble La Venexiana contains reflections from two authors, providing radically different framings. The biographical section by Claudio Cavina isolates Strozzi completely from her fellow women musicians,<sup>121</sup> while José Carlos Cabello, in the section titled "The Power of Expression" manages both to include Strozzi among a long line up of other early modern Italian women artists, and also to position her as a lone genius:

Their undeniable talent in a variety of fields has earned them a place in history and our most heartfelt admiration. All of them, however, are surpassed by one single, exceptional and incomparable figure, whose true stature is beginning to be appreciated now: Barbara Valle, virtuosissima cantatrice and brilliant composer, known in her day as "La Strozzi."<sup>122</sup>

Cabello frames Strozzi as *so exceptional* that she transcends her gender completely: "Leaving aside the fact that she was a woman, her music is up among the best of the

<sup>117</sup> *Barbara Strozzi: La virtuosissima cantatrice*, 3.

<sup>118</sup> *Barbara Strozzi: La virtuosissima cantatrice*, 4.

<sup>119</sup> *To the Unknown Goddess: A Portrait of Barbara Strozzi*, 2.

<sup>120</sup> *To the Unknown Goddess: A Portrait of Barbara Strozzi*, 3.

<sup>121</sup> *Barbara Strozzi Primo Libro de Madrigali*, 27.

<sup>122</sup> *Barbara Strozzi Primo Libro de Madrigali*, 29.

whole century.”<sup>123</sup> The liner notes for the 2000 CD *Barbara Strozzi: Cantates* takes a similar approach: “The traces that the life of Barbara Strozzi left behind give evidence of one of the most unusual destinies of the time. Why? Because she was a woman. Not of the common sort, to be sure, otherwise we would know nothing about her.”<sup>124</sup> Also issued in 2000 was Favella Lyrica’s CD *A New Sappho*. The liner notes, written by Pamela Dellal, isolate Strozzi from the realities of the career opportunities available (if not always easily available) to women of her time and place, by claiming that no woman in seventeenth century Italy could have a public career.<sup>125</sup>

Two recordings from 2001 do take a more musically focused tack: *Barbara Strozzi: cantate e ariette a voce sola*, and *donne barocche*. The first, from early music group Ensemble La Commedia del Mondo, features liner notes from their harpsichord player, Philippe Despont, who provides a brief biographical overview before focusing on the Ensemble’s interpretation of Strozzi’s style through a contemporaneous text on theatrical production, *Il Corago. Donne barocche*, a collection of music from women composers of the Baroque period, benefits from liner notes written by Robert L. Kendrick who gives an overview of early modern women’s musicking that includes information on other artistic developments and the *querelle des femmes*. His specific treatment of Strozzi is based on the information that she herself provides through her publications, including the possibility that she performed in person for the dedicatee of her eight Opus, Duchess Sophia of Brunswick-Lüneburg.<sup>126</sup>

2004 Deutsche Grammophon recording *Music for a While*, featuring one of classical music’s most famous mezzo-sopranos, Anne Sofie von Otter, is included here not for its content, but for its *lack* of content. Strozzi is the only woman composer included, and only through one song, “L’Eraclito amoroso.” The title of the work is not given – rather, the song is identified by the first line of text, and the liner notes contain no information on Strozzi at all.

<sup>123</sup> *Barbara Strozzi Primo Libro de Madrigali*, 30.

<sup>124</sup> *Barbara Strozzi: Cantates*, 8.

<sup>125</sup> *A New Sappho*.

<sup>126</sup> *donne barocche*, 18.

Finally, the last two recordings included are marked by an increased focus on Strozzi as a sexual force and likely courtesan, a framing explained, perhaps, by an upsurge in similar popular representations of the composer during the same time period. The artwork for 2006 recording *Barbara Strozzi* by Ensemble Poïésis heavily emphasises the *Satire* quote regarding fruit and flowers, previously highlighted by Rosand. While there is some musical information and analysis, the biographical text is marked by sensational subheadings, the most eye-catching of which is the first, “The youth of a Siren.” Strozzi is elevated to the “mastermind” behind the Unisoni, and Giulio is described as trying to distinguish his daughter as much for her beauty as for her art.<sup>127</sup> Vidman is mentioned, although the information given on their children is factually incorrect, and the courtesan question is raised and found credible. Most striking of all is the gendered language used to describe Strozzi, particularly through the interesting choice of the word “wilful”: “In archival documents and the prefaces to her works, Barbara Strozzi’s character appears cut-and-dried and wilful.”<sup>128</sup> *Heroines of Love and Loss*, released in 2016/2017, provides the strongest examples of the sexualised courtesan framing found in the recordings examined here. A collection of songs from a variety of composers, Strozzi is represented by “Lagrime mie” and “L’Eraclito amoroso”; the latter is described as “highly perfumed.”<sup>129</sup> The courtesan question is no longer a question, but an (unexplored) reality, in moralising language yet again influenced by Pecknold: “She was educated, but also pimped out by her father to his friend; her life as a professional musician was precarious and overshadowed by the taint of the courtesan.”<sup>130</sup>

Aside from these textural framings, these recordings of Strozzi are linked by two other common factors. The first is by a limited number of song choices, favouring works for solo voice in the lament style. Of the twelve recordings included here, four songs emerge as the most popular: “L’Eraclito amoroso” (featured six times), “Lagrime mie” (featured five times), “Amor dormiglione” (featured five times), and

<sup>127</sup> *Barbara Strozzi*, 8-9.

<sup>128</sup> *Barbara Strozzi*, 9.

<sup>129</sup> *Heroines of Love and Loss*, 7.

<sup>130</sup> *Heroines of Love and Loss*, 7.

“Lamento (appresso ai molli argenti)” (featured four times). “Amor dormiglione” is the only strophic song of the group, with a mildly erotic text that well suits a more sexualised framing of Strozzi. The second common factor is that of album art choices: “sex sells” appears as a common motif, either through a focus on overtly sexual imagery, or through feminine-coded art choices. Musica Secreta’s recording, and the 2001 *donne barocche*, both focus on the breasts in their album artwork, the former through the exposed nipple of *A Blonde Woman* by Vecchio, and the latter by a framing of Gentileschi’s *Judith and her Maidservant* that cuts off half of Judith’s face to better position her cleavage as the main focus. This approach can be seen in other recordings of Strozzi’s works not included in full here (see Figure 2.3 for examples). The 1999 CD *Kurtisane und Nonne* explicitly uses the Virgin/Whore trope to market Strozzi, while both *Barbara Strozzi: Passioni, Vizi & Virtù* (2015) and *Barbara Strozzi: Diporti di Euterpe* (1999) feature a titillating historical figure. Ensemble Kairós’s 2005 CD, *Due alme innamorate*, a collection for two sopranos, takes a more innuendo-laden approach, with album artwork featuring a suggestive vulvic image of two pearls nestled in an oyster shell. Where album artwork is not sexualised, it is usually heavily gendered, such as in Ensemble Poïésis’s artwork featuring a blurred, intimate image of a sleeping woman. Other gendered tropes used in Strozzi CD artwork include images of suggestive flowers and fruit (2014 CD *Barbara Strozzi: Arias & Cantatas*) and the use of the colour pink (2009 CD *Strozzi: Virtuosissima Compositrice*).



Figure 2.3. Examples of album art

## Concerts

The first of the two recent concerts considered here took place on 10 January 2019 at King's Place, as part of the *Venus Unwrapped* series focusing on women composers. "Barbara Strozzi: Star of Venice" was performed by the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and fell into familiar framing patterns. The concert marketing details released by King's Place focused immediately on the courtesan question: "An illegitimate daughter, a single parent, who was rumoured to be a courtesan and unable to secure a position in any court."<sup>131</sup> The listing goes on to describe her music with a word commonly associated with Strozzi: "sensuous."<sup>132</sup> The concert featured music by both Strozzi and Monteverdi, with the Strozzi drawn from a handful of her most popular works, including "Lagrime mie." More so even than the concert itself, the review from influential music website *Bachtrack* is an ideal example of popular understandings of Strozzi. The reviewer, Stephen Pritchard, describes Strozzi's music as "uniquely feminine."<sup>133</sup> As to the concert's inclusion of Monteverdi: Pritchard first acknowledges the fact that it is unfair to directly compare two very different works, written for different forces and different settings, before doing so anyway, judging Strozzi's worth by a male yardstick: "Poor Strozzi couldn't compete with this scale of grandeur."<sup>134</sup>

The second concert programme was performed in 2018 at both Brompton Cemetery Chapel and Handel House. *The Courtesan's Gaze* by early music group Fieri Ensemble presented three works of Barbara Strozzi alongside complementary pieces by Monteverdi and Francesca Caccini; two of the three pieces by Strozzi were "Amor dormiglione" and "L'Eraclito amorooso." Of particular interest to this study is the ensemble's use of online marketing, and a review from highly respected online arts magazine *The Arts Desk*. The courtesan question colours every aspect of this representation of Strozzi; the marketing information provided by the organisers on

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<sup>131</sup> Kings Place. "Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment – Barbara Strozzi."

<sup>132</sup> Kings Place. "Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment – Barbara Strozzi."

<sup>133</sup> Pritchard, "Venus Unwrapped."

<sup>134</sup> Pritchard, "Venus Unwrapped."

their Facebook event page reads: “Barbara Strozzi lived a life of high musical achievement and scandal in the Venice of the seventeenth century. A prolific and successful published composer in her own time, she was said to have acted as courtesan at musical and intellectual meetings where ‘clothes were optional’.”<sup>135</sup> This same framing looms large in the review: “The texts Strozzi set in her op. 2 are blatantly sexualised – leading to the scurrilous contemporary libels suggesting she was a courtesan that gave the concert its name.”<sup>136</sup>

### Victoria & Albert Museum Exhibition

From 30 September 2017 to 25 February 2018, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London ran an exhibition in partnership with the Royal Opera House titled *Opera: Passion, Power and Politics*. As one of the highlights of their exhibition, they included the Bernardo Strozzi *Suonatrice*. The exhibition told the history of opera by focusing on the premiers of, and musical cultures surrounding, seven highly influential operas in the Western canon. The first was Claudio Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea*, and it was in this section that the curators included information on Giulio and Barbara Strozzi, Giulio being represented by his work in honour of Anna Renzi. Barbara was not represented by her own works, despite the understandably heavy focus on notated scores in the exhibition, but by the Bernardo Strozzi painting. The information given alongside it read:

Barbara Strozzi was a singer and prolific composer. She was adopted by the intellectual Giulio Strozzi who encouraged her musical talent. Despite her success, music may not have been her only source of income, as this seductive portrait implies. She is shown surrounded by scores and instruments, but is also bare-breasted. The sexuality of the image suggests she may have been a Venetian courtesan.<sup>137</sup>

I am grateful to the curators of the exhibition, who took the time to discuss their representation of Strozzi with me. In an emailed interview, Jule Rubi explained some

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<sup>135</sup> See screencapture and interview in Appendix Two.

<sup>136</sup> Hughes, “The Courtesan’s Gaze.”

<sup>137</sup> See Appendix Two for full interview with curator Jule Rubi.

of the curatorial decisions regarding the representation of Strozzi: that they based their representation of Strozzi on the research of Rosand and Glixon, and that they wanted to present Strozzi as a parallel performer to Anna Renzi, as two unmarried women making careers in music. In answer to my question as to why the painting was chosen, rather than a volume of Strozzi's music, Rubi wrote:

What was of interest to us in the depiction of Strozzi is her role as a woman in Venice, which comes out more strikingly in the portrait. It is also helpful in an exhibition context to humanize the story with characters. The famous question of whether or not she was a courtesan also allowed us to reinforce how Venice was a thriving city for entertainment and to show how courtesans were integral to Venetian life in the seventeenth century. In the context and limited space of the exhibition, we focused only on the manuscripts of the featured operas. In this specific section, we displayed Cavalli's copy of Monteverdi's *Poppea*. Bringing in manuscripts of different works would have taken us away of our main narrative thread and our aim to encourage new and less specialist audiences to opera as a subject.<sup>138</sup>

I am interested by the idea that an unconfirmed portrait by a male artist would prove more helpful in demonstrating Strozzi's "role as a woman" than her own – a woman's – work. In terms of charting the representation of Strozzi in modern culture, the V&A exhibition proves an example where the courtesan question takes precedence over other interpretations of Strozzi's life and works.

### Online information

In choosing which online sources of information to examine, I felt it important to select examples which appeared high up in Google results for a search of "Barbara Strozzi,"<sup>139</sup> and which would appear, to many readers, as trustworthy sources of information. The first of these, therefore, is the Wikipedia entry for Barbara Strozzi, which provides a basic but factually sound overview of Strozzi's life and works. Listing her first as a singer, then as a composer, the entry charts the importance of Giulio Strozzi's support and Cavalli's training in bringing about her musical career.

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<sup>138</sup> See Appendix Two for full interview with Jule Rubi.

<sup>139</sup> Acknowledging that there is a degree of tailoring in search results based on previous online activity.

Relying heavily on both Rosand and Glixon, the courtesan question is raised but is not a main focus: “It is conceivable that Strozzi may have been a courtesan, although she may have merely been the target of jealous slander by her male contemporaries.”<sup>140</sup> My second example comes from the highly popular Sinfini Music website, acquired by Deutsche Grammophon in 2016. While Deutsche Grammophon promised to maintain existing Sinfini Music material, their entry for Barbara Strozzi has subsequently disappeared. I believe it still worthy of consideration here, though, given the influential nature of the website, and the fact that it so clearly reflects two of the most prevalent framings: the courtesan and the embodied woman. Of the latter, Sinfini’s entry notes Strozzi’s “sensuous texts,” states that she “chose subject matters around love, lust and tragedy” and, in feminine-coded language, writes: “Strozzi’s music is sensuous, extravagant and lyrical. Her vocal lines are shapely, florid and uninhibitedly melodramatic.”<sup>141</sup> The courtesan question is embellished, so that Strozzi is presented not as a courtesan per se, but as a sex worker specifically working for the Unisoni.<sup>142</sup>

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* entry for Barbara Strozzi, written by Rebecca Cypess, also includes the exceptional woman framing, and subsumes Barbara into her father’s activities (a trope explored in Chapter One): “Without her father’s connections and involvement in the musical activities of Venice, it is unlikely that Strozzi would have been able to launch a career as a composer.”<sup>143</sup> Cypess gives a few details on the Unisoni and the Incogniti, before raising the courtesan question, linking it to the *Satire* and to a new reading of the *Suonatrice*, in which Bernardo Strozzi’s depiction of a viol (“the shape of which mimics the female form”<sup>144</sup>) provides evidence of a deliberately sexualised portrayal of Barbara Strozzi.

AllMusic.com’s entry for Strozzi, written by Joseph Stevenson, upgrades the content of the *Suonatrice* painting, changing a half-visible nipple covered by lace to “a semi-

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<sup>140</sup> Wikipedia, “Barbara Strozzi.”

<sup>141</sup> Sinfini Music. “Barbara Strozzi.”

<sup>142</sup> Sinfini Music. “Barbara Strozzi.”

<sup>143</sup> Cypess, “Barbara Strozzi.”

<sup>144</sup> Cypess, “Barbara Strozzi.”.

nude showing her in dishabille.”<sup>145</sup> The entry otherwise contains standard information on her life and compositions. Encyclopedia.com, which underscores its projection of trustworthiness by claiming to be the world’s top online encyclopaedia, describes Strozzi as an “intellectual activist.”<sup>146</sup> Presenting her as an exceptional woman, linking her name to Hildegard von Bingen’s, the entry provides a rather confused reading of the courtesan question, but does note the existence of academic disagreement as to the likelihood of such claims.

Classic FM’s online article of 25 April 2018 combines a mixture of approaches to produce a deliberately positive depiction of the composer. The piece contains factual inaccuracies – Strozzi is described as having had three children, rather than four – but stands out in comparison to other online information in its analysis of her music. The courtesan question is raised and immediately dismissed, Robert Kendrick’s (unattributed) reading of the *Suonatrice* is given, and Strozzi is recommended to readers, albeit in the vein of the exceptional woman: “A prolific female composer and single mum in 17th-century Venice, Barbara Strozzi was so ahead of her time that she makes Marty McFly look like an amateur.”<sup>147</sup>

By comparison, *The Wall Street Journal’s* 2016 review of Beer’s *Sounds and Sweet Airs* dismisses Strozzi entirely, along sexual lines. Norman Lebrecht, a musical writer whose popularity and reach seem unaffected by the belief (from some quarters) of the sexism present in much of his work, writes: “Barbara Strozzi was raised in Venice, where prostitution was as much a part of the entertainment industry as opera. Pimped by her father, Barbara declared a kind of sexual liberation in her life as a courtesan.”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Stevenson, “Barbara Strozzi Biography.”

<sup>146</sup> Encyclopedia.com. “Strozzi, Barbara.”

<sup>147</sup> Longdon, “This is the Amazing Story.”

<sup>148</sup> Norman Lebrecht, “Euterpe’s Daughters,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 June 2016.

### *My Tango with Barbara Strozzi*

The last item for consideration in this reception study is the 2007 novel *My Tango with Barbara Strozzi* by Russell Hoban, best known for his classic children's book *The Mouse and His Child*. Published by Bloomsbury and well received by the UK press, the front cover features an interpretation of the Bernardo Strozzi portrait in which the model (explicitly identified as Barbara Strozzi in this work) is presented as thinner and (to modern eyes) prettier than in the original, with larger eyes and lips, and a flush of pink across her décolletage that calls attention to her breasts. The plot follows the misadventures of main character Phil Ockerman, a man obsessed with Barbara Strozzi, who meets and falls in love with a woman he believes looks just like her. In the opening pages, Ockerman has his first encounter with Strozzi, through viewing the Bernardo Strozzi painting at the Royal Academy. Hoban, here, details Ockerman's reaction:

What a woman!

Not a beauty but she had a slightly sluttish look that was irresistible. Her eyes, so languorous, so not caring, so haunting after three centuries and more! She leans back in her chair, her blouse well off her shoulders, her bodice lowered to expose her breasts, her left hand grasping the neck of a viola da gamba. Barbara Strozzi! Dead for so many years but she reached out of the frame and clasped me to her opulent bosom and opened her mouth to my tongue. OK, it was all in my mind but so is everything else. Perhaps I fainted, I don't know. I didn't fall down but it was a Road-to-Damascus kind of thing. A girl of twelve or thirteen and her mother approached as I stood there. "That man has an erection," said the girl.<sup>149</sup>

What is fascinating about Ockerman/Hoban's representation of Strozzi is just how much it hinges on the visual representation of her by a man, rather than her own presentation of her works and self, as the deciding factor. Ockerman declares that Strozzi's own music falls flat in comparison to the music he believes Strozzi *should* have written, which is based on his own reaction to the painting: "There was music in that look – not her own *lamentate* but something more coarse and sexual and a

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<sup>149</sup> Hoban, *My Tango with Barbara Strozzi*, 4.

rhythm of controlled passion.”<sup>150</sup> Throughout the novel, Strozzi functions not as a character in her own right, or as an accurately presented historical figure (there are several factual inaccuracies in the work), but as a kind of ghostly succubus, haunting, inspiring, and tormenting the anti-hero with her uncontrollable sexuality.

### **Section Five: The Courtesan Question**

Of all the commonalities found throughout representations of Strozzi in the academic and broader materials so far considered, none emerges with such urgency as that of the courtesan framing. Crucial to this method of representation is its ultimately unanswered nature; lacking resolution or analysis, it serves to be asked anew with each new presentation of the composer. With that in mind, in this section of the thesis I will attempt to examine the courtesan question itself: as a genuine request for information, answered through an examination of primary material and secondary research, and as a symptom and function of gendered biases in classical music culture. Beginning with the arguments made in support of the courtesan question, based on readings of the *Satire* and the *Suonatrice*, this section moves to investigate the gendered limits and possibilities experienced by the women of seicento Venice, so as to situate both Strozzi and the various interpretations of her sexual status in historical context. With this additional information in mind, the full texts of the *Satire* are examined, alongside alternative readings of the *Suonatrice*, in the hope of bringing to light useful information on Strozzi herself. Finally, this section asks what it is that the courtesan question is meant to *do* – and whether there are more productive and accurate methods of representation available.

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<sup>150</sup> Hoban, *My Tango with Barbara Strozzi*, 5.



Figure 2.4: *Suonatrice di viola da gamba*, Bernardo Strozzi, circa 1637

### Argument One: The *Satire*

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, evidence for the claim that Strozzi was a courtesan is most frequently cited as originating in the *Satire*. Following on from Rosand, the most common quote used in support of this argument is the joke made against Strozzi for distributing flowers after giving away the fruit; none of the texts after Rosand have discussed the *Satire* in full, nor provided any relevant information on the early modern Italian satire tradition, particularly as it relates to seicento Venetian writing.

Pecknold in particular makes an extraordinary claim from the *Satire*, which appears to have entered the general discourse surrounding Strozzi, as seen in the marketing for *The Courtesan's Gaze* concert series. Part of the *Satire* deals with a Unisoni debate on how best to clothe Cupid (presumably in his guise as *putto*) – this treatment will be considered in greater depth later in the section. Pecknold, ignoring conventions of early modern dress and the practice/meanings of nudity, writes: “As the interlocutors discuss ‘the clothing of love’ (‘vestir Amore’) and the alleged lack of physical modesty – and perhaps clothing – at the Strozzi *casa*.<sup>151</sup> This is one, rather extreme, example, but it does point towards the general way in which a limited number of short quotes are taken from the *Satire* and discussed in isolation, making it easy to claim that the *Satire* supports the presentation of Strozzi as a courtesan, without investigating the full contents of this document, or its reliability and potential meanings as a text.

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<sup>151</sup> Pecknold, ‘On Lightest Leaves Do I Fly,’ 21.



Figure 2.5. Bernardo Strozzi *Saint Cecilia* linked to the *Suonatrice*, with close ups of notable change to the music, and similarity of the hands and jewellery.

### Argument Two: the *Suonatrice*

The identification of Barbara Strozzi as the musician portrayed in the Bernardo Strozzi painting *Suonatrice di viola da gamba* (circa 1637 – see Figure 2.4) began in 1981, and was immediately linked to the courtesan question. “‘Barbara di Santa Sofia’ and ‘Il Prete Genovese’: On the Identity of a Portrait by Bernardo Strozzi,” contains three arguments as to why the unknown figure is most likely Barbara Strozzi: the comparison with one of Bernardo Strozzi’s *Saint Cecilia* paintings; the presence of flowers; and where the painting was held. The last claim is the most straightforward: while there is no evidence that the work was commissioned for Nicolò Sagredo, it was discovered in his extensive art collection, as was Bernardo Strozzi’s portrait of Giulio Strozzi. Given this link, and the fact that Barbara Strozzi dedicated her Opus 7 to Sagredo, the Rosands suggest that Barbara is the musician depicted.

The comparison between the *Suonatrice* and one of Bernardo Strozzi’s many Cecilias (see Figure 2.5) is more problematic. While this *Saint Cecilia*, held at the Galleria Comunale of the Palazzo Bianco, Genoa, is clearly an original model for or a re-working of the *Suonatrice*, it feels as though the Rosands place this link into a virgin/whore framing, with a drive to assert the individuality of the *Suonatrice* (and, therefore, its identification as Barbara) that erases the great variety of women’s faces depicted by Bernardo Strozzi throughout his career. The Rosands write: “Despite the basic similarity, however, the subject of the Dresden canvas stands out; against the typological standard of the painter’s Saint Cecilias, she asserts a very definite individuality.”<sup>152</sup> The Rosands question whether the *Suonatrice* could be a sensual reworking of the theme of Cecilia, patron saint of music, as a deliberate nod to the Libertine Incogniti/Unisoni; a religious subject given a libidinous makeover. While a similar neckline is featured in several other Strozzi paintings (discussed below), the authors deny any link to these other works in a brief footnote.<sup>153</sup> The

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<sup>152</sup> Rosand and Rosand, “‘Barbara di Santa Sofia’,” 249.

<sup>153</sup> Rosand and Rosand, “‘Barbara di Santa Sofia’,” 250.

third argument made for the identification of Barbara Strozzi is found in the flowers in the *Suonatrice*'s hair. The Rosands link these flowers with the Unisoni debate in which Barbara gave a different flower to each attendee, recorded in both the *Veglie* and the *Satire*. This point is also a key feature of the Rosand's argument for courtesan status; this later article does not include Ellen Rosand's previous translation of a description of Barbara as Primavera, but instead claim "an association with Flora, but *Flora meretrice*, patroness of courtesans."<sup>154</sup> Additional weight for the courtesan framing is found by the authors in the music on display, a duet, implying that the musician is waiting for a partner to join here – a common theme in artistic depictions of musicians, but one also with erotic implications.

As is the case with Ellen Rosand's solo work, it is important to recognise that this article raises the courtesan question *as a question*, although in such a manner that the implications of either a positive or negative answer are not explored. Rather than situating the category of the *cortigiana* within the sexual-economic context of seventeenth century Venetian life, the Rosands present a more romanticised interpretation of the courtesan as an artists of love.<sup>155</sup> Throughout the article, and the many interpretations from other writers which follow its lead, a crucial lack can be observed: at no point is there any acknowledgment or examination of the fact that these choices of presentation – costume, posture, gaze, accessories – ultimately belong to *Bernardo Strozzi*. The Rosands, in the conclusion to their article, refer to "Her costume and self-display"<sup>156</sup> – there is no interrogation of what it means for a woman to be painted by a man, for the delectation of other men.

There are two further ways in which the *Suonatrice* is used to support the presentation of Strozzi as courtesan: the meeting of the gaze of subject and viewer, and the costume (and exaggeration of the costume) of the woman depicted. Throughout Pecknold's work she argues that the direction of the gaze of the *Suonatrice* supports her sexual-economic interpretation of Strozzi. Pecknold, citing

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<sup>154</sup> Rosand and Rosand, "'Barbara di Santa Sofia,'" 249-250.

<sup>155</sup> Rosand and Rosand, "'Barbara di Santa Sofia,'" 253.

<sup>156</sup> Rosand and Rosand, "'Barbara di Santa Sofia,'" 258.

Loredano's argument that a woman's open gaze is unchaste, understands the *Suonatrice*'s contemplation of the viewer as a sign of sexual availability, in direct comparison to the *Saint Cecilia* discussed by the Rosands.<sup>157</sup> A similar interpretation may be observed in the fictional response to the portrait in *My Tango with Barbara Strozzi*.

Examples of popular descriptions of Strozzi quoted thus far throughout this Chapter have demonstrated a range of representations of the neckline, and ensuing exposed flesh, found in the portrait, typically becoming more exaggerated over time. The costume of the *Suonatrice* is not only used as a confirmation of courtesan status, but as a way of introducing Strozzi to the reader or listener. For a 2019 edition of BBC Radio 4 *Front Row* set to celebrate Strozzi's 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the presenter Kirsty Lang introduces her subject like so: "There is a well-known portrait in Dresden's Old Masters Gallery of a dishevelled female musician wearing a low-cut white top from which one of her breasts appears to have popped out, sort of Janet Jackson-style wardrobe malfunction. It is widely thought to be of the Baroque composer Barbara Strozzi, one of the first women to have music published under her own name."<sup>158</sup> Both of these considerations, of the gaze and the neckline, will be examined below.

### Placing questions and answers in context

Is there any merit to be found in asking the courtesan question? Does asking whether or not Strozzi was a courtesan tell us anything of her life and culture – the possibilities and limits she experienced – and does it add to our understanding of her music? Working from the foundations and approaches detailed in Chapter One, I believe that this question *can* be useful, so long as there is a genuine desire for, and willingness to investigate, answers. Understanding music and musicians in and of their social categories and social functions is useful both for theoretical and/or philosophical examinations of said music, and provides ideas and insights for future

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<sup>157</sup> Pecknold, 'On Lightest Leaves Do I Fly,' 16.

<sup>158</sup> *Front Row*. "Horrible Histories, Barbara Strozzi at 400."

performance practice. In particular, studying gendered structures and systems in broader contexts allows us to make sense of their impact on musical cultures, and constitutes a move away from the idea of music as somehow “pure,” “untainted” by ordinary life, an idea which plays out in highly gendered, and frequently misogynistic, ways.

Therefore, in this subsection, I would like to take the courtesan question in good faith, as a tool with which to learn more about Barbara Strozzi’s life: to ask what the options were for a Venetian woman of her era; to understand how those options interfaced with a musical career; and to find the information that might allow a considered answer to be presented to the courtesan question, rather than an ongoing, unanswered asking.

In many biographies of Strozzi, the options for a woman’s life are given as marriage or the convent, with sex work as a simultaneously popular (demonstrated by the unchallenged claims of early modern male tourists) and disgraceful wild card option. However, when investigating the histories of early modern Venetian society, it becomes clear that the sexual/relationship choices for seicento Venetians were not quite so straightforward, and that the options available for women were predicated on the limiting of options available for men. Due to the particularities of the Venetian inheritance system, the number of men allowed to marry was strictly limited. There was, therefore, a “surplus” of women of marriageable age, a concomitant crisis in the soaring cost of dowries, and a great demand for romantic and sexual relationships outside of the institution of marriage. This subject is explored at length by Guido Ruggiero, who sums up the situation so:

the ideal of marriage as the required place for normal sexuality was undermined by the realities of that institution itself. For economic, social, and demographic reasons marriage could not incorporate large parts of the population within the embrace of its normality.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 15.

For this reason, the number of women enclosed into religious life was very high; Alexander Cowan notes that more Venetian women of the patrician class were enclosed than were married.<sup>160</sup> These enclosures were not all voluntary, and nor were they cheap, requiring the payment of a “monastic” or “spiritual” dowry. Scippa Bhasi writes:

Monastic dowries, while less than marriage ones, were still sizeable, especially in Venice. Gabriella Zarri explains that by the second half of the seventeenth century, they were fixed at a rate of 1,000 *ducati* for entry into all Venetian convents. This value was established by the senate and was still more affordable than a marriage dowry, which could run from eight to forty times more.<sup>161</sup>

Decrees were issued in 1602, 1610, and 1620, all fixing the spiritual dowry at 1,000 ducats.<sup>162</sup> By point of comparison, Beth Glixon notes that the rent on a “more humble dwelling might cost between fifteen and fifty ducats per year.”<sup>163</sup> Clearly, from a purely monetary standpoint, the convents could not serve as the only other option to legal marriage.

Marriage itself was a category in flux. Joanne Ferraro’s *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice* demonstrates the myriad ways in which marriage was neither a stable nor a universal category during Strozzi’s lifetime. The changes to the institution of marriage made by the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563) were slow in being adopted, and were often contested or ignored. Before these official changes “the Church had permitted the free expression of mutual consent between partners to be the only requisite for a valid marriage.”<sup>164</sup> While the Council of Trent formalised the marriage contract, and made invalid the mutual consent model, those changes were not quickly or easily adopted, and Ferraro notes that Venetian society experienced many clashes over the interpretation and practice of legal marriage. It is important to note these differences of interpretation, as it is part of the reason for the popularity of concubinage relationships, explored below.

<sup>160</sup> Cowan, *Marriage, Manners and Mobility*, 151.

<sup>161</sup> Scippa Bhasin, “Prostitutes, Nuns, Actresses,” 20.

<sup>162</sup> Medioli, “Arcangela Tarabotti’s reliability,” 69.

<sup>163</sup> Glixon, “New Light,” 313.

<sup>164</sup> Ferraro, *Marriage Wars*, 3-4.

Marriage was, frequently, neither a safe institution, nor one that precluded other relationship models. Ferraro's work examines in detail the abuses inherent in the Venetian practice of marriage, exaggerated by the restrictions placed on its availability. Large age gaps between partners (with the woman the younger party) were the norm, many women were unhappy with their father's choice of husband, and marriage was no guarantee that a woman would be well treated, be financially secure, or would not have to turn to sex work to survive. While many representations of Strozzi present sex work and marriage as exclusive either/or categories, Ferraro's research makes it clear that this simply was not the case; it is worth remembering that Veronica Franco, the most celebrated courtesan of the cinquecento, was married.

There was a common alternative to legal marriage: common-in-law marriage, also known as concubinage – similar in many ways to the earlier mutual consent model of marriage. Jana Byars' much needed study of concubinary relationships, 2019 work *Informal Marriages in Early Modern Venice*, is the first dedicated work on the subject. Byars defines these partnerships as: "heterosexual relationships of some duration that existed outside of marriage and, though materially beneficial to both partners, were not strictly commercial like prostitution. Such relationships were astonishingly pervasive yet generally invisible unless legal or ecclesiastical authorities were effectively compelled to intervene."<sup>165</sup> Byars establishes concubinage as a popular and unremarkable form of partnership, prevalent throughout all classes of society, in a manner of different forms. Partners could be single, widowed, or married to other people, and often had children together – Byars cites an illegitimate birth rate of 10%, with little in the way of punishment or censure.<sup>166</sup> One specific and popular form of concubinary relationship, "domestic concubinage," was the longstanding relationship between an unmarried man and his housekeeper, often having and raising children together – a model which seems to accurately describe

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<sup>165</sup> Byars, *Informal Marriages*, location 18.9/607 (ebook).

<sup>166</sup> Byars, *Informal Marriages*, location 171.4/607 (ebook).

the relationship between Barbara Strozzi's parents. Informal marriage was so normalised that it was an unremarkable (and therefore unremarked upon) feature of Venetian society, making it an illusive subject, centuries later, to study. Byars explains: "Difficult to define but quite simple to understand, concubinage in Venice thrived on the margins. While their union was not officially sanctioned, it was recognized, well understood, often tolerated, and, in some cases, even integral to Venetian life."<sup>167</sup>

What of the posthumous recording of the rumour that Vidman raped Strozzi? How would this claim have been understood at the time, what would it mean for the relationship models discussed above, and what were its functions and implications? Was it a description of reality, a rhetorical turn of phrase, a cultural shibboleth, or a combination of all of the above? The scholarship of Guido Ruggiero provides many of the answers to this puzzle, one of which being that the rape of a woman of marriageable age by the man who intended to claim her was understood as a fairly normal aspect of male-female relations in early modern Italy. Ruggiero, speaking of the Italian Renaissance as a whole, writes first that "It was not atypical to begin a relationship with rape, move on to a promise of marriage, and continue with an affair,"<sup>168</sup> and later explains "We see examples of such behaviour even in apparently nonviolent courtships."<sup>169</sup> Ruggiero goes on to explain that, in the case of unmarried women of a marriageable age, particularly when of a lower class than their rapists, rape was hardly considered a crime.

Rape, or public reports of rape (whether factual or not) were common not just in relationships that ended in marriage, but in concubinary relations, with a specific function of particular relevance to the Strozzi-Vidman relationship: the legitimisation of any children resulting from the union. Claims of rape were a way of proving exclusivity and paternity. Alexander Cowan, in *Marriage, Manners and Mobility in Early Modern Venice*, charts the common practice of concubinage between higher-

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<sup>167</sup> Byars, *Informal Marriages*, location 182.6/ 607 (ebook).

<sup>168</sup> Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 31.

<sup>169</sup> Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 31.

class men (some of whom were married) and (often lower-class) women, and details the methods by which the children of such unions were legitimised. Cowan writes:

While, at first sight, tales of rape, abduction and false promises appear to have been told by their perpetrators to friends, relatives and servants as a form of male bravado, they had a serious function. In order to defend the status of natural children, it was necessary to prove their father's paternity. This could only be achieved by demonstrating that the women concerned had an exclusive physical relationship with their patrician partners, that they had been virgins before they met, and that they had no contact with other men.<sup>170</sup>

It was common for the “natural daughters” of these unions to enter convents, as a stage towards either marriage or enclosure, just as legitimate daughters did (as did Strozzi and Vidman’s daughters). Concubinary partners could share a house, or live separately and still be understood as a household, and the description of the women in such partnerships with the “phrase *come se fosse sua moglie* (‘as if she were his wife’) appears so frequently in the records that it could be said to be a formal description of a woman in a consensual relationship.”<sup>171</sup> Cowan notes that the partners of influential men in such relationships could benefit from a secure and advantageous match, and that their children would not suffer from being born outside of marriage.<sup>172</sup>

Sex work was a category, as has been noted, that existed within and alongside marriage and informal marriage, and sometimes even enclosure. The historical legacy of the fantasy of the Venetian courtesan weighs heavily on many modern accounts – but as leading researcher Margaret Rosenthal explains:

Contrary to the mythical image of the courtesan as irresponsible or wayward that was presented in European travelers’ accounts, Venetian courtesans, whether of the *cittadino* or lower classes, did not choose prostitution over other professions but were forced into it principally out of economic necessity... many Venetian girls were introduced to prostitution at a very young age by their aging mothers, who were in need of financial assistance.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Cowan, *Marriage, Manners and Mobility*, 120-121.

<sup>171</sup> Cowan, *Marriage, Manners and Mobility*, 129.

<sup>172</sup> Cowan, *Marriage, Manners and Mobility*, 131.

<sup>173</sup> Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*, 15.

There were several reasons why the sex trade was prevalent in early modern Venice, but the most important of these, heavily emphasised by both Ruggiero and Rosenthal, was economic.<sup>174</sup> Joanne Ferraro's 2018 article "Making a Living: The Sex Trade in Early Modern Venice," demonstrates not only how widespread and varied the Venetian sex industry was, but also the permeability of its borders. Instead of fixed categories of legitimate wife vs. illegitimate prostitute, engaging in the sex trade was "literally referred to as carnal commerce (*commercio carnale*),"<sup>175</sup> and was often a response to shifting monetary realities of family life. Ferraro writes:

"Moral deviance" and "prostitution" were social constructions that did not command uniform consensus at the ground level, for family economics and commercialization undermined the rules of patriarchy. Nor did all women in the trade view occasional sex work as the key factor shaping their identities. They moved in and out of varied realities that were tied in many respects to the economic viability of their households.<sup>176</sup>

When considering all of these non-exclusive social categories – enclosure, marriage, concubinage, sex work – the key, common themes that emerge are economic necessity, economic control, and patriarchal limitations. As a feminist, I am concerned that so many works on Strozzi fail to take into account a central question asked through centuries of feminist discourse: how is sexual coercion and control through non-voluntary marriage or non-voluntary enclosure any different from that experienced through non-voluntary sex work? Suzanne Cusick, in her work on Francesca Caccini, underscores the importance of "thinking from women's lives"; in the case of Barbara Strozzi and early modern Venetian women, it feels impossible to consider the conditions they experienced without also considering their own reflections on the same.

To that end, I would like to touch on Moderata Fonte's perspective. Anne Rosalind Jones' "Prostitution in Cinquecento Venice: prevention and protest" explores Moderata Fonte's reflections on sex work in her dialogue polemic *// merito delle donne*. Jones demonstrates the ways in which Fonte attacks the double standard of

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<sup>174</sup> Rosenthal, "Venetian women writers," 116.

<sup>175</sup> Ferraro, "Making a Living," 35.

<sup>176</sup> Ferraro, "Making a Living," 34.

men's and women's behaviour and justifies any supposedly immoral behaviour of sex workers by positioning it as justified retribution for the abuses they have suffered at the hands of men. Fonte "goes further than even the most progressive Venetian officials by putting the blame for prostitution squarely on the men who initiate and benefit from it."<sup>177</sup> Jones quotes Fonte directly, who writes:

how many fathers there are who, while they are living, never provide for their daughters and, when they finally die, leave all or most of their possessions to their sons and deprive their daughters of the inheritance that is rightfully theirs, exactly as if they were only the daughters of their neighbors; and in this way, they are the reason that the poor young girls fall into a thousand errors through poverty while their brothers stay rich in goods – and equally in shame.<sup>178</sup>

Bonnie Gordon sums up the difficulties faced by early modern Venetian women in a way that incorporates contemporaneous opinions such as Fonte's:

it is important to remember that in some metaphorical way Venetians bought and sold young women's bodies every day. With its very tight marriage market, nobles exchanged their daughters for political clout and understood dowries as the financial make or break of the bride's pure, noble body. Such devil's bargains were also made on a regular basis with the church. Patricians unable to afford a high enough dowry to buy themselves a reputable son-in-law often forced their daughters into convents. Jutta Sperling estimates that by 1581 over 54 percent of Venice's noble women lived in convents, and usually not by choice. What differentiates courtesans from nuns and wives, then, is that they sold themselves.<sup>179</sup>

What does all of this information tell us about Barbara Strozzi's life, and the realities upon which any answer to the courtesan question must be based? Strozzi, like every other Venetian woman, was forced to negotiate a society in which her own desires and choices were bounded by patriarchal laws and customs, and by the vagaries and stresses of economic necessity. Both marriage and enclosure demanded a heavy monetary investment, and neither could promise guaranteed security, nor the *guaranteed* freedom to pursue a musical career (although many women musicians were married, or nuns). Concubinage emerges as a commonplace possibility, and one she would have experienced through her own family life. Sex work appears not

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<sup>177</sup> Jones, "Prostitution in Cinquecento Venice," 52-54.

<sup>178</sup> Translated and quoted by Jones, "Prostitution in Cinquecento Venice," 53.

<sup>179</sup> Gordon, "The Courtesan's Singing Body," 192.

so much as a specific category, but as the fallback option of *commercio carnale*, available as and when monetary want demanded it. Representing any kind of sex worker as a “fallen woman” or immoral in this situation does not do justice to the complexities and realities of women’s multiple survival strategies.

There are two final points I would like to mention, before moving on to an examination of the *Satire*, *Suonatrice*, and the known specifics of Strozzi’s life. The first is that, for a woman musician of Strozzi’s era, aspersions and attacks against her sexual reputation were inevitable.<sup>180</sup> It was standard practice for some men to link musicking with sex work, regardless of the realities of a woman musician’s life. Bonnie Gordon explains how even women of Strozzi’s circle who were publically acknowledged as “virtuous” were not safe from this form of attack: “Even Anna Renzi, an opera singer whose chastity was frequently praised, was identified as a courtesan in an avid operagoer’s program.”<sup>181</sup> It is impossible to explore the insults levelled at Strozzi without providing for the inevitability of their utterance.

My second point is the necessity of bearing in mind just how different seicento Venetian gendered culture could be from our own. An illuminating example of the vast gap between our society and Strozzi’s comes from Sally Scully’s article “Marriage or a Career?: Witchcraft as an Alternative in Seventeenth-Century Venice,” which examines court records to find evidence of women negotiating their place in Venetian society through the use of magic. Scully’s work reveals an aspect of Venetian society often missing in modern interpretations of the same, writing:

The survival strategies open to women, marriage among them, also included witchcraft...In assessments of the choices or lack of choices open to women, that witchcraft may have been a real option, manipulated with varying degrees of skill by various women, merits consideration.<sup>182</sup>

While I do not believe it necessary to specifically involve contemporaneous accounts of witchcraft in examinations of Barbara Strozzi’s life, I do think it serves as a useful

<sup>180</sup> Hadlock, “The Courtesan’s Arts,” 2.

<sup>181</sup> Gordon, “The Courtesan’s Singing Body,” 189.

<sup>182</sup> Scully, “Marriage or a Career?” 858.

reminder that there is much of her culture that is not familiar to modern scholars, or even, in some instances, possible to know. When approaching the traces left by Strozzi's life, and the large gaps in the record, it behoves any researcher to act with an eye to nuance, ambiguity, and humility.

### Response to Argument One: The *Satire* examined

A crucial element missing from all previous Strozzi scholarship has been a full, contextualised examination of the *Satire*. This section of my thesis aims to provide the first step towards realising that element. I am deeply indebted to Dr Candace Magner for photographs and transcriptions of the *Satire*, Dr Gregorio Bevilacqua for further transcription and translation (see Appendix One for the full translation), and the University of Huddersfield for providing the funds necessary for this important aspect of this work. In this section, I will place in the *Satire* in context, provide a detailed preliminary account of their contents, and consider their attacks against Giulio and Barbara Strozzi in light of these two preceding factors.

The satire was a popular, and prominent, method of writing throughout early modern Europe and, while satirical texts are frequently misogynistic, women were not the only targets for satirical treatment and attack, nor was satire a single unified form. Satirical writing was a form of entertainment, a show of literary and intellectual skill, a way to skewer elements of contemporaneous culture such as fashion and religious practice, and a mode of political attack. An example of the range of satire can be found in the writings of Ferrante Pallavicino, celebrated for his use of literary insult. A prominent member of the Incogniti and Unisoni, himself satirised in the *Satire*, Pallavicino took aim not only at women (discussed below), but at his fellow members of the intelligentsia, his broader society as a whole and, in particular, the church. It was his satire against Pope Urban VIII that led to his death; charged with lèse-majesté and apostasy, convicted on the basis of his writings, and

excuted at the age of twenty-eight.<sup>183</sup> The Italian academies were hotbeds of satirical writing,<sup>184</sup> and members were quick to lambast their own.<sup>185</sup>

How were women typically treated within early modern Italian satire? One of the ways in which the *Satire contro gli Unisoni* is typically presented is as an unique and shocking document – how does this representation hold up against a broader considering of the satire/parody form, and its gendered representations? Paula Findlen's "Humanism, Politics, and Pornography" explores and contextualises the tradition of writing concerning women and sex, specifically sex workers, in Venetian publishing, of which Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamenti* may be the most infamous.<sup>186</sup> Many of these works are unabashedly and deliberately obscene, particularly in their descriptions of women sex workers. Several members of the Incogniti/Unisoni served as key players in the tradition of misogynistic satire. Paolo Fasoli's essay "Bodily Figurae: Sex and Rhetoric in Early Libertine Venice, 1642-51" considers two works by Incogniti writers, both of whom are, coincidentally, attacked in the *Satire*: Ferrante Pallavicino's 1642 *La retorica delle puttane* (The Whores' Rhetoric) and Antonio Rocco's 1651 pederastic text *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola* (Alcibiades the Youth at School). Pallavicino's text is both anticlerical – a parody of Jesuit instruction – and deeply anti-women. He tells the story of a young girl being instructed in the ways of prostitution by an older woman. Both women end up tortured and assaulted by men.<sup>187</sup> Pallavicino's summation of the worth of sex workers, echoing St Thomas Aquinas, is still shocking in its cruelty:

[they are] like shitholes and urinals exposed to the common benefit of whomever wants to discharge excessive semen....excrement I must call the semen ejected in those vases [that are] incapable of generation, that are just sewers that receive a waste which with sordid transmutation corrupts itself.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Muir, "Why Venice?" 345.

<sup>184</sup> Marshall, *Cultural codes and Hierarchies*, 56-57.

<sup>185</sup> Furhmann, "Gossip, *Erotica* and the Male Spy," 201.

<sup>186</sup> Findlen, "Humanism, Politics and Pornography."

<sup>187</sup> Fasoli, "Bodily Figurae," 100-101.

<sup>188</sup> Pallavicino quoted and translated by Fasoli, "Bodily Figurae," 101-102.

Busenello, best known to modern musicians as the librettist for Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, was also the author of a satirical poem listing and attacking the sex workers of Strozzi's era (as Beth Glixon has previously noted, it is important to state that Barbara Strozzi does not appear on this list). The *Rollo delle putane* attacks women in crude terms, and has this to say about the musician, and sometime courtesan, Lucietta Gamba, here named as 'Vidimana,' likely in reference to a patronage relationship with a member of the Vidman family:

Lucietta Vidimana / has such a fart / that she makes every dick large / not in a healthy way / but thanks to a rare drip / and a secret that is expensive to cure. / She would like to be a temptress / and if I did not warn them / it would happen to them what happens to those whom she curses. / And yet it is a well-known thing / that these also run around the house for three days / and then return in the arse of those who made them.<sup>189</sup>

Margaret Rosenthal's work *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice*, explores many of these satires against courtesans: they are alarming in their extreme misogyny and celebration of violence against women. One of the worst is Lorenzo Venier's sixteenth-century poem // *trentuno della Zaffetta* (The Thirty-One of Zaffetta), written against the courtesan Angela Zaffetta:

Venier describes Angela's public humiliation when she is raped by no less than eighty men on the island of Chioggia. Led there by her scorned lover, who has organized this violent outing to seek revenge on her for recently refusing him entrance to her home, she is subject first to the squalid "whims" of a sodomite, and then to a host of lower-class characters – fishermen, gondoliers, priests, sacristans, servants, and porters. What concerns her most, the author tells us, is that this "private" abuse should not become public; but her pleas to her lover are to no avail. Upon returning to Venice, the band of men write on the wall that on 6 April, Angela Zaffetta has received a "thirty-one."<sup>190</sup>

Rosenthal explains that this "trentuno" was a specific punishment aimed at publicly humiliating a courtesan and infecting her with syphilis. Daniella Rossi's examination of the same text differs from Rosenthal's in some regards; while Rossi believes the satire to be an attack against Zaffetta, she believes that the trentuno itself did not

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<sup>189</sup> Busenello, translated by Ongaro, quoted by Glixon, "Private Lives of Public Women," 523.

<sup>190</sup> Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*, 37-38.

occur in reality but that “The poem stands as a metaphoric rape to mirror the very act that it narrates.”<sup>191</sup> Group rape as a punishment against sex workers (or those assumed to be so) was an established and accepted practice, as Rossi explains: “Group rapes were merely seen as a way of safeguarding civic morality and social honor. The normalization of group rape as a form of social discipline was confirmed by the ambivalence to such crimes by the ruling class.”<sup>192</sup> The Venetian satires, in all of their misogynist violence, served as mirrors for a culture that contained profoundly anti-woman elements – and sex workers served as a specific locus for that misogyny. Veronica Franco herself was subject to disgusting attacks in satire, in the form of three poems by Maffio Venier, in which he insults every aspect of her body and character, always returning to cruel descriptions of her genitals.<sup>193</sup> It is vital to keep the specifics of these anti-women satires in mind when considering the representation of Barbara Strozzi in the *Satire contro gli Unisoni*.

The *Satires against the Unisoni* is a collection of eight works, some in the form of dialogues, others in the form of letters. They form a self-referential whole, calling back to individual aspects of previous components, and clearly responding to feedback from the Unisoni members attacked therein. The document is divided into eight sections as follows : *Satires against the Unisoni* (dialogue), *To Giulio Strozzi [from] the Nameless Accademico* (dialogue, dated 23 November 1637), *Vendramino's thefts punished by the Muses* (dialogue), *Copy of a letter written by the most illustrious Crassus as a report of the latest Accademia of Strozzi* (letter, dated 21 December 1637, signed *The Incognito*), *Playful sentiments had in Parnassus at the Accademia degl' Unisoni* (this subtitle has appeared before, but appears this time with no additional title), *To the Illustrious gentleman, as a brother, Mr Giulio Strozzi* (letter, signed Accademico Spenserato – possibly a pun on “carefree” or “thoughtless”? ), *Condolences given to His Majesty Apollo by Mr Giulio Strozzi, regarding a satire about him issued in the year 1637* (letter) and, finally, *Defence of Ms Barbara Strozzi for the fifth satire made about the Unisoni* (letter). The characters

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<sup>191</sup> Rossi, “Controlling courtesans,” 228.

<sup>192</sup> Rossi, “Controlling courtesans,” 227.

<sup>193</sup> Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*, 53-56.

engaged in the dialogues include the god of music, Apollo, and all of the Muses, historical figures linking the Classical philosophical tradition with the Italian Renaissance (Aristotle, Plato, Plutarch, Seneca, Diogenes, Guicciardini), Avicenna (the Persian philosopher and scientist) Momo (Momus in Greek mythology, the personification of satire, frequently called upon in Renaissance writing as a mouthpiece of criticism), and Verieno, Bernia, Cino de Parsi, and Paolo Marini, who I have not yet been able to identify.

The *Satire* is an unashamedly self-congratulatory literary document, which revels in its own unreliable nature through arguments between the participants of the dialogue in which they accuse one another of lying; Verieno, for example, turns to Momo and exclaims “Momo, contain your mendacity, and have more discernment with your tongue.” The first document is the mildest in terms of its criticism; the series grows progressively crueler, in what is presented as a specific response to the Unisoni reaction (particularly Giulio’s) to the first *Satire*. The second document, addressed to Giulio, begins:

He who does not have restraint in throwing insults, should at least have the patience to suffer the [consequent] resentments. Because, if you do the opposite, the pen will turn into a club, thus deserving the insolence of he who, having made satires of others, has no [will] to suffer reading any on himself. Be aware that, on his own advice, this Momo who [likes to] joke, has more insolence than tongue. Thus, make sure that you enjoy in peace the outrages made to you by those who want to pay the Devil’s tithe with their skills.

Overall, the information provided about the Unisoni is a mixture of practical (the placement of the stage, the members present, the choice of instruments) and insulting opinion along five main lines: that the Unisoni is a money-grabbing enterprise (and that Giulio and Barbara are low class outsiders), that the Unisoni are talentless, that the Unisoni are unjustifiably self-congratulatory, insults along general anti-religious lines, and insults along general misogynistic lines. The reliability of the former information provided cannot be verified, and any acceptance thereof must be tempered with an awareness of the nature and purpose of the text. With those provisos in mind, it is useful to break the information contained down into four categories: aspects related to the Unisoni in general; aspects related to particular

Unisoni members; aspects specifically related to Giulio Strozzi; and those specifically related to Barbara Strozzi.

In the first *Satire*, the majority of attacks against the Unisoni as an organisation centre on their lack of money and their lack of class. Plato asks if members of Accademia are required to pay an entrance fee, and Socrates answers: "If they pay, you ask, eh? They are robbed." The dialogue participants note that there were not many Accademici taking part in the discussion as "in a mercenary Accademia, where even the chairs are for sale, the Accademici do not want to discuss unless they are paid." Momo claims that the Accademici are to pay five ducats each, and there is some joking about the lamps not being lit, and the risk of falling and breaking one's neck on the stairs. The members include those "of vulgar condition," and the Unisoni is judged to be not for the virtuous, given that the organiser (Giulio) is both a poet and a Florentine. On hearing that a nobleman of the Moro household was in attendance, Socrates exclaims "I am very surprised that he lowered himself to such an assembly." Information is given on the subject of the Unisoni debate, a discussion on how to clothe Cupid, with a prize (given by Barbara) of "a very beautiful satin and golden flower." The winner of the debate was to propose the problem for the next meeting.

In the second document, the Unisoni are derided for taking offense at the previous *Satire*:

it would be appropriate not to mention any further word about the Accademia degl'Unisoni, because, since the things we have been discussing here have already been reported elsewhere, and this caused great commotion in the souls of those who cannot see beyond their own noses.

Compounding this insult, the Unisoni are then described as pederasts: "it is evident that they love catamites very much." The music is described as a "harmonious bewilderment," a play on words on "armonioso concerto."

The third *Satire*, a long-winded personal attack on Vendramino, judges the Unisoni to be "Awful, the singing as well as the discussions," with the music being impossible

to ignore as “the reason why everyone could hear was that the stage was not at the very end of the room, but in its centre and detached from the wall.” The debate set for this session was to give a prediction of the future (in terms of a *dubbi amorosi*), based on the specific flower given out by Barbara. The fourth document merely notes that “in that Accademia nothing happened but turmoil and universal discord.” The fifth *Satire* complains that the most recent gathering was nothing but music, in order to set up a long-winded joke about the Eve of the Epiphany, and the animalistic nature of the Accademici. The characters discuss the fact that older music was performed, as well as new compositions, including a dialogue between Jason and Medea going to find the Golden Fleece, which had, apparently, been sung many times before “and it’s now many years after the wedding of the Highness of Parma” – indicating that the music was part of the wedding festivities for Duke Odoardo Farnese of Parma and Margherita de’ Medici in the December of 1628.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this document is its reference to Monteverdi’s involvement with the Unisoni, through Giulio’s insistence on the performance of his collaborations with Monteverdi. This section, in full, reads:

Bernia: Why, doesn’t he want anything else than his compositions to be sung?

Momo: They sing other things, as I said, but he enjoys having [singers] being exhausted in practising the music compositions with continuo by Monteverdi, whom I feel sorry for, since he often does not know where to hang his head, with those bizarre and visionary poems of his.

Apollo: Even Monteverdi happens to be in that place?

Momo: They bring him there, I do not know why. And maybe God’s will that he won’t arrive also at one of those scenes, where everyone one else are about to end up one of these evenings, with a comical musical representation.

Aristotle: If he will not be there physically, he will be there potentially, because he may have advised [to make] the whole thing.

From this point, the *Satire* documents adopt a less general and more personalised approach.

Attacks against individual Accademici portray members of the Unisoni as talentless, stupid, cowardly, and base. The first *Satire* mocks Loredano and Guerini for their ambition, calls Frangipane a “buffoon” and claims that Busenello “aspires to more than what he is.” Anti-clerical sentiment is displayed against Pallavicino (presumably as a play on his own anti-clericalism), Vendramino is a plagiarist (the subject of the entire third document), and the author(s) levels a “your mother” joke against Francesco Grimani, whose tendency to repeat the same speech in praise of whores while at Loredano’s Incogniti meetings is summed up with “neither is it improper for anyone to keep praising his own mother.” Grimani is then further criticised for robbing “maybe more than a hundred whores” and because “he never makes a distinction between males and females.”

The same tenor of approach runs through the second document. There is a joke made about Barbara giving out water; Bernia notes that if she added hard biscuit to the rations then it would suit the Accademici, the implication being that they are all criminals. The topic of discussion for this Unsoni session was the double nature of Cupid/Love, which gives the *Satire* author(s) a chance to make a joke on arse-kissing/analingus: “Maybe with his loves this gentleman has kissed both the front and the rear indifferently, thus, in order to make his kisses honest, he wanted to make [Cupid/Love] with two faces.” An anti-Semitic remark is made against the Unisoni, and Giulio in particular, as the dialogue participants note that you can find all sorts in the Unisoni: “Aren’t there some Jews too?” and then “Isn’t Strozzii perhaps one of them?” Religious men are summed up as thieves, and the author(s) joke that Pallavicino would try to grab Venus, unless he went after Ganymede first. Grimani (who has a “thief’s stench”) is further attacked because he wants Love “to play the part of both man and woman,” with the transgressive addendum: “Who knows, maybe he was thinking about his mother or himself as a young man.” He is also, through a convoluted joke referencing the birth of Venus from the genitals of Uranus, and the alliterative line “testa testicolare,” called a dickhead. These same kinds of insults against the Accademici are repeated throughout sections three, four, and five of the *Satire*.

The first *Satire* is relatively tame in its condemnation of Giulio Strozzi: “The author of the Accademia is not so detestable, excluding the fact that the dissoluteness of his life and the injustices of the fate have forced him into a state where he provokes laughter in all manners.” It wonders whether Giulio insisted on honesty in the Unisoni discussions because he “feared some vituperation.” From the second *Satire* onwards, however, Giulio is viciously attacked, apparently in retribution for his reaction to the first satire. He is described as “that madman and blockhead Strozzi/Born a bastard, son of a bastard.” Seneca notes that Giulio is becoming insane, to which Bernia replies: “He will not have to struggle much.” Bernia then launches into a detailed and vicious account of Giulio’s failings:

in Rome he served per fas et nefas (through right and wrong); that he was a deconsecrate priest; that, being a clumsy poet and unable to enter Parnassus, he wanted to have a workshop in the public square with the mount Parnassus on its sign; that after stealing much money from his heroic friends he wanted to murder Trevisano; that in the [business of] making the decorations for St John and St Paul, he stole a large number of *scudi* from the Florentine nation with a thousand excuses; that for many years he held in his house, under the name of Music, a profitable trade, being not ashamed to act as a procurer for his daughter and a thousand other women, whom I am not mentioning, as I do not want to take Momo’s job and offend Your Majesty’s ears.

The author(s) note that Giulio has complained about Unisoni members “who entered the Accademia as his friends, then sent him the satire as his enemies.”

This ongoing complaint, that Giulio can dish out satirical attacks, but cannot take them, is thoroughly detailed in the sixth part of the *Satire*, the letter to Giulio Strozzi. He is blamed for the attacks against him and derided as powerless and weak. The author(s) writes: “You, with little knowledge, made your own funeral pyre by yourself, and there you now live with burnt honours, there you submit, miserable, to passions, and you are truly a toy in others’ intrigues.” Later: “You barked but didn’t bite. With your words you awoke those sleepy tongues to your own detriment: they were only interested in resting.” Finally, the author(s) revel in the fact that their *Satire* has been more successful than Giulio’s: “your satires are not being seen, while theirs get awards and triumphs in every place and by every hand, by shaming you.”

The seventh *Satire*, written in the persona of Giulio Strozzi in the form of a defence, is in fact another attack. It seems that the purpose of this part of the *Satire* is to mock Giulio's attacks to defend himself, and to parody his character and manner of speaking/writing. The “Giulio Strozzi” portrayed here is a snivelling, pathetic character – “Poor Strozzi, who, by [supporting?] others’ honours, is taken down” – full of self-pity and obsessed with the idea of virtue. “Giulio” attempts to defend his decision to found the Unisoni: “I, poor Giulio Strozzi, both for my own pleasure and to direct Venetian nobility towards the virtues, created a virtuous Accademia, a congress of [...] senators. In this Accademia, with both debates and songs, I managed to delight.” “Giluio” sums up the insults previously made against him and Barbara and, in so doing, repeats and underscores them: “in addition to speak ill of many virtuous gentlemen, made particular invective against her and me, calling me failed poet, merchant, almost procurer, and her implicitly whore.” The letter finishes with “Giulio” bowing and scraping and begging the gods for justice.

Finally, what does the *Satire* have to say about Barbara Strozzi? Barbara is mentioned in every document bar the letter to Giulio Strozzi. What is written is a mixture of information on her role in the Unisoni and her music making, attacks against her, attacks against women in general, and a “defence” written in the persona of “Barbara Strozzi,” which just like the “Giulio Strozzi” section above, has much to reveal about how her character and methods of self-defence were understood and parodied.

The first *Satire* is, again, the mildest. Barbara is named the “supervisor” of the gatherings, and the author(s) notes that she was “singing gently.” Of the claim that she could be called a Venus, Plato asks “And how would one call this third Venus, since she is by no means celestial nor vulgar?” to which Bernia replies “One could call her, to distinguish her from the vulgar one, plural Venus, or, if it seems better, neutral Venus.” The general crude misogyny of the *Satire* is evident in the author(s) belief that it is pointless to try to win the debate prize by flattering Barbara “because a woman is a beast that cannot be captures with praises.”

What emerges from the first *Satire* is the theme of the main attack made against Barbara throughout the series: that she insists too much on her own virtue and honour. It is not so much a *lack* of virtue that is impugned throughout, but the fact that she insists that she is virtuous (perhaps hypocritically). Diogenes begins this line of attack by saying that an Accademici attendee “knowing that he was coming to the house of Ms Barbara he must have left his decency in the convent,” before continuing: “am not speaking ill [of her], I rather want to imply that in the house of Ms Barbara there is so much decency that anyone who goes there can leave his own at their house without any danger.” Later, after an innuendo involving sewing and needles, follows the claim that Barbara has been enjoying the company of castrati – a claim which acquires a different meaning when taken in its entirety:

*Momo*: Who knows? Maybe, as a woman who is used to handling a needle, she understood the speech about mending and patching better [than the others].

*Verieno*: I do not wish that these double entendres would damage the honesty of Ms Barbara, who proclaims to be a virgin.

*Bernia*: To claim and to be are different terms, however she seems most chaste to me: whereas she, being a woman and being used to being free, could spend time with some lovers, she nevertheless addresses all her affections to a castrato.

*Momo*: Actually, she is so honest that she can unleash her lusts with castratos.

As already demonstrated, the second *Satire* becomes progressively nastier. The three specific accusations levelled against Barbara are that she’s a drunk, that she’s sexually incontinent, and that she’s a gold-digger. In response to the fact that she was to present a vase of water to the winner of the debate, Diogenes remarks: “What a change. She gets drunk with wine then she presents the Accademici with water.” A rather unclear section seems to refer to Barbara in likening her to Penelope “who differs from the old one only in this [feature]: while the latter had few lovers whom she did not gratify, the former, on the contrary, has many of them, and makes sure that they are all satisfied.” The castrato theme is continued in this exchange:

Seneca. How are these obscene words tolerated in the presence of Ms Barbara?

Momo. She does not fear words in public, since in private she does not fear facts [that are] compliant [with such words].

Verieno. One should not speak thus, as she was never been impregnated.

Momo. Let her thank the trend rather than the infertility of castratos.

The author(s) claim that she has an “appetite” and would “become a matter of” religious men, so long as they had a noble title. Finally, an odd little sentence (Bevilacqua notes “I am not sure who is supposed to urinate on whom”) underscores the crude and vituperative nature of the *Satire*: the author(s) talk of getting revenge on Momo through drowning him in the water given out in the prize vase, before noting that “If one could be drowned in so little water, Ms Barbara would have already pissed on his head.” When this sentence is taken alongside the Loredano anecdote in which Barbara is mocked for responding with anger to Giuliu’s insult against her, I wonder whether this *Satire* remark is a specific response to her refusal to accept insults made against her?

The third *Satire*, concerning itself mostly with Vendramino, has little to say about Barbara, but does include the insult most regularly quoted against her: “What a nice thing to give flowers after its fruits have already been dispensed.” It is in the fourth document, however, that the debate involving the dispensation of flowers is detailed. What is striking is the difference between the *Satire* author(s)’ account of this event, and the later interpretations made of it in much of the modern literature on Strozzi. Rather than portraying this debate in an erotic light, the author(s) use it as a chance to attack Barbara’s rudeness and her use of her cleverness to degrade others. The scene opens with this observation: “It can’t be denied, however, that in giving away the gift of her flowers, one could notice her rancour and the bad talent with which she was making the present.” The author(s) claim that Barbara gave a cherry blossom with its fruit to Father Tonetti, who did not realise that he was being humiliated by the fact that the fruit was so sour. Her gift of a jasmine flower was intended to hurt its recipient “because she – who knows very well that it is a plant that lives with hot and dry air and who was handing out nothing but cold and humidity – aimed at having the flower die between his fingers.” Likewise, she is

recorded as giving a narcissus to D. Antonio Rocco, both because the flower would be closed but also as an insult because “a sharper man understood that she well thought about this gift, knowing that the philosophy of Rocco does not lack in Narcissi.” She gave a violet to Moro, which the author(s) describe as being a “sham,” rather than a real token of affection, and she gave a “moschetta,” a purgative, to Pallavicino. Parts of the manuscript are unclear, and Gregorio Bevilacqua was unable to make sense of them, but the section concerning the gift of a rose to Loredano is typical of the crude humour of the *Satire*: “she gave anyway the gift, because of the rough nature that a rose carries in the middle of its seed, and which the peasants call Buttscratcher.” Only Vendramino escapes being given an insulting flower and the author(s) note that “Grimani was the wisest of all, since he did not want to accept any flower, as he understood the dishonesty of the one who was giving the gifts.”

The fifth part of the *Satire* moves on to attacking Barbara’s pride, her appearance and her musical performance. There is one point of information as to the instrument Barbara played that may prove useful – if it could be trusted: “She should have fastened herself to the spinet, which she was so happily playing.” Her manner of singing and choice of music is then criticised: “some authoritative [men] and Turchetto made Ms Barbara sing again, with her usual carelessness. But she treated them in an old-fashioned manner, since she sang very old things which were sickening.”

Momo claims that Turchetto sang some sonnets in praise of Barbara and this exchange appears to reference the sonnets of the *Veglie*:

Bernia: She does not blush at vituperations, and you would expect her to blush at praises?

Verieno: Why, then, are praises not appropriate to Ms Barbara?

Momo. Yes, well. Not those that praise her for being beautiful, despite you see them even in printed sonnets that celebrate her as such.

Plato: Your Majesty should banish from Parnassus such compositions, which have been published in the past days.

This attack on her appearance then widens into an attack against women in general, following a long-winded joke about an Accademici's argument likening Love to the sea, in which Momo and Bernia discuss whether women's breasts would enable them to float, and whether Barbara's "breasts are becoming so small that they would not keep her afloat?"

Document seven of the *Satire*, the letter written in the persona of Giulio Strozzi, drives home the insults against Barbara's appearance, whilst reinforcing the message that Giulio and Barbara are (hypocritically?) obsessed with promoting themselves as noble and virtuous. The author(s) writes:

It is true that I have under my care and custody a woman called Ms Barbara who, despite not being handsome, has nonetheless a very beautiful soul and mind. And there is nothing else in her that is "barbarous," except for a heart safeguarded by the vetoes of love, entirely adverse to the luxuries of the senses, and thus worthy of the highest praises.

"Giulio" claims that the previous *Satire* make Barbara out to be "a singer who is a sorceress of hearts and [who] lures affections" – clarifying and repeating the insult, as appears to be the point of this section.

The conclusion of the *Satire* comes in the form of a letter signed "Barbara Strozzi." Ellen Rosand surmised that, due to its content, this document could not have been written by Strozzi herself, and I am indebted to Beth Glixon for her kindness in looking over the handwriting and signature of this section in order to compare it with known examples of Strozzi's writing and signature – Dr Glixon does not believe them to be a match. Rather than making this section irrelevant for study, however, I believe that this final aspect of the *Satire* is crucial in understanding how Strozzi was, at least partly, understood and received by her contemporaries. If the point of a parody is to exaggerate the truth to comic effect, then by considering this exaggeration it may be possible to come closer to knowing the truth of the person lampooned. What is immediately apparent is the choice of histrionic language and melodramatic posturing, unlike the language used in the other sections: "Cruel, unholy enemy, what wrongdoing have I ever done to you that you so unjustly

offended me, so unfairly tore me down, so ruthlessly you unleashed your tongue to my damage and shame?" With a framing directly related to the arguments of the *querelle des femmes*, it appears as though the author(s) are not only satirising Barbara for standing up for herself, but for standing up for herself *as a woman*:

all the spite of your infamous tongue cannot bury the honourable actions of a good man, least of all of a woman with no stain, who, because of her weaker sex, is worthy of more respect. Isn't it an accused infamy, an insane action, a dishonourable activity, a detestable habit, to go against a woman, a defenceless woman who is only armed with the affection of honest, virtuous and worthy men?

Her appearance is attacked yet again ("My breasts, which you mock as swollen blisters") and she sums up the accusations made against her in the previous documents: "you accuse me of being daring, courageous, drunk." She is depicted throwing insults back at her attackers: "Indeed, you don't know anything about me, you are a defamer, an assassin." "Barbara Strozzi" is also shown to be haughty: "However, I am not surprised at all by your writings, because I am familiar with the malice of some men, who are pleased more by hurting others than receiving [something] good for themselves." Finally, the "Barbara" of this letter puts her trust in God as her defence, and her consolation, and states her belief that God will avenge her against these attacks.

What, in summation, is to be made of the *Satire*? Rather than a specialised attack against Barbara Strozzi, it is clearly a more complicated document: an attack against the Unisoni as a whole, possibly originating within the Unisoni itself,<sup>194</sup> with special attention paid to certain members; a punishment meted out against Giulio Strozzi

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<sup>194</sup> Given the use of satire as a form of "in group" writing in early modern Italian academies, it is a distinct possibility that the *Satire* was written by one or several members of the Unisoni, as a type of in-joke, group hazing, or combination of the two. The inclusion of Barbara in this document could, paradoxically, indicate her status as a "proper" member of the academy. It could also, if Melanie Marshall's doctoral work on the social reception of musical eroticism (see *Cultural Codes and Hierarchies in the mid-cinquecento villotta*) can be applied to the reception of non-musical eroticism and sexualised writing, serve as a test of gentility and sophistication: could the listener/recipient rise gracefully above the material? These possibilities must be fully considered and included in ongoing work on the *Satire*. Based on the information currently available from Strozzi herself – the dedication to Opus 1 and its concluding ATB trio – I believe that even if Strozzi did not consider the *Satire* a personal insult, she understood and responded to it as a threat to her reputation.

for his attacks against others, and his inability to take his own medicine; a celebration of the author's(s) learning, wit, and inventiveness; an entertainment specifically designed for those "in the know"; a contribution to a popular literary form; and a repository of insults specifically along lines of talent, class, religion, desire, and gender. The insults levelled against Barbara Strozzi are misogynistic and fit into broader misogynistic tropes found in early modern Italian literature, but do not display the exaggerated violence and extreme misogyny found in the Venetian satires against courtesans so far considered. The insults and innuendoes against Barbara Strozzi serve a double function, acting as additional sticks with which to beat Giulio. Besides depicting him as a bad father and an emasculated man, unwilling to or incapable of fulfilling his societal obligation to guard his daughter's chastity and control the women of his household, insulting Giulio as a "procurer" held a particular cultural weight and meaning. The question of parents either prostituting their children or, in the case of mothers, instructing and indoctrinating them into the family trade, was a particular point of debate and anxiety in early modern Venice. The Council of Ten passed a law against this precise crime in 1563, with severe punishments.<sup>195</sup> Therefore I do not believe that the *Satire* attacks against Giulio and Barbara can be taken in isolation from one another, but must be understood in the broader context of the entire work, in which both Strozzi as a family are depicted as money-grabbing, low-class outsiders, flattering themselves that they are more honorable, more virtuous, and more artistically talented than they have a right to pretend to be.

Does the *Satire* provide "proof" for the claims that Strozzi was a courtesan? I do not believe that it does, but do believe that it is an invaluable source of information on Strozzi's cultural environment, the misogyny she faced, and the ways in which (some) men of the Venetian intelligentsia saw her: strident, self-aggrandising, immodest, wilful. With an awareness of the double standards of gendered behaviour, it is tempting for a modern (feminist) researcher to interpret those same depictions as illustrative, instead, of Strozzi's confidence, self-belief, desire for

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<sup>195</sup> Rosenthal, "Venetian women writers," 116-117.

freedom, and strength. But, most importantly, and again following Suzanne Cusick's example, it is important to ask what Strozzi herself made of the *Satire*.

Previous scholarship has already noted the importance of the publication of the *Veglie* and the dedication of Opus 1, both clear refutations of the *Satire* as "slander."<sup>196</sup> I would like to add an additional point in support of the argument that Barbara Strozzi openly refuted the insults made against her. It is not only in the dedication to Opus 1, but in the choice and setting of texts, that we see both Strozzi – daughter and father – responding to their detractors as composer and poet. It is hard to hear the final piece of Opus 1, the *Conclusione dell'opera*, as anything other than a triumphant stand against their anonymous attackers:

Here is the first votive offering presented in the temple  
by a new and perhaps unrecognized paragon

In a bright flash  
that shines brilliantly,  
how beautifully  
the new airs appear  
in the realm of song.  
O God, whose ear  
is filled with discordant harmony,  
listen,  
for I will provide you  
with better melody. And as for those  
who don't wish to believe my statements,  
I oppose and defy them with proof.<sup>196</sup>

In this matter, I am content to let Barbara Strozzi have the last word.

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<sup>196</sup> Translation by Richard Kolb, *Opus 1*, Cor Donato Editions.



Figure 2.6. Bernardo Strozzi *Allegoria della Pittura*, circa 1640



Figure 2.7. Bernardo Strozzi, called *Allegorical Figure* or *Minerva*, circa 1636 or 1640

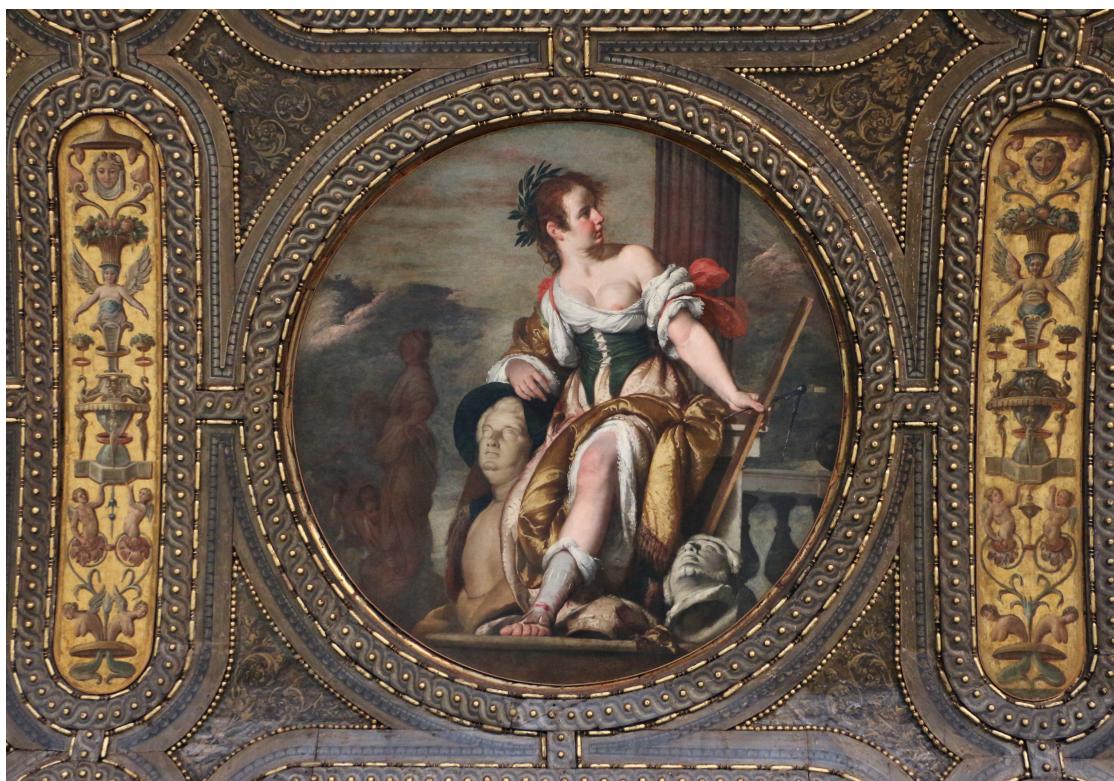


Figure 2.8. Bernardo Strozzi, *Allegoria della Scultura*, 1635

### Response to Argument Two: Alternative readings of the *Suonatrice*

The Bernardo Strozzi painting commonly identified as depicting Barbara Strozzi has, in the absence of a set title, gone by a variety of names - *Suonatrice di viola da gamba* and *Suonatrice di violoncello* being the most common – and has no fixed date of commission or completion, although art historian Franco Vazzoler believes it to date from no later than 1637.<sup>197</sup> It was found in the Sagredo collection in Venice,<sup>198</sup> which also contained a Bernardo Strozzi portrait of Giulio Strozzi, a copy of which (the original being lost) is now held in the Ashmolean museum. There is no evidence of who it was painted for, how/if it was displayed, and who it was seen by. Of all the questions that surround the painting, the most important for this study is whether it actually is a portrait of Barbara Strozzi.

Apart from the Rosands' 1981 arguments, the claim that the *Suonatrice* is Barbara rests on discoveries by Linda Borean and Beth Glixon. In Borean's 2013 essay "Francesco I e il mercato veneziano" there is an intriguing chain of business associations linking the only surviving evidence that this portrait is of Barbara with the art collection of Giovanni Paolo Vidman. Who are the people in this chain? Clemente Molli a Bolognese sculptor, and Giovann Battista Franches, an old acquaintance of Molli's, who appears to have been a merchant/art dealer. Franches had provided legal representation in 1639 in a dispute with Bernardo Strozzi, over unmade payments – the record of which mentions a copy of a portrait of Barbara Strozzi.<sup>199</sup> Borean refers back to Beth Glixon's research for this mention – Glixon writes: "While no commission survives for the painting, my research in Venice did eventually turn up a documentary link between artist and his subject, specifically a reference to Bernardo Strozzi's copy of his portrait of Barbara Strozzi, painted for Giovanni Battista Franceschi no later than August of 1639."<sup>200</sup> This documentary link is a note held in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, by notary Alessandro Basso. Borean includes the full note in her appendix; it contains no other details apart from: "una

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<sup>197</sup> Vazzoler, "Segeundo il camnio del pittore," 338.

<sup>198</sup> Orlando, *Bernardo Strozzi*, 220.

<sup>199</sup> Borean, "Francesco I e il mercato veneziano," 14.

<sup>200</sup> Glixon, "New Light," 312.

copia del ritratto della signora Barbara Strozzi.”<sup>201</sup> At no point does the documentation currently available identify which specific work depicts Barbara. Holding this point in mind during subsequent discussions of the *Suonatrice* is not a retreat into pedantry, but a reminder not to confuse (potentially likely) theories with uncontested proof.

As to the link between Franchesini and Vidman: Borean identifies Franchesini’s associate, Molli, as a member of the Incogniti and a client of Vidman’s.<sup>202</sup> She further describes Giovanni Paolo Vidman as a great collector and patron of art.<sup>203</sup> This link could mean nothing at all, but simply demonstrate the incestuous nature of the close-knit artistic community of Venice. It might allow for a theory – and only a theory – that Vidman could have commissioned the Bernardo Strozzi painting. There is simply not enough information to do more than imagine. All that is currently known is that Bernardo Strozzi painted an (unidentified) portrait of Barbara Strozzi and that, sometime before August 1639, he had made, or was meant to have made, a copy. Whether the *Suonatrice* is a depiction of Barbara Strozzi or not, the link between the two was not well known enough, or well documented enough, to pass into the historical record, which might imply either a limited viewership or limited knowledge of the painting.

One way of trying to establish the identity of the portrait lies in identifying the music pictured on the left hand side of the painting (see Figure 2.9 for a close up). Throughout this study I have attempted to do so, but have so far been unsuccessful. The painting appears to show a vocal duet with basso continuo line although, given the positioning, it could perhaps refer to the bottom two vocal lines and basso of a multi-voice work. Given the likely date of the *Suonatrice*, the most obviously compositions to examine are those of Strozzi’s Opus 1 (in which I found no likeness), and Volumes 1 and 2 of Fontei’s *Bizarrie Poetiche*. I am extremely grateful to the Victoria & Albert Museum for providing access to the Dresden portrait in order to

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<sup>201</sup> Borean, “Francesco I e il mercato veneziano,” 20.

<sup>202</sup> Borean, “Francesco I e il mercato veneziano,” 14.

<sup>203</sup> Borean, “Francesco I e il mercato veneziano,” 15.

examine the music closely, and to the library of Christ Church College, Oxford University, for providing access to the Fontei originals.<sup>204</sup> While I personally was not able to locate the portrait music in the Fontei, I emerged from this study with three observations: that the music in the portrait is consistent with Fontei's style of vocal writing, that I believe it likely to be a dialogue style duet – Fontei's Dialogue between the Nymph and the Shepherd, in Volume 2, being a good example of type, and that I believe it worth opening this search up to musicians more experienced than I in identifying sources. I was excited by the potential of a Fontei duet that uses the barbara/Barbara conceit, "Donna Barbara e tirana," but could not match this music to the music in the portrait.

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<sup>204</sup> I did not have enough time with the manuscripts to be able to transcribe the music. This would be a useful endeavour for the future.

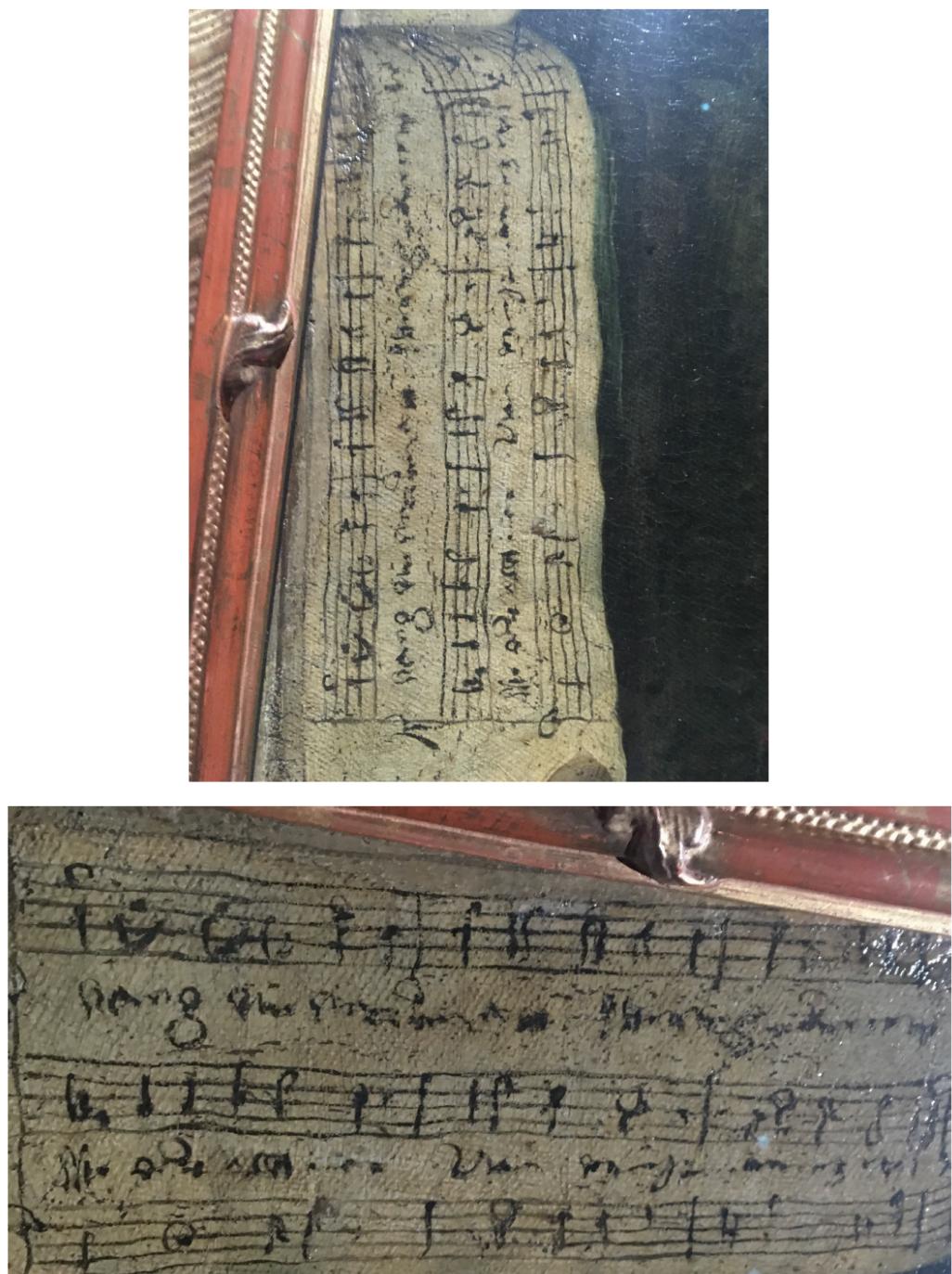


Figure 2.9. The music in the *Suonatrice* as it appears (above), and flipped for legibility (below)

Even though there is no definitive evidence that the musician of the *Suonatrice* is meant to represent Barbara Strozzi, I believe it is useful to examine the painting in greater detail, both for the fact that it is potentially a depiction of Strozzi, and because it is widely taken to be so, and used as a crucial focus in popular representations. In this examination, and in order to answer the specific arguments brought up in the asking of the courtesan question, I will explore five aspects of the work: the *Suonatrice* in comparison to Bernardo Strozzi's Allegory paintings, the direction of the gaze, the meaning of the flowers, the meaning of the costume, and the consideration of the male gaze in artistic representations of women.

In the artistic and art history literature, the *Suonatrice* is occasionally referred to as the *Allegoria della Musica*. Such an example comes in art historian and curator Francesca Del Torre Scheuch's essay "Melodies in Images: Depictions of Musicians in Venice from the Cinquecento to the Settecento," who describes the painting as "an allegory for music."<sup>205</sup> When viewed alongside Bernardo Strozzi's other paintings depicting Allegories of the Arts, it is easy to see why. The *Allegoria della Scultura* (see Figure 2.8) was painted in 1635 on the ceiling of the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice, while the *Allegoria della Pittura* (see Figure 2.6), which dates from 1640 is also included in another painting, containing the Allegories of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, also circa 1640. Finally, the Allegory group includes the painting referred to as both the *Allegorical Figure* and *Minerva* (see Figure 2.7), which some art historians date to around 1640, and others to around 1636. The art historian Anna Orlando, building on the work of influential Bernardo Strozzi scholar Luisa Mortari, places these works in a group; all were painted in Venice at a similar time, and the visual similarities between the paintings are clear. Orlando draws a particularly close link between the *Allegororia della Pittura* and what she terms "la figura della Musica (or *Suonatrice di violoncello*)."<sup>206</sup> As to the depiction of Minerva: Orlando describes the debate over the figure in this picture, citing the 1647 Venetian edition of mythographer Vicenzo Cartari's *Imagini dell'i dei de gl'antichi* to further the

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<sup>205</sup> Del Torre Scheuch, "Melodies in Images," 109.

<sup>206</sup> Orlando, *Bernardo Strozzi*, 220.

argument that this painting represents the goddess Minerva in her role as “inventor of all the arts” – in which aspects she is highly associated with the Venetian Academies, and specifically linked to Bernardo Strozzi’s Allegories.<sup>207</sup>

Viewing the *Suonatrice* alongside these paintings shows many similarities, particularly in the display of the artists’/musician’s tools, and in the most obvious of similarities, the neckline. The costume that has inspired so much debate in the *Suonatrice* painting is the same, or nearly the same, in all of the Allegorical pictures: a low swooping white material that reveals a nipple and part of the breast. Of particular interest to me are the similarities between the *Suonatrice* and *Minerva* figures. It is not only that the colours of the clothing are the same, nor simply the distinctive green sash that cuts asymmetrically across the shoulder and between the breasts, but the exceptional bodily and facial similarities between the two figures. The flushed cheeks are a fairly common feature in Bernardo Strozzi’s works, as is the cloud of hair (the auburn tint is more unusual). However, there is a distinctive similarity in the shape and thinness of the eyebrows, the shape and colour of the eyes, the shape and size of the mouth, the shape of the jaw and throat, and the shape of the body. Bernardo Strozzi frequently recycled his own materials into new works, using the same models in different settings, or chopping and changing aspects of a figure to suit a new piece. Given this artistic tendency, and the similarity between the *Suonatrice* and *Minerva*, I believe that it is possible that there is either a deliberately link or an artistic re-working joining these two works and that, more broadly, it is important to understand the *Suonatrice* as part of the Allegory group. If the woman depicted in the *Suonatrice* and *Minerva* is the same, it presents one of two interesting possibilities: that either the model for the *Suonatrice* is not Barbara Strozzi, or that, by depicting her as both the Allegory of Music and as ‘the inventor of all the arts,’ Bernardo Strozzi was directly acknowledging her link to the Unisoni, and the broader artistic world of the Venetian intelligentsia.

This chapter has previous noted Pecknold’s theory that the “unchaste” gaze of the

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<sup>207</sup> Orlando, *Bernardo Strozzi*, 220.

*Suonatrice* gives weight to the claim that Barbara Strozzi was a courtesan. In particular, Pecknold's theory draws on the Rosands' initial comparison of the *Suonatrice* with the *Saint Cecilia* held in Genoa. However, working through the rest of Bernardo Strozzi's oeuvre, it is hard to make this theory fit the wide variety of subjects and women he painted. More often than not, the women in Strozzi's portraits face forward and meet the gaze of the viewer; a similar tendency can be seen in his religious and allegorical works. Perhaps the use of the frank, forward facing gaze in his *Maddalena Penitente* (circa 1620), *La Cuoca* (circa 1630) and *Berenice* (circa 1640) may be taken to suggest an element of sexual frankness, but what then of his *Santa Cecilia* (circa 1618-1619), *Santa Martire* (circa 1618), *Santa Caterina d'Alessandria* (circa 1620), *Santa Dorotea* (1620-1622), *Madonna col Bambino e San Giovannino* (circa 1630-1635), another *Santa Martire* (circa 1630-1635) and *Carità* (1630-1635)? Instead of being particular to the *Suonatrice*, I would argue that this use of the gaze is a common aspect of Bernardo Strozzi's style – any additional meaning in the case of Barbara Strozzi would require further evidence.

Similarly complicated is the meaning of the flowers worn in the *Suonatrice*'s hair. The Rosands specifically link these flowers to a depiction of *Flora meretrice*, and argue that their inclusion suggests that Strozzi was a courtesan. While there are obviously a multitude of meanings signified by the display of flowers in artwork of this time, I would be interested to learn more about how this theory accounts for other uses of flowers in Bernardo Strozzi's works. In his earlier *Santa Cecilia che regge un vassoio con le teste di Valeriano e Tiburzio* (circa 1618 – 1620), Saint Cecilia is adorned with flowers in her hair, as well as flowers in the hair of the heads upon her tray. Meanwhile, Giusto Sustermans contemporaneous portrait of the dedicatee of Strozzi's Opus 1, *Vittoria dell'Rovere come Flora*, shows the noblewoman in the guise of the goddess Flora, with flowers in her hair and hands. To be fair, the Rosands distinguish between *Flora* and *Flora meretrice*, but do not give clear reasons as to how they are able to do so; later interpretations of the portrait in relation to Strozzi do not mark this distinction, but simply state that the flower adornment shows that she was a courtesan. In light of these representations, I feel it useful to

ask what other possible readings there could be for the inclusion of flowers, and how the viewer is meant to tell which aspect of *Flora* is being shown.

It is hard to tell, from a modern perspective, what the costume of the *Suonatrice* is meant to signify: whether it indicates an outfit actually worn, or is simply consistent with the drapery modelled by the other Allegories. In many representations of Barbara Strozzi through the use of this painting, it is assumed that modern viewers can, from a distance of 400 years, make an informed judgment as to whether these clothes signify a “chaste” woman or a courtesan. But, even if we take the costume of the *Suonatrice* as representative of an actual Venetian outfit, the situation remains complicated. As Margaret Rosenthal explains in her essay “Cutting a Good Figure: The Fashions of Venetian Courtesans in the Illustrated Albums of Early Modern Travelers,” the question of early modern Venetian dress codes, sumptuary laws, and infractions to said codes and laws was complex even within its own moment: “any women, not just Venetian courtesans, exposed their bodies, towered dangerously above their male companions, and peered from behind silk mesh veils.”<sup>208</sup>

This preoccupation with whether the outfit of a painted figure of a woman “proves” courtesan status is not limited to discussion of Strozzi, but extends to other debates within the field of history of art. Anne Christine Junckerman’s study of Giorgione’s painting (commonly known as) *Laura*, “The Lady and the Laurel,” presents an almost parallel debate over the identity and social/sexual categorisation of a similar, though earlier, portrait. Junckerman details the varied and contradictory interpretations of a portraiture tradition to which the later Bernardo Strozzi works may be said to belong, a “large group of paintings of women produced in Venice, generally half-length in format, that appear to make a seductive appeal to a heterosexual male viewer through a careful combination of gesture, glance, intimate focus, and

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<sup>208</sup> Rosenthal, “Cutting a Good Figure,” 59.

dishabille that displays the body.”<sup>209</sup> Junkerman sums up the academic arguments over the Giorgione as falling into the virgin/whore cultural dichotomy:

If it has not been possible to identify the woman depicted, many critics have wanted to identity the category into which she may be placed – lady or courtesan? Is she good, a chaste wife whose sexuality is circumscribed by a husband, or is she bad, a courtesan whose sexuality, in terms of Renaissance social convention, is uncircumscribed and autonomous?<sup>210</sup>

That some academics may believe that there can be an unambiguous, ‘correct’ answer is, Junkerman states, tied to the idea that women can be summed up and categorised by one singular judgment of their virtue, of their characters: good or bad, chaste or promiscuous. Junkerman argues instead for moving beyond that framing, and allowing for the differences in ways of seeing between our era and that of the work’s, of understanding the difference between the image of a woman presented by a man in a specific style and to a specific order and the woman herself, and of allowing the mysteries and contradictions of an image to co-exist without erasure.

Junkerman’s article brings me to my final point concerning interpretations of the *Suonatrice* and representations of Strozzi: the necessity of including the creator and function of the work in any discussion of its meaning. In most contemporary discussions of Strozzi and the *Suonatrice*, the role of Bernardo Strozzi as creator, and the unknown commissioner as consumer, are erased, closing the door on what might otherwise be a productive exploration of power, agency, visual display, interpretation, and ownership. While such a prolonged discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, I have found it useful to remember an essential idea from John Berger, in his work *Ways of Seeing*. In his study of the female nude, and the ways in which women’s bodies have been used in Western art for the benefit of male-dominated society, Berger considers a representative image of Nell Gwyne. Berger writes:

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<sup>209</sup> Junkerman, “The Lady and the Laurel,” 50.

<sup>210</sup> Junkerman, “The Lady and the Laurel,” 49.

Charles the Second commissioned a secret painting from Lely. It is a highly typical image of the tradition. Nominally it might be a *Venus and Cupid*. In fact it is a portrait of one of the King's mistresses, Nell Gwyne. It shows her passively looking at the spectator staring at her naked. This nakedness is not, however, an expression of her own feelings; it is a sign of her submission to the owner's feelings or demands.<sup>211</sup>

When considering the *Suonatrice*, it is worth asking if Bernardo Strozzi has painted a woman, or a man's fantasy of the woman he wishes (or has been instructed) to see.

Does the *Suonatrice* provide proof that Barbara Strozzi was a courtesan? As is the case with the *Satire*, I believe that the truth is more complicated and, frankly, more unknowable than that simplistic conclusion. While it seems likely that Barbara Strozzi was the model for the *Suonatrice*, it is also important to remember that no documentary proof exists to confirm this theory; this fact should serve as a reminder to ask who commissioned the painting, if it was widely viewed, what its function was, and whether a link between Barbara and the portrait was made clear and then forgotten, or was never widely known. If the *Suonatrice* is to be taken as a representation of Strozzi, then it is vital to consider both its context, particularly in relation to the Allegory group, and its possible functions and meanings. To attempt to position the painting without ongoing considerations is to favour a sophistic representation of Barbara Strozzi over the more nebulous, and illuminating, reality.

### The two-fold answer

Having approached the courtesan question in good faith, this final part of Chapter Two attempts both to answer the question and to interrogate the meaning of its repeated asking.

From the historical materials currently available, it appears that Barbara Strozzi was involved in a concubinary relationship with the father of her children, Giovanni Paolo Vidman. Furthermore, there is a lack where we might reasonably expect evidence to be, should she have pursued a career as a courtesan. The common elements of a concubinary relationship – exclusivity, mutual provision for children, mutual financial

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<sup>211</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 46.

benefit, a description of the two as a married couple – are all present in the Strozzi-Vidman relationship. The posthumous third-party report of rape could well be understood through the desire to legitimise the children of the union, as could the repeated public descriptions of Strozzi's virtue, so savagely mocked in the *Satire*. Alexander Cowan asserts that for natural children to be legitimised, documentation and witness statements affirming the virtue of the mother were needed, a fact which Giulio Strozzi, as Roberto Strozzi's legitimised son, would have known. It seems apparent that Giulio Strozzi and Isabella Garzoni enjoyed a concubinary relationship – given how common and accepted concubinage was at this point in Venetian history, there is no reason why Barbara Strozzi should have avoided this form of relationship. A concubinary relationship had several advantages compared with either legal marriage or religious life, the first and most important of which was financial. Giulio Strozzi died without the funds to provide for his own burial and, according to records discovered by Beth Glixon, the most costly house he rented went for 150 ducats a year.<sup>212</sup> Would Giulio have been able to afford 1,000 ducats for a spiritual dowry, or between 8,000 to 40,000 ducats for a legal marriage? A concubinary relationship offered the possibility of making an advantageous match without financial ruin, allowed Barbara Strozzi the guaranteed freedom to pursue a musical career, and was an unremarkable choice with no legal penalties for any subsequent children. For these reasons, I feel it sensible to describe Strozzi's relationship with Vidman as concubinage or, in more modern parlance, a common-law marriage.

There is no recorded evidence describing Barbara Strozzi as a courtesan, either in general or in the specific documents where her name would be expected if she had been courtesan, such as Busenello's poem; it is vital to note that the Venetians were not shy about recording such matters. Not only is Strozzi not described as a courtesan, but her treatment in the *Satire* is not consistent with the more overt and descriptive misogyny levelled at courtesans in other Incogniti writing. Most importantly, however, is the fact that Strozzi does not describe *herself* as a

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<sup>212</sup> Glixon, "New Light," 313.

courtesan. The figure of Veronica Franco is often invoked in representations of Strozzi to suggest that Strozzi too was a courtesan; rarely, if ever, are the similarities and differences between the two evaluated. When they are – considering both in the Venetian tradition of educated, artistic women, actively involved in the *querelle des femmes* – the limited materials currently available demonstrate a significant difference in their self-presentation regarding sex work. Franco openly acknowledges her social-sexual position, writes with authority from it, and speaks openly of various aspects of sex in her poems and letters. In the few surviving written records left by Strozzi, she does not claim courtesan status; while some of her song texts are mildly erotic, they do not fall outside of the bounds of standard song lyrics of the time. Strozzi denies the allegations made against her in the *Satire* and dismisses them as slander; Franco uses the public allegations made against her as a launching point for her own arguments, never denying the fact that she is a courtesan, but using her position as courtesan to reassert her moral dominance over the men who would attack her and other women. To point out the differences in the two women's approaches is not to imply a virgin/whore dichotomy, but simply to try to understand the ways in which each woman negotiated her particular gendered position, reflecting differences in their economic, artistic, marital, and social statuses.

To try to understand a historical figure who left little in the way of biographical material is to grapple with the constant impossibility of knowing. There is no neat and complete narrative of Strozzi's life to present in answer to questions regarding her (and her father's) moral worth and sexual status. However, from the perspective of this study, I propose an approach that works from the biographical and historical material currently available, and which respects Strozzi's presentation of herself. Both of those considerations necessitate an examination of the courtesan question itself.

To ask a question to which either there can be no answer, or to which any answer given is dismissed in favour of repeating the question, is to inhibit progress. The courtesan question – first asked as a genuine question by Ellen Rosand in 1978 – has

not disappeared over time, despite several genuine, and well researched attempts to answer it (Glixon, Kendrick). Instead, some later representations of Strozzi have become more extreme in their positioning of this framing than earlier ones. While I do not believe that those who ask are deliberately inhibiting progress, nevertheless the question serves to focus attention on the gendered tropes previously outlined in Chapter One, and represents and limits Barbara Strozzi through their limited framings: exceptional woman (not married, not a nun), virgin/whore, siren/embodied singer-composer. Failing to consider all forms of economic sexual control, it resorts to a “sex sells” representation of sex work, either through a titillating fantasy image of a courtesan, or through a “misery porn” depiction of immoral fallen woman or pimped-out victim.

Asking again and again, with no desire for resolution, marks Barbara Strozzi out as a gendered “other.” I refer back to the feminist musicology research presented in Chapter One which explores the ways in which musicians marked out as women are prevented from being understood and received as musicians: consistently representing Barbara Strozzi through the unsolvable frame of the courtesan question marks her as fundamentally incompatible with the (male) canon. Heather Hadlock, in a 2008 review of *The Courtesan’s Arts and Music of the Sirens*, explains this very clearly: “In older scholarship, one discerns a conscious or unconscious reservation that music of professional seductresses may not quite qualify as a musical art because its purpose was to titillate, manipulate, and gain rewards rather than to achieve disinterested or purely personal artistic goals.”<sup>213</sup> It is a useful thought experiment to consider what a similar treatment of a male composer would look like – if one of the many men composers who paid for (or is believed to have paid for) sexual services was constantly introduced and interrogated along these lines. What if every popular performance of Brahms lieder was prefigured by: “Johannes Brahms, who many scholars believe regularly paid for sex”? It is hard to envision. The question is uniquely and fundamentally gendered.

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<sup>213</sup> Hadlock, “The Courtesan’s Arts,” 4.

To instead examine and place Strozzi in historical, socio-sexual context using an approach which presupposes that all musicians must be understood in such a way gives a more holistic representation of the composer. Moreover, it *settles* Strozzi, so that it is possible to integrate her music, and the potential meanings and possibilities thereof, into existing and emergent musical cultures. Asking again and again, however, unsettles and destabilises, and does not allow for developed, ongoing work. Lucy Green, writing in 1997, hints at this modern conundrum when speaking of the historical one, speaking specifically of Strozzi and the courtesan question: "Like many women singers, she suffered public abuse and accusations of sexual license. She may indeed have been a courtesan of some kind; but what is telling is that, had she been a non-singing courtesan, of whom there must have been hundreds, she would presumably not have inspired a public debate about her 'virtue'."<sup>214</sup> I disagree with Green as to the specific debates about women's virtue (critically, their lack of it) and accusations of/positioning of sex workers in Italian culture at the time – but I think that something vital is gestured towards in Green's statement. We are *still* debating Strozzi's "virtue," through fundamentally misogynistic framings, supporting and supported by a foundation of cultural anxiety around women's "display," control, freedom, and power. If we answer that Strozzi *was* a sex worker, we would be forced to interrogate that category as it is understood then and now, investigate how carnal commerce functioned in Venetian society, and examine how that career may or may nor have intersected with Strozzi's compositional and performance work. If we say she was not a sex worker, then we must do the same, from a slightly different position. Constant vacillation and created uncertainty, however, does not require this sometimes difficult reckoning with our entwined musical, economic, and gendered cultures; a less burdensome way of presenting Strozzi, but a less fulfilling and enlightening one.

The repeated question, asked not only without hope of resolution, but with no real drive to resolution ensures that Strozzi remains stuck in the problematic framings

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<sup>214</sup> Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 33.

that haunt the representation of women musicians. Was she or was she not a courtesan? To keep asking the question over and over again is to work within a limited and misogynistic framework: it does not help us to understand Strozzi, it does not help us to perform her music, it fails to take into account the positions of seicento women writers, and it fails to take into account Strozzi's own representation of herself. It is time for the courtesan question to be retired.

### **Conclusion: Towards Ambiguity and Nuance**

The aim of this chapter has been to chart and analyse the ways in which Strozzi has been represented, to identify gaps and outstanding questions in the current research, and to attempt to answer those questions through an examination of broader historical and societal context. With those answers, and through an interrogation of popular representational framings, I hope to have arrived at an alternative interpretation of Strozzi, one which is both more informed and more allowing of ambiguities, nuance, and the paucity of currently known primary source material.

What does this new interpretation, or approach, to Strozzi look like? It would:

1. Focus on Strozzi's music in both performance and analysis, drawing from the whole of her compositional output, rather than highlighting the same few songs and placing her within a limited framing.
2. Work from Strozzi's own representation of herself, in accordance with Cusick's practice of writing from women's lives, and Gerda Lerner's desire that women in history be approached on their own terms. In practice, this means centring Strozzi's own words and actions, situating her in her own social context, and retiring the courtesan question in favour of understanding her family life through the common Venetian practice of concubinage. This

approach would be aware of, and have a critical eye towards, cultural misogyny and the male gaze.<sup>215</sup>

3. Combat the unlearning and ignorance perpetuated through misrepresentations of Strozzi. Part of this work will involve active investigation into the individual biases that each researcher and/or performer brings to their work – something I will demonstrate in Chapter Four of this work.

In addition to this approach, this chapter identifies three areas of future research. The first lies in further archival research work in Venice; Beth Glixon hints at the possibility that Barbara's son, Giulio Pietro, may have had (and lost) additional materials from his mother, and it is possible that the Archives in Venice contain previously unstudied data. The second concerns the status of the lost Opus – there is not, at the present moment, any record of work already carried out to locate it – has anyone tried? It was recorded by as having arrived at the Mantuan court on 7 December 1655, according to one Francesco Bulgarini, and had a sun on its cover; would those details provide a researcher with a place to start? Finally, the music contained in the *Suo natrice* portrait remains unidentified; it would be fascinating to open up the search for the composition depicted, and to see if an answer might provide more information on the musician waiting with her viola da gamba.

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<sup>215</sup> I believe that there is fruitful work to be done here working with autoethnographic insights gained from studying lived experiences of the male gaze (and other dominant gazes, such as the cis gaze). In addition to my work in Chapter Four on this subject, please see my essay "Being Seen."

## **Chapter Three: An Examination of the Music of Barbara Strozzi**

### **Introduction**

Having located the known facts – and later interpretations – of Barbara Strozzi’s life within their appropriate cultural context, this thesis turns now to a consideration of her musical works.

This chapter consists of six subsections: a description of the specific works chosen for closer analysis within this thesis; an examination of the compositional and performance background to Strozzi’s career; an analysis of Strozzi’s music, from which emerges specific hallmarks of her style; a case study of two contrasting works for solo voice; an analysis of Strozzi’s style in comparison, considered alongside specific works of Monteverdi, Cavalli, and Bembo; and, finally, an exploration of the texts set by Strozzi and her methods of text-setting, particularly as understood through the lens of the prevailing literary trends favoured by the Incogniti and their followers.

As previously discussed at the beginning of this thesis, I am primarily a performing musician and not a music theorist, and so have undertaken my analysis of Strozzi’s music from this experiential perspective. My understanding of her compositional style stems from my experiences of singing and playing: what her music requires from the voice, from the singing actor, from the ensemble, and from the performers as co-poets and co-rhetoricians. I have highlighted this process through the case study on (and recorded practice of) two paired contrasting pieces, “L’Astratto” and “Giusta Negativa.” This foundation leads also to my understanding and describing of the tonality of this music. Strozzi’s music has been understood in different ways by different researchers, some emphasising its modal tonality, and some describing it through a major-minor tonal system. I believe that both of these approaches are useful, but find the latter more closely aligns with my instinctive understanding of,

and responses to, these works while musicking, and so it is this system I use here. I am inspired by Cusick's eclectic approach to the music of Francesca Caccini, her stated goal of making her analysis accessible to the reader, and by her demonstration of what I would describe as Tuana's practice of "loving ignorance": "I do not pretend to know how she might have thought about chords; I only know that she thought about them very well."<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate not only the primary hallmarks of Strozzi's compositional style, but her exploitation of the cantata form and the printing press as ways of reaching a broad audience, writing not only for her own voice, but for the voices of those she would never know. Her use of text embeds her in her community of intellectuals and artists, and is deserving of further, detailed study. I consider her works a major addition to the category of seicento vocal music, marked by an incredible self-assuredness, polish, inventiveness, wit, drama, and a gloriously symbiotic richness between text, voice, and instrumental ensemble.

### **Section One: Selection of works**

While all known works by Barbara Strozzi have been examined for this study, I have chosen to focus on thirty-three pieces for a closer analysis. Of these works, six are sacred and twenty-seven are secular: twenty-five are solos, seven are duets, and one is a trio. They represent examples from every one of her surviving solo composer volumes, and the ATB motet published in the *Sacra Corona*, not present in any other sources. I have aimed for contrast and variety in choice of texts and compositional techniques, with a specific focus on her main output, solo voice, and the next most representative category, the duet. I have not chosen to include any of Strozzi's four and five voice madrigals from her Opus 1, because a study of these pieces, rooted in the broader madrigalian tradition and particularly the works of her Venetian

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<sup>1</sup> Cusick, *Francesca Caccini*, location 32 (ebook).

contemporaries, feels to me to be a work in its own right, and an important one.<sup>2</sup> By focusing on the solo and small ensemble works, I hope to provide an overall introductory guide to her most popular style, not only in terms of numbers, but in terms of how she has been most frequently presented and received.

In the spirit of the Accademia tradition of arguing different sides of a particular position or question, I have arranged my selection into opposing debates, working through one such debate in rehearsal and written analysis for the fifth section of this chapter.

***Is it better to declare love, or to keep silent?***

Opus 2, “L’Amante segreto” &  
Opus 6, “Amante segreto”

**VS**

Opus 6, “Amante loquace”

***Is love to be rejected or treasured?***

Opus 6, “Bando d’amore”

**VS**

Opus 2, “L’Amante consolato”

***She loves me, she loves me not: two aspects of Lilla***

Opus 6, “A Lilla che si dole ch’io non l’amo”

**VS**

Opus 2, “Lilla crudele ad onta d’amore”

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<sup>2</sup> In addition, given the links between Opus 1 and the treatments of Strozzi found in the *Satire* and the *Veglie* already demonstrated in Chapter Two of this work, and the potential for further insights to be gained from a cross-comparison analysis of these texts, I believe it is prudent to wait to approach the multi-voiced works until such a time as a full critical translation of the *Satire* is available. While this necessarily limits the scope of the musical analysis in this thesis, I believe it better to save this work for a future time when it can be approached with greater resources and more space than are available for this project.

***Is life misery or joy?***

Opus 8, "Che si puo fare"

**VS**

Opus 2, "Gite, o giorni dolente"

***Are women noble or base?***

(DUET) Opus 1, "Sonetto proemio dell'opera" &

Opus 8, "Cieli, stelle"

**VS**

Opus 2, "La, sol, da, mi, re, do"

***To flee from love, or return to it?***

Opus 8, "E giungerà pur mai" &

Opus 8, "Donne belle"

**VS**

(DUET) Opus 2, "La riamata da chi amava"

***Should you sing of love?***

Ops 2, "L'Astratto"

**VS**

Opus 2, "Giusta negativa"

***What qualities do the nobility possess?***

Opus 2, "Costume di grande"

**VS**

Opus 2 & Opus 3, "Lamento (Sul Rodano severo)"

***Inconstant vs. constant love***

Opus 2, "Chiamata a nuovi amore"

**VS**

(DUET) Opus 2, "Grande allegrezza di cuore"

***Revenge or forgiveness?***

(DUET) Opus 3, “Begli occhi”

**VS**

Opus 8, “Tu me ne puoi ben dire”

***Kisses or music from a beautiful mouth?***

(DUET) Opus 2, “Morso, e bacio dati in un tempo”

**VS**

(DUET) Opus 1, “Canto di bella bocca”

***Embracing love vs. rejecting love***

(DUET) Opus 1, “Dialogo in partenza”

**VS**

Opus 7, “Basta così, v'ho inteso”

***Peter doubts the faith, and Peter spreads the faith***

Opus 5, “In medio maris”

**VS**

Opus 5, “Erat Petrus”

***The holy name of God, and the sacred flesh***

Opus 5, “Oleum effusum”

**VS**

Opus 5, “Salve sancta caro”

***Faith through Christ alone vs. the veneration of the Saints***(TRIO) *Sacra Corona*, “Quis dabit mihi”**VS**

Opus 5, “Mater Anna”

## Section Two: The Compositional and Performance Background to Strozzi's Music

A crucial set of problems encountered when addressing the music of Barbara Strozzi are the multiple changes in musical culture between our time and hers; changes not only in performance practice, but in performance meanings, genre divisions, and popular genres. Strozzi specialized in small-scale accompanied vocal music for the chamber – but what did that mean at the time of her career?

It was certainly not a niche occupation, nor did it carry a single unambiguous meaning. In her essay “Musical Encounters Public and Private”, Margaret Murata lays out multiple ways in which private musical performances could be understood. It quickly becomes apparent that Strozzi, as a woman singer-composer, was not an outlier or oddity. Murata notes that, while it would have been unusual for a woman to be included in the audience of an accademia performance, it was quite usual for women to appear as performers. This did not necessarily imply that the female performers were seen in a sexualized light: private musical performances by women were associated with courtesans, and they were also associated with a state of virtue, endowing a proof of refinement and artistic prowess on performer and audience alike. It was entirely possible for a woman to make a career only from private performances; Murata describes the talents and fame of Strozzi’s direct contemporary, Leonora Baroni, who never performed on the public stage, but only within the “confines” of the chamber.<sup>3</sup> Even when Baroni toured Paris, she performed only in private, singing for the Queen Regent in a chamber setting.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that our hierarchy of vocal performance – the popular understanding that bigger means better in terms of venue, audience size, and forces – does not translate to the musical world of the seicento.

Nor does our concept of a chamber recital match the private performance standards of Strozzi’s time. Wendy Heller notes throughout her work the collaborative, ensemble nature of chamber music, particularly that of the accademia and salons.

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<sup>3</sup> Brosius, *Virtuose of the Roman Conversazioni*.

<sup>4</sup> Murata, “Musical Encounters Public and Private,” 43-44.

These were places of debate, development, and experimentation. Talking specifically of the Unisoni, Heller writes: “These were not concerts in any conventional sense but rather collaborative enterprises, in which Strozzi’s performances were interspersed with debates, poetry readings, and academic discourses.”<sup>5</sup> In light of these performance standards, “private” is something of a misnomer when used as we might use the word now, implying something closed, discreet, and protected from feedback and criticism. Perhaps it would be more helpful to consider that these chamber performances were, instead, “select”: highly public in terms of exposure to and feedback from some of the most important and powerful people of the time – the nobility, the intelligentsia, fellow musicians and artists – with the potential to contribute to, challenge, and change the broader literary and musical culture.<sup>6</sup>

Although Strozzi wrote in a variety of vocal forms, it is as a cantata composer that she is most readily described, from John Hawkins’ attribution of “inventress” through to vocal selections for CD and concert performance today. Again, by the light of our own musical standards, it is easy to consider the cantata, and its related forms, as a niche genre. We would be very wrong to do so. Carolyn Gianturco, in the introduction to her collection of cantatas for Garland, described the form as the “most popular of all Baroque genres.”<sup>7</sup> The form itself was not fixed, and underwent many developments during Strozzi’s lifetime: part of the importance of the cantata lies in its flexibility, the way it absorbed new vocal developments, and developed other vocal forms in turn. Gloria Rose, one of the leading scholars of the cantata form, charts the international and ongoing impact of the Italian cantata:

In the course of its history, which coincides with the Baroque period, the cantata exercised an influence second to no other category of music. It developed alongside opera, and the two categories show similar traits at the various stages of their development. But the performance of cantatas, unlike that of operas, demanded no elaborate preparation or production.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Heller, *Music in the Baroque*, 165.

<sup>6</sup> There is important future work to be done in studying Strozzi’s use of chamber performance and cultural influence with that of the prominent women artists, patrons and hostesses of early nineteenth-century Germany and late nineteenth-century Britain.

<sup>7</sup> Gianturco, “Introduction,” *The Italian Cantata in the Seventeenth Century*.

<sup>8</sup> Rose, “The Italian Cantata,” 676-677.

So, rather than an “also-ran” category in relation to the newly developing genre of opera, the cantata was not only one of the most popular forms of music at the time, but one with the potential for the greatest critical and geographical impact.

According to Colin Timms, Strozzi was a central figure in this musical development, “The most important figure for the history of the cantata in mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century Venice.”<sup>9</sup>

Understanding the importance of the cantata gives one part of the answer to the question frequently asked of Strozzi: “why didn’t she write opera?” By considering the limits placed on a woman composer in Strozzi’s position, we can provide another. Rather than simply expecting Strozzi to follow the example of Francesca Caccini, it is necessary to look at the specific cultural, economic, and gendered standards that shaped each individual composer’s possibilities. Caccini, with a court position, and a commission for the composition of *La Liberazione* as a specific courtly entertainment, was in a drastically different professional environment from Strozzi, a composer-performer independent of court or church, whose links to opera lay not in the closed world of noble entertainment, but in the commercial circles of early Venetian opera. It is not that both had the same possibilities because they were both women, but that both worked within specific geographical and professional bounds.

Claire Fontijn makes this fact exceptionally clear in her 2010 essay “Sotto la disciplina del Signor Cavalli,” in which she studies the music and careers of two of Cavalli’s most successful students, Barbara Strozzi and Antonia Bembo – and provides practical answers as to why the content of their outputs varied. Speaking specifically to the opera question, Fontijn writes:

While in Venice, neither woman could aspire to produce large staged works or music for the church, but instead both honed their skills in the production of paraliturgical and secular chamber music. It was only in France that Antonia – by then known as “Antonia Bembo, Noble Venetian” – dared write for the stage.... While Strozzi’s creative activity had been largely limited to the city of Venice, Bembo’s was not. In an audacious move, Bembo retraced Cavalli’s steps by setting *L’Ercole amante* anew

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<sup>9</sup> Timms, et al. "Cantata."

in Paris, some forty-five years after *his* legendary visit there. While Bembo's opera reveals an effort to continue his work in the domain for which he was best known, and it represents one of the first large-scale dramatic works ever composed by a woman, it appears that her opera was never premiered. Indeed, this may explain how she had the freedom to write "music for music's sake," more than had either Cavalli or Strozzi.<sup>10</sup>

It is notable that Bembo wrote an opera only after she had secured a pension from the French court. Strozzi, seemingly reliant on a specific patron for each volume of music to provide ongoing income, may well have lacked the economic security to write such a large scale piece for her own satisfaction, even leaving aside the question of securing a professional commission for the stage. As any composer knows, even now, what we write is frequently dependent on available funding, rather than reflecting a purely personal desire to create. When the question "why didn't Strozzi write an opera?" is asked, the genuine economic and social barriers to a woman of ambiguous status and lack of fixed income writing an opera – let alone having that opera professionally staged as a commercial venture – are rarely addressed. When we do consider them, the more appropriate question becomes: "even if she had wanted to, how could she?"

What of the specifics of the performance of Strozzi's music, and the vocal music of her contemporaries? Descriptions of Strozzi's own performances would be a logical starting position to answer this question but, unfortunately, reports from her listeners focus on the general effect, rather than specific elements of vocal production. Heller quotes a description of Strozzi "stealing the souls of the listeners through their ears with sweetness"<sup>11</sup> as she sang – an impressive achievement, but not particularly helpful in this context. Looking to Strozzi's exact contemporary, Leonora Baroni, provides only a little more information; the French viol player André Maugars, hearing Baroni perform in the late 1630s, wrote: "Her [vocal] leaps and sighs are not at all lascivious, her glances have nothing of lewdness, and her gestures have the correctness of a proper lady. Sometimes in passing from one note to another, she lets the intervals of the enharmonic and chromatic genera sound with

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<sup>10</sup> Fontijn, "'Sotto la disciplina del Signor Cavalli,'" 179-180.

<sup>11</sup> Heller, *Music in the Baroque*, 165.

such skill and charm that no one remains unmoved by this beautiful and difficult type of singing.”<sup>12</sup>

The latter part of this description of Baroni certainly chimes with information provided by singer and musicologist Richard Wistreich in his investigations into the various singing techniques of the Baroque era. In “Reconstructing pre-Romantic singing technique,” Wistreich emphasizes the ease with which singers would have had to produce this often difficult repertoire, writing that “great flexibility and speed of articulation” was “something especially prized in the sophisticated performances of certain repertoires for select audiences in small rooms.”<sup>13</sup> In recognition of the physical space around the singer and the type of accompaniment, chamber music required a dynamic that would not overwhelm the listeners, but would allow the text to be readily understood. Broad vocal ranges and the ability to manage large leaps – so prevalent in Strozzi’s compositions, and praised in Baroni’s singing – were increasingly desirable as the seventeenth century progressed.<sup>14</sup> In examining this aspect of the voice, Wistreich focuses on the demands for flexibility and range made on tenors and basses, but it appears clear that, by including such vocal demands in her works for voices both low and high, Strozzi was well in line with contemporary trends in vocal production.

The growing trend of vocal virtuosity in chamber music is something Wistreich returns to in his 2015 essay “High, Middle, and Low: Singing Monteverdi.” Wistreich’s descriptions of Monteverdi’s bass singers, and the music written for them, bring to mind much that is distinctive in Strozzi’s writing for *high* voice:

Monteverdi’s “essay in vocal completeness” called on the one kind of (male) singer equal to such a task – a bass with a very large range as well as vocal agility. His notated setting of Rinuccini’s text...appropriates a whole range of vocal gestures, speech rhythms and different types of articulation (including occasional, sudden dramatic leaps across the vocal range) associated with a particular Italian tradition

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted and translated by Murata, “Musical Encounters Public and Private,” 43-44.

<sup>13</sup> Wistreich, “Reconstructing pre-Romantic singing technique,” 180-181.

<sup>14</sup> Wistreich, “Reconstructing pre-Romantic singing technique,” 183-184.

of highly virtuoso solo bass singing, sometimes called *basso alla bastarda* in early seventeenth-century song books.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond his research into the written record of the performance of Italian chamber music, Wistreich points to another essential source of knowledge on the performance of these pieces: the performance experience itself. Detailing the insights that singers can gain through our actual – physical, mental, emotional – engagement with the sung work, Wistreich shows that we should not rely solely on the text of the music, or texts related to the music, but expand our understanding to include the experiential. He writes:

Interestingly, performers often neglect another, very potent hermeneutic tool that they have at their disposal, and one which has the potential, at least, to provide penetrating and productive contact with the participants in that now silent, but once-shared “conversation” between Monteverdi and his performers: namely the huge complex of sensations, skills, negotiations and instantaneous (and normally unverbalized) decisions that we experience and make every microsecond during the acts of simultaneously reading and performing music.<sup>16</sup>

Following on from this “permission granted,” and after a decade of performing Strozzi’s music, I would suggest certain key skills that I have found are required for a successful performance of her work: attention to the text (audibility, meaning and double meaning, word play and jokes, linguistic sound effects), great flexibility (both in the *passaggi*/ornamentation, and in leaping from one part of the voice to the next), interplay within the ensemble, and an ability to appropriately declaim and dramatise key elements of each piece. This is not easy music, but it feels as though a crucial element of performance is to make it *appear* easy – a display of vocal sprezzatura – dancing over the quasi-improvisational elements and conversationally quick patter, speech rhythms and syncopations, and lighting fast changes of style and mood.

This need to emphasise the linguistic and dramatic elements certainly fits into broader vocal elements of Strozzi’s culture, and serves as an important reminder to the modern performer, perhaps trained for and more used to a certain modern

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<sup>15</sup> Wistreich, “High, Middle, and Low,” 79.

<sup>16</sup> Wistreich, “High, Middle, and Low,” 67.

emphasise on a standard “operatic” sound, at the expense of text and versatility. As John Rosselli notes: “Around 1600, singing, acting, dancing, composing and playing an instrument were not distinct callings; many who appeared in early opera excelled at more than one. Composers sang (not often on stage), hence taught singing, and were to go on doing so down to Rossini; actors sang and danced; some early singers would accompany themselves on a stringed instrument; singers who appeared in opera might be called ‘musicians’ or ‘actors’; in Italy what they did was at first called ‘acting in song’ (*recitar cantando*).”<sup>17</sup> “Acting in song” feels very close to what Strozzi demands of her singers, and it is impossible to forget that Strozzi sang and played at the same time when we, as modern interpreters, attempt the same and experience the profound level of interaction between voice and basso continuo.

Having covered the *what* and the *how*, we come to the *who*: who would have performed Strozzi’s works, and how does that impact our interpretation of them?

It is well documented that Strozzi performed her own works in the early part of her career, and there is broad agreement amongst scholars that she continued to compose primarily for her own instrument throughout her life, with a few notable exceptions: Adamo Franchi, Giovanni Antonio Forni, and Carlo II. But there is a crucial element of Strozzi’s performance practice that has been overlooked, one that I believe deserves emphasizing.

Who performed Strozzi’s music? Through the dedicated pursuit of multiple publications, the answer is: people other than Strozzi. The publication of eight solo composer volumes, and the inclusion in several anthologies, did not happen by accident, and nor was it an inevitable result of a career as a singer-composer. If the purpose of publication is widely accepted as being to reach a broader audience – and we know that Strozzi’s works did spread over a wide area – then the majority of her works’ singers would not have been known to her. Transposition to suit the singer

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<sup>17</sup> Rosselli, “Song into theatre,” 84.

would have been entirely acceptable in Strozzi's time; though her works are usually described as soprano solos, there is no reason why they could not have been sung by any other voice. The large number of performance indicators in Strozzi's texts show her forethought in preparing her works for musicians who would not have heard the original performances; an indication that her publications were not simply notations of a specific performance, looking back as a record, but preparations for future performances, looking outward to other musicians.

It is in this realization that both of these questions – “why didn’t she write opera” and “did she only write for her own voice?” – come together to provide a possible answer. Rather than understanding Strozzi’s compositions as a extension of her personal voice, and that voice itself as an extension of a highly gendered sexual role (with her focus on the cantata form as a “failure” to align with the hierarchies of vocal style in our own era) it is possible instead to follow the cultural trends of Strozzi’s own time, and her manipulation of them, and see instead deliberate career and compositional choices. Rather than positioning the voice of Barbara Strozzi as something necessarily introspective, personal, and small, we see instead the deliberate use of the voice of the composer – in all its meanings – exploiting the most popular and influential vocal genre of her time, through the new technology of the printing press, to achieve a remarkable level of reach and influence.

### **Section Three: The Specifics of Strozzi’s Style**

While allowing for the inevitable and necessary changes that occur throughout a composer’s career – experimentation, specific commissions and dedications, maturation of style – what emerges from a broad study of Strozzi’s works is an awareness of a highly distinct, internally consistent style. To my mind, this style can be summarized through the classification of six general trends, and four highly distinctive hallmarks. The general trends I would count as: a dramatic/rhetorical quality, the use of leaps, the exploitation of the full range of the voice, elaborate

madrigalism, dexterous vocality, and written out ornamentation. As to the hallmarks: abrupt endings (humorous or dramatic), highly involved basso continuo, unusual dissonances, and the use of multiple characters in solo song. In this section, I will explore each of these elements in turn.

In introducing highly dramatic elements to her vocal settings, we can clearly see Strozzi's response to the dictates of the text and also her skill for framing the performative nature of her own music. This is not music that pretends to naturalness – music unconscious of or feigning ignorance of its performance and compositional context – but music that openly acknowledges its setting and audience. This is most obvious in Strozzi's attention-grabbing openings, of which I feel there are three main types.

The first is the most formal, a seemingly literal address to the listeners before the meat of the music begins. The opening five bars of Opus 5's "Salve, sancta caro" are a perfect example of type (see Example 3.1). Before the full phrase "hail, holy flesh" is expounded in a lilting triple meter, the singer begins with the repetition of an unanchored "salve"(hail) in duple time, leaping down the octave with a stop on the fifth over a unison tonic note in the bass. The effect is of an extra-textural greeting to the audience, a drawing in, before the musicians turn themselves, and their listeners' attentions, towards Christ.

Example 3.1. Bars 1-3 of "Salve, sancta caro"

A handwritten musical score for voice and basso continuo. The top staff is for the voice, starting with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and common time. It shows two measures of a repeating 'salve' phrase: 'Sal-ve, sal-ve,' followed by a fermata over the second measure. The bottom staff is for basso continuo, starting with a bass clef, a key signature of one flat, and common time. It shows the beginning of a bass line with a 'G' and a 'C' indicated.

A secular example can be found in Opus 2's "Lilla crudele ad onta d'amore." Again, the music begins in common time for an opening salvo, before switching to a swinging triple meter for the song itself. The first word of each verse (first "leave off" and then "be silent"), expressed through a semiquaver flourish and division, summarizes the words to come, but also functions as an injunction to the audience, part of the world of the song and yet also standing apart from it.

The second type of opening is most prevalent in her more conversational, syllabically-set pieces: an explosive, unprepared exclamation. Two excellent examples can be found in Opus 7's "Basta così v'ho inteso" (see Example 3.2) and Opus 2's "Giusta negativa," both songs rejecting requests made of the singer, the first to love, the second to sing of love. Both pieces begin high in the voice, working down through a fifth in the first bar; "Basta così v'ho inteso" on the very first beat, and "Giusta negativa" after a quaver breath. Both settings bring an immediacy to their meaning, a sense that the singer has been interrupted mid-rage, or else is exploding with an emotion that cannot be contained; highly dramatic, and serving well the humour of these pieces.

#### Example 3.2. Bars 1-12 of "Basta così v'ho inteso"

The musical example shows two staves of music. The top staff is in common time (C) and the bottom staff is in 9/8 time (G). The lyrics "Ba-sta co-sì v'ho in-te-so, Ba-sta co-sì v'ho in-te-so" are written below the notes. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns.

The third type of the dramatic opening is perfectly illustrated by the cantata "Cieli, stelle" (Opus 8). These first two words – "heavens" and "stars" – are each elongated and ornamented through the same rhythmic device over a static bass, the second word a third higher than the first. Similar to the opening of "Salve, sancta caro," there is a sense of stillness, of setting-up, before the piece begins in earnest. Also

from Opus 8, “E giungerà pur mai” extends this declamatory style throughout the first ten bars, the elaborate and melodious recitativo-style vocalizing playing out over a largely static bass. Important words are highlighted through mimicking meaning: “long” is lengthened, “eternity” is held to become the longest note of the piece so far, and “ruin” falls swiftly to the lower part of the voice. Through this dramatic, declamatory style, it feels as though voice is setting the bounds of the musical world to follow – literally creating a musical soundscape that the narrator can then inhabit.

Strozzi’s other most common use of rhetorical gesture in her vocal writing is the use of exclamations and eruptions at key points of the text. These go beyond the use of exclamatory sounds such as “O,” although these also are found in Strozzi’s works. A good example can be seen in bars 54 to 55 of Opus 7’s “L’Astratto”: “Eh” appears as an obviously speech-like exclamation, syncopated and high in the voice, before a swift parlato phrase in a natural speech rhythm, moving into (for a soprano) the chest register (see Example 3.3). Bar 78 repeats this use of parlato, before dropping beneath the stave for the singer’s lowest note, used to illustrate the word “hell” (see Example 3.4). In “L’Astratto”, these dramatic, more speech-like moments function as reflections on the content of the song – the singer who wishes to sing but cannot, speak-singing of the quandary they find themselves in.

Example 3.3. Bars 54-55 of “L’Astratto”

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is in G major (G clef) and the bottom staff is in G minor (C clef). The tempo is marked "parlato". The lyrics "Eh, si confondon qu'la nott' el giorno." are written below the notes. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns.

The declamatory moment is often tied to a dramatic shift in pitch, particularly when that pitch mimics the geography of the words sung. Opus 5's "Oleum effusum" (bar 170-174 – see Example 3.4) describes how the Holy Name of God reaches to all imaginable places: from "Heaven" on a g" to an immediate drop of an octave and a half to "Earth" on c'. A further semi-tone fall to "Hell" implies either a neat theological joke or warning – or perhaps simply illustrates the limits of the singer's range.

Example 3.4. Bars 170-174 of "Oleum effusum"

The image shows three staves of handwritten musical notation. The top staff is for a soprano voice, the middle staff is for a basso continuo (labeled 'C' for cello/bassoon), and the bottom staff is for another basso continuo (labeled 'G' for guitar/bass). The music consists of short note values (eighth and sixteenth notes) and rests. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first section (measures 170-171) starts with a soprano note on g" followed by eighth-note pairs on f and e, then a long rest. The basso continuo part has a sustained note on c. The lyrics are "Ef-fu-sam pla-ne quod non so-lum coe-lum". The second section (measures 172-173) begins with a soprano note on f followed by eighth-note pairs on e and d, then a long rest. The basso continuo part has a sustained note on c. The lyrics are "ter-ras-quae per-fu-dit Sed a-sper-sit et". The third section (measures 174-175) starts with a soprano note on d followed by eighth-note pairs on c and b, then a long rest. The basso continuo part has a sustained note on c. The lyrics are "in-fer-os". The basso continuo part ends with a sharp sign indicating a key change.

The declamatory statement can also come through an instant change in tempo, such as in "Tue me ne puoi ben dire" (Opus 8). Stopping the presto flow of an extended

semi-quaver run, Strozzi marks the half-bar phrase “I will {continue to} adore you” – the heart of the singer’s complaint – with an adagio, before immediately dropping back into the presto, repeating this gesture at bar 63.

Finally, this sense of eruption, of declaiming, can be underscored by repetition. Looking at bars 108 to 111 of “Che si puo fare” (Opus 8), the narrator’s horrified approach to the “point of death,” building from its earlier mention, is illustrated through a melismatic exclamation, rising up three times to g”, holding there, and each time falling away, only to rise again, before the final dissolution.

Example 3.5. Bars 85-88 of “Cieli, stelle”

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a vocal part (labeled 'Aria') and a continuo/harmonic part. The vocal line starts with a melodic run of eighth notes, followed by a sustained note (held over three measures) and a series of eighth-note chords. The lyrics 'Lu-sin-ghie-re ca-te - - - -' are written below the vocal line. The continuo part consists of sustained bass notes. The key signature changes between G major (two sharps) and A major (one sharp). The vocal line ends with a single note followed by a fermata.

Octave leaps are a common element in Strozzi’s vocal settings, very often used to reiterate the first few words of a song or section, or as an integral part of the melody line. These leaps are sometimes used to mark the beginning of a new thought, sometimes for dramatic effect, and are sometimes embedded in the vocal flow, demonstrating a fluid virtuosity of sound production. These latter examples often appear to serve a functional purpose, as a tool that allows for an extension of a melismatic phrase, a way for the singer to have another run through their vocal range. Bars 85 to 88 of “Cieli, stelle” show this usage: having risen to d” in quavers,

the octave leap mid-word allows the singer to begin the journey again, this time in semiquaver/quaver turns (See Example 3.5). Bars 84 to 86 of “L’Astratto,” with an octave leap up to a”, use the leap and the repetition of the gesture to balance the phrase – but also, I suspect, as a chance to demonstrate the skill of the performer.

The declamatory or dramatic leap, however, is not always of an octave, and its direction and distance are largely dictated by the meaning of the words set. In bar 117 of Opus 8’s “Che si puo fare” the upward leap of a tenth emphasizes the drama that lies behind the repetition of the desperate address to the “spirits of the damned.” “Amante loquace” (Opus 6), also makes arresting use of the upwards tenth – this time in parodic imitation of distress on the word “pity” in a light-hearted strophic song. Sometimes the leap is only just larger than an octave, again reflecting the drama of the context: “Sul Rodano severo” (Opus 2&3), features a jarring upward minor ninth on the word “victim,” the first moment at which the ghost of the murdered squire names himself as the victim of treachery. In the same song, Strozzi uses a leap of an octave and a half – from f” to b-flat (bar 189) – to chart just how far the character has fallen in the eyes of the world. Another example of Strozzi’s use of geography of pitch in her mirroring of word meanings comes with the slightly delayed downward leap between bars 101 and 102 of “L’Astratto”. The voice swells through a stepwise progression to a” as the lover’s hopes rise to heaven, holds in a moment of triumph – and then drops down the octave in abject failure.

These leaps point to another critical element of Strozzi’s style: the exploitation of the full range of the voice. While the majority of Strozzi’s solo songs are written for high voice – either what would now be classified as soprano or high mezzo – there are differences in register even within these high settings. Regardless of the general pitched home, however, Strozzi tends towards a full and flexible use of the range. Sometimes this is obviously tied to word meaning, other times to the overall mood of the music. Bars 72 to 96 of Opus 2’s “L’Amante segreto” provide a good general example of Strozzi’s expectations of vocal flexibility; while only requiring an octave and a half of range, the singer must navigate the changes in the register swiftly, stylishly, and without damaging the audibility and character of the language. An

awareness of the character of each part of the voice can be seen in the use of the lower register at the end of this piece: dropping down from the flights of vocal brilliance throughout the rest of the work, Strozzi hammers home the meaning of the poem's conclusion, the murder of "one who is close to death" by digging into the resonance of the lower mixed and upper chest registers of the singer.

Example 3.6. Bars 40-49 of "Gite, o giorni dolente"

The musical score consists of three staves of handwritten musical notation. The top staff starts with a treble clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one sharp. It contains six measures of music with lyrics: "par-te, E scen-de, scen-de, e scen-- - - -". The middle staff starts with a bass clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one sharp. It contains five measures of music with lyrics: "- de il Nu-me del-le Noz - - - -". The bottom staff starts with a bass clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one sharp. It contains four measures of music with lyrics: "- - - - ze in fer - - ra.". The notation uses various note heads and stems, with some notes connected by vertical lines.

But it is in service to the meaning of the words and the drama of the narrative that Strozzi makes greatest use of the vocal instrument. Changes in vocal register can suggest different regions, emotions, and events through which the singer must pass. "A Lilla che si dole ch'io non l'amo" (Opus 6) uses contrasting ranges to highlight contrasting sentiments from the narrator; beginning at bar 24, the singer drops down through the voice from g" as they grapple with the beloved's disbelief, before rising back up with determination on "but you shall see." "Cieli, stelle" contrasts

“peace” and “war” through the latter’s wild trampling up and down through the voice (bar 127 to 130). Bars 85 to 89 of “Sul Rodano severo” arpeggiate repeatedly through an octave and a half range, illustrating not only the ghost’s downfall, but his emotional response to the same. Finally, it is again in service of mapping out different spatial and philosophical regions, in representing heaven and hell, that Strozzi most characteristically uses this element of her style. Opus 2’s “Gite, o giorni dolente,” a celebratory cantata written to honour the marriage of the volume’s dedicatee, Ferdinand III of Austria, and specifically designated to be sung by the castrato Adamo Franchi, mainly emphasizes the higher end of the voice. However, when action or location of the text demands it, the voice moves in a lower register. An early example comes in bars 40 to 49 as the goddess of love descends from heaven to earth (see Example 3.6, illustrating also leaps of more than an octave and flexibility through the range); another, more sinister, in bars 96 to 106, as the singer evokes the “discord of hell.” Bars 14 to 20 of “Che si puo fare” chart the octave and a half distance between “heaven” and “pain,” and bars 56 to 79 to “L’Astratto” feature a two octave distance between the wild flight of the furies and the invocation of hell.

It is clear that madrigalism – the musical illustration of the meanings and features of the text – is at the heart of Strozzi’s compositional style. Using melismas, extensions, syncopated and dotted rhythms, mimicry, changes of pitch, and changes of harmony (explored below), Strozzi constructs a musical world around the sounds and meanings of her texts. The vast majority of the words chosen by Strozzi for extension and ornamentation have a meaning immediately illuminated or enhanced by their melismatic setting. When less obvious, or less important, words are chosen, their melismatic setting serves to balance the musical line and to convey the total meaning of the textural phrase which, to my mind, also fits under the category of madrigalism.

## Example 3.7. Bars 69-73 of "La sol fa, mi, re, do"

The musical notation consists of two staves. The top staff is in common time (indicated by '3') and shows a vocal line with various note heads and stems, some of which are decorated with small strokes or dots. Below the vocal line, lyrics are written: "Per mo-strar- quant' el-la- sa, pas-se- gian —". The bottom staff is also in common time (indicated by '3') and shows a continuo or basso continuo line with sustained notes and rests. The lyrics "do fa co-sì," are written above the notes in this staff.

One of the most consistent examples of Strozzi's madrigalism is through her setting of words related to singing, nearly always ornamented, and often set in a way which enhances the meta-functions of the narrator, singer, and composer. Even in "Giusta negativa" where the singer complains of being made to sing of love, calling Cupid the bane of musicians and lovers alike, the words "sing" and "sound" are heavily ornamented and emphasized (bars 17 to 19). In Opus 2's "La sol fa, mi, re, do" the luckless narrator describes the behaviour of his beloved, who only "sings" in exchange for money. As the song goes on, the narrator describes just how his beloved sings/"sings" – before coming to the conclusion that we each sing what we know, and so he must sing of becoming the "King of Cuckolds" (bar 108 to 118). A humorously subversive piece, rich in double and triple meanings, making use of slang and euphemism, each word relating to vocality is highly ornamented, and feels like a kind of knowing wink to the audience. We see this first in the third bar, in the extension and ornamentation of the word "canta." The second part of the piece begins with playing up the link between "sing" and "pay," "canta" and "conto," before the highest note of the piece makes its appearance in an ornamentation of "she never finds her good voice" in bars 28 to 29. In the third part, "ornament" is ornamented (bars 50 to 53), as is "ornamented song" (bar 58 to 60), and when the narrator tells us that "she sings passages like this" (bar 69 to 73), he demonstrates

(see Example 3.7). Certainly, Strozzi is making full use of the vocal instrument here – but there is no antagonism between that display of virtuosity and the demands of the text but, rather, a symbiotic and mutually beneficial relationship.

Example 3.8. Bars 5-13 of “Chiamata a nuovi amori”

The image shows three staves of handwritten musical notation. The top staff is for the voice, starting with a treble clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one sharp. The lyrics are: "Hor che sciol-taape-na res-to, Nuo-vo lac- cio il piè le-gò —". The middle staff continues the musical line, also in common time and one sharp. The lyrics are: "— Nuo-vo lac- cio il piè le-". The bottom staff begins with a bass clef, suggesting a piano part, and shows a sustained note followed by a melodic line with various rests and notes.

Rhythm plays a large role in Strozzi's word painting, frequently linked to a sense of mimicry. “In medio maris” features a chromatic extension of the word “groaning,” set in a dotted rhythm, at bars 16 and 17, and three trembling “trembling’s in bars 46 to 48. Words related to running nearly always take place on runs: the “Pindaric flight” of Opus 1’s “Sonetto proemio dell’opera” (bars 6 to 8) is one example, and “Gite o giorni dolente’s” semi-quaver melismatic setting of “come running” at bar 54 is another. At points the text functions as an instruction to the music; in the almost

entirely syllabic “Chiamata a nuovi amori” (Opus 2) the word “tie/entrail” – the entrapment of new attractions – is extended once through a melismatic dotted quaver passage (bars 7 to 9), and once through a three-bar tie (bars 11 to 13) (see Example 3.8, 18 bars 5-13). In “Che si puo fare,” which explores the inescapable nature of melancholy for one ill-fated, it is notable that the most extreme moments of madrigalism occur on words which anchor and illuminate this key message, such as the extension of “eternalize” in bars 92 to 94.

It is Rosand’s claim that, in her text setting, Strozzi repeats neutral words as often as meaningful ones, that unlike Cavalli and Monteverdi, her extensions and ornamentations have more to do with vocal sound than dramatic meaning. But when one looks at the words as a whole – either in their total meaning, or in the ways in which they make clear the particular state of the narrator – it is hard to find a repetition lacking in meaningful function. The opening 24 bars of “Amante segreto” (Opus 6) feature a high level of textural repetition, but that repetition, and the way in which it is scored, creates an effect of desperate pleading. While the individual words could be seen as neutral, the total effect is one of dramatic characterization. Likewise in bar 9 of Opus 6’s “Bando d’amore,” with its repetition of “decided” in the first three verses, and “succeeded” in the fourth; far from lacking meaning, this repetition is a key element of the drama, summing up the argument set forth throughout the song, and securing the central conclusion that love should be, is going to be, banished.

Frequently, the words repeated are not the key descriptive words, but the intensifiers around them. “Troppo” (too/too much/too many) is a popular choice for repetitive setting, as in Opus 2’s “Lilla crudele ad onta d’amore. This intensifying function explains the repetition of questions – either open-ended or rhetorical – such as the “what” throughout “Che si può fare,” or the “maybe I will be” of bars 15 to 21 of “Sonetto proemio dell’opera”.

Even the examples I can find which closest match Rosand’s descriptions of repetition on neutral words can be understood in a different way. The repetitions and

extensions of “che” (who/which/that/what) from bar 148 to bar 161 of “E giungerà pur mai” can seem a strange choice, if “che” is understood as a neutral word in the sentence “Che non si vince Amor che col fuggire,” (that love can only be won through flight) with a more logical choice for melismatic setting being “Amor” or “fuggire.” But we could also see that double “che” as being crucial to the posing and the solving of this riddle, this *dubbi amorosi*: that to tease the listener through the extension of the puzzle is at the core of the riddling, puzzling nature of this form of verbal and musical play.

Example 3.9. Bars 98-102 of “La riamata da chi amava”

The image shows two staves of handwritten musical notation. The top staff has three lines of music. The first line starts with a clef, followed by a series of notes and rests. The second line begins with a rest, followed by a series of notes and rests. The third line begins with a rest, followed by a series of notes and rests. Below the first line, the lyrics "al -" are written twice. Below the second line, the lyrics "go -" are written twice. The bottom staff also has three lines of music. The first line starts with a clef, followed by a series of notes and rests. The second line begins with a rest, followed by a series of notes and rests. The third line begins with a rest, followed by a series of notes and rests. Below the first line, the lyrics "de -" are written twice, followed by "re.". Below the second line, the lyrics "de -" are written twice, followed by "re. -". The notation uses various note heads, stems, and rests to represent the musical rhythm.

Bars 98 to 100 of the Opus 2 duet “La riamata da chi amava,” featuring extreme extended melismas on the word “al” could, likewise, be seen as a validation of Rosand’s argument. But linguistic scholar and Italian vocal coach Matteo dalle Fratte

makes a fascinating point in his instruction to singers of poetic Italian: that there is a convention of placing emphasis on the word before the most obviously important word, as a way of strengthening the meaning of that key word.<sup>18</sup> So, in the case of this duet, the melismatic setting of “al” serves to strengthen the key conclusion of the text that follows: “godere” – “to take delight.” When considered in this light, we can see that the melismatic setting of “al” performs three key, complementary functions (see Example 3.9). By its complexity, it draws attention to the word that follows. It allows and, through the function of its changing pitch, encourages a swell and following drop in volume, calling the listener’s attention to the concomitant climax of meaning and music. Finally, through its “a” sound, it stands as both functional word “al” and also wordless exclamation of the emotional, passionate state of the narrator/s. In this threefold illustration of meaning, we can see Strozzi exploiting not “sheer voice,” but the potential of the voice as both sounding instrument and conversational tool to communicate the totality of intent. My experience, in singing these pieces, is that there is always a reason for word painting, extension, and/or repetition. Sometimes that reason is obvious – where it is not, it helps us to explore more deeply, and more fully, the music and text’s sometimes multiple meanings and potentials.

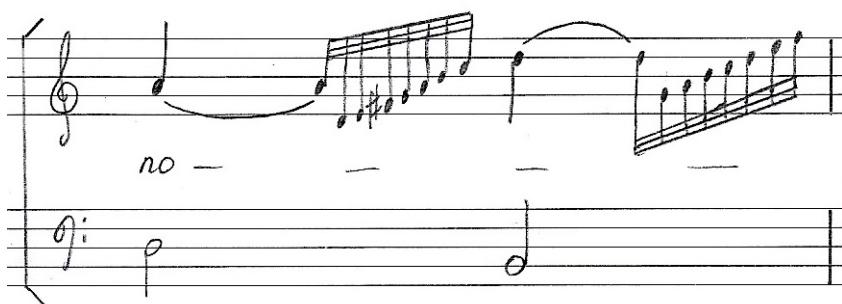
The fifth trend found throughout Strozzi’s music is one already touched on, that of dexterous vocality. Even the easiest of Strozzi’s songs require great vocal flexibility, but her harder pieces take this flexibility into virtuosic territory, particular in light of the need for textural intelligibility and expression. The use of fioreture is common, and I believe that, to the performer, there is a real sense that these runs, turns, and divisions should appear both effortless and an inevitable, indivisible element of the total work. Frequently, these brilliant displays appear to function as flourishes, natural extensions of the meaning of the text and the mindset of the narrator. The demisemiquaver flourish through an octave and a half found in bar 77 of Opus 5’s “Oleum effusum,” a pouring forth on the core message of the work, the name of

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<sup>18</sup> An important part of my work as a performer of Strozzi has been coaching with Matteo dalle Fratte, so as to better understand and present her use of language.

God, is a prime example of Strozzi's vocal outpouring (see Example 3.10) Another is the semi- and demisemiquaver flourish illuminating the gold of the page's hair in bar 31 of "Sul Rodano severo". These effusions of rapid, fluid notes demonstrate not only an expectation of excellence in vocal production, but also of a harnessing of that excellence in the pursuit of dramatic and emotional illustration.

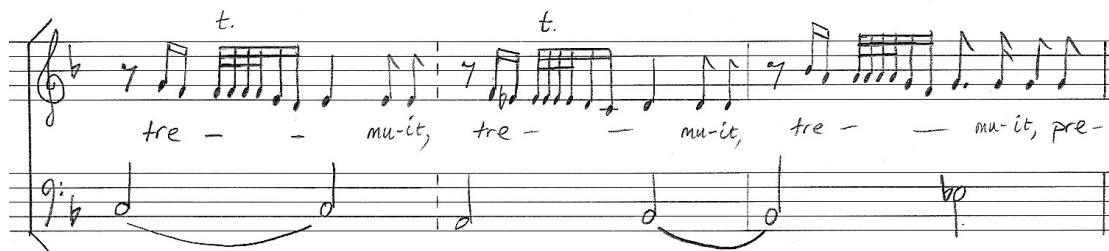
Example 3.10. Bar 77 of "Oleum effusum"



An extension of this expectation, and a key component in the function of Strozzi's music as *published* scores, is found in the sixth trend, that of written out ornamentation. Richard Wistreich, among others, has noted that the writing out of specific ornamentation is a feature of Monteverdi's writing in his works published for general and broader performance. Strozzi's music, coming down to us through her volumes published for a broader market, is full of these ornaments. Divisions and turns are written out, and trill marks are indicated above words. Trills are indicated in bars 8, 9, 39, and 40 of "Tu me ne puoi ben dire," and bars 153, 154, 155, and 156 of "Salve, sancta caro," which also features a written-out division and turn in bar 151. The written out division is a defining characteristic of Opus 6's "Amante segreto" (bar 2 and repetitions of this gesture throughout the piece), and instances such as "In medio maris's" trill marks and written out divisions for the "trembling" found in bars 46, 47, and 48 (Example 3.11), make it clear that this kind of ornamentation is not some kind of optional extra, but a key component of the musical line. While it is to be expected that additional ornamentation would be

added at key (unornamented) moments, these written out ornaments not only demonstrate the kind of ornamentation favoured by Strozzi, but also her expectations regarding the illustration and communication of the text through vocal skill.

Example 3.11. Bars 46-48 of “In medio maris”

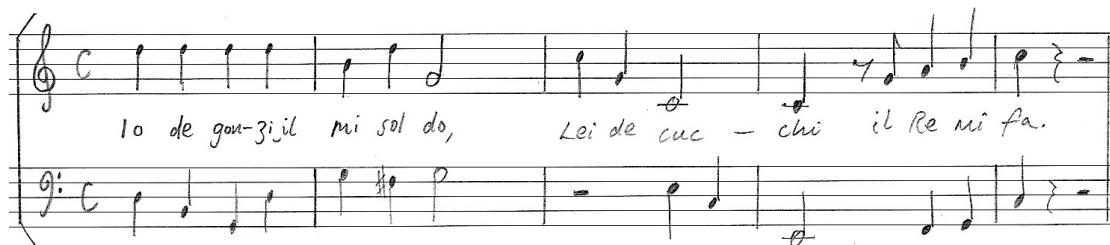


Beyond these foundational elements of Strozzi's style, I have identified four defining characteristics, hallmarks of Strozzi's style not present in every work, but repeated and developed throughout her compositional career, together forming a unique and recognizable voice.

The first of these hallmarks is the development of her exclamatory phrase at the ends of works to provide a dramatic or humorous sting in the tail. These endings are frequently illustrative, and reinforce the dramatic and performative nature of the singer's role, the punchline or key word that sums up the total argument. The ending of “La, sol, fa, mi, re, do” provides a humorous example (see Example 3.12). The music shifts from a lilting triple meter to common time for the final five bars, the voice punches out the concluding point through repeated notes and broken chords, and the piece finishes on a snatched crotchet on the first beat of the bar. After all of the narrator's long-winded explanations of his romantic woes, the heart of the matter is quite simple: he is the king of cuckolds. Those final five bars are both a resigned shrug from the narrator of the piece, and a knowing delivery of the punchline by the performer – as in so much of Strozzi's music, the material serves a double function. “Basta così v'ho inteso” creates a similar, if angrier, effect by closing

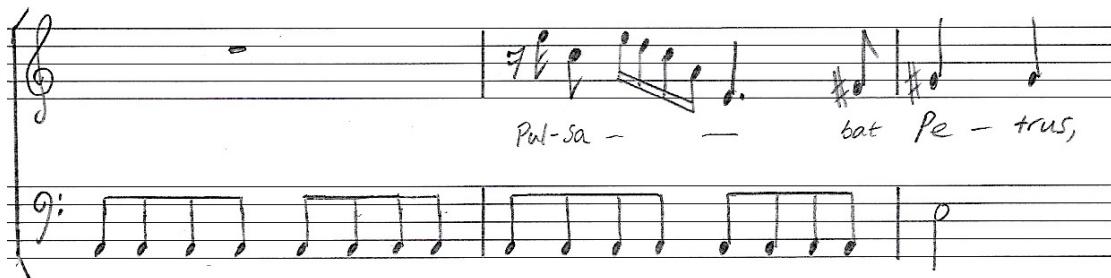
the piece with an explosive restatement of the opening. In a tragic vein, the ending of “Sul Rodano severo,” starting at bar 231 is so abrupt, and so dramatic, it is almost more sound effect than song (see Example 3.19). The earthquake that hits Paris and shakes the Seine is demonstrated by the repeated semiquavers in the bass, the rising and falling broken chords in the voice, and by the sudden silence following the final instrumental semiquaver group.

Example 3.12. Bars 114-118 of “La sol, fa, mi, re, do”

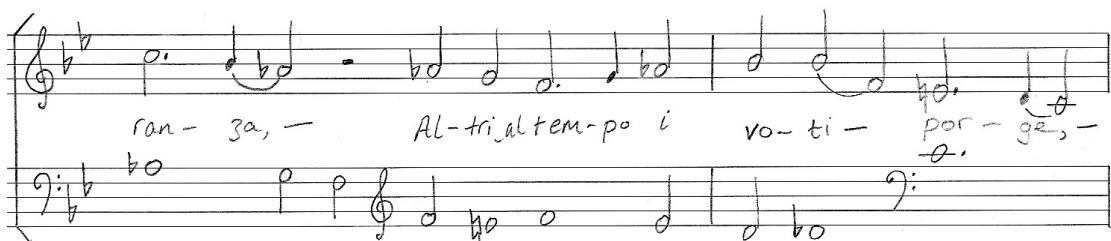


This use of the bass to act out the action of the story brings us to the second of these hallmarks: the interaction of bass and voice, and bass and text. The use of the bass to provide sound effects is one of the ways in which this feature plays out. It can be seen clearly in Opus 5’s “Erat Petrus,” where twice the basso continuo line is used to illustrate the action of the song (see Example 3.13). The first instance is between bars 14 and 26, where through the use of the repeated bass C we can hear the angel shaking Peter awake. The second is through the knocking effect illustrating Peter’s actions, set under the text for “Pulsabat Petrus,” (Peter was knocking) at bars 33 to 34, 41 to 43, 46 to 47, and at bar 50. This inescapable repetition is certainly a variation on the *stile concitato*, but is also a playing out of the events of the text in real time – a musical sound effect. Less obviously dramatic, but just as effective, is Strozzi’s use of the lament-style falling tetrachord ground in the Adagio section of “In medio maris,” from bar 51. This descending pattern, repeated 15 times, does more than just set the text into a typical, and appropriate, lament form: it creates an aural equivalent of Peter’s feet sinking beneath the rising and falling waves.

Example 3.13. Bars 33-35 of "Erat Petrus"



Example 3.13. Bars 33-34 of "Donne belle"



It is not only with the words of the singer that the bass interacts, but with the vocal line itself. In Opus 8's "Donne belle," the basso continuo line comes up in the treble clef to interact directly with the vocal melody (bars 24 to 25, 28 to 30, 33 to 34, 35 to 37, and bar 57). Sometimes it doubles the vocal line a third below, sometimes it occupies the note just vacated by the singer (bar 28), sometimes it plays the same note, at the same pitch as the singer (bars 33-34 – Example 3.14) and, finally, at bar 57 it rises step by step to meet the voice. Bars 56 to 71 to "L'Astratto" feature something similar, a bass line that wends in and out of the treble clef, pre-empting the vocal line in the presto section, clashing with the voice once it enters, and then forming a canon with the singer. Looking closely at Strozzi's basso continuo writing, it is impossible to forget that she was praised as an instrumentalist as well as a singer, and through playing and singing at the same time it becomes apparent that this music must be understood as a holistic whole – words, voice, instruments – all

coming together to serve the deeper function of meaning and expression. This is a stark warning to the kind of performance that would stress the vocal line at the expense of this ensemble whole.

The third unique element of Strozzi's compositional voice is her use of harmony, most notably harmonic dissonance. While her dissonance is always an element of her madrigalism, Strozzi sometimes pushes this harmonic interest to a highly distinctive extreme. Bars 15 to 20 of "Cieli, stelle," in which the singer describes the action of painting as a metaphor for singing, feels like a moment of self-referential cleverness, deliberately jarring the listener to call attention to the importance and wit of the text (See Example 3.15). In particular, the meeting of the falling chromaticism in the voice, the vocal a'-sharp against the basso e in bar 20, push the discord of this section into an almost painful territory – it is hard not to see this as a self-assured ironic touch.

Example 3.15. Bars 15-20 of "Cieli, stelle"

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is for the voice, starting with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (G major), and a 2/4 time signature. The lyrics are written below the notes: "pen-ne io pin-ga e - can - ti, - con ca-no - ro pen-". The bottom staff is for the basso continuo, starting with a bass clef, a key signature of one sharp (G major), and a 2/4 time signature. The lyrics are written below the notes: "nel- lo, - Con pen-nel- li di pen-ne io pin- ga e - can- ti -". The music includes various note heads (solid, hollow, stems up, stems down), rests, and dynamic markings such as forte (f), piano (p), and tenuto (t.). There are also two asterisks (\*) under the basso continuo staff.

It is not only in the longer, more serious cantatas that we find these unusual harmonies, but in the lighter songs. Opus 2's "Costume di grandi," an acidic little

setting of a section of text from Giulio Strozzi's *La finta pazza* which makes mock of the nobility, features an unprepared and unexpected harmonic shift at bars 16 to 17, adding to the biting humour of the text. "Amante loquace" plays c"-sharp in the vocal line just before bar 26 against f-natural in the bass just after it, and "Basta così v'ho inteso" features a similar clash, with the introduction of a-flat in the bass in bar 29, followed by e-natural in bar 30. In these three works, Strozzi does not so much use dissonance to illustrate a particular word, as to create a soundscape which both illustrates and subverts the total meaning of the text; there is something parodic and ironic in her harmonic writing here.

Even when dissonance is used in a more expected madrigalic way, in settings of distressing words, to illustrate the pain of the narrator, that dissonance is often pushed to extremes. In "Che si puo fare," the word "pain" at bars 72 to 73 is set with e"-flat in the voice against f-sharp in the bass – a clash made even uglier through being unprepared and unexpected, coming as it does straight after a long section of, effectively, tonal writing in the major key.

Is this extreme use of dissonance and odd harmonic shift an indication of a lack of harmonic knowledge, surety or intelligence? Is this hallmark a series of mistakes? I believe not. Throughout her works, Strozzi's harmonies are handled with a surety and confidence of touch; her more extreme moments feel like an extension of acceptable usage, not a failure to understand its limits.

The final hallmark of Strozzi's writing, although found in only a few of her works, is one of the most interesting and distinctive: the use of multiple characters for a single voice. These character shifts are signalled openly in the song texts and in the instructions to the performer, and also through changes of pitch (and, therefore, vocal colour) and rhythmic pattern. It is in this juggling of multiple characters and modes of expression, wherein the singer must distinguish clearly between themselves as performer, the character of the narrator, and the characters within the world of the work itself, that Strozzi's skill as rhetorician reaches its apogee. Perhaps the most obvious example is found in "Sul Rodano severo," in which the

singer must portray both the rather detached narrator and also the ghost of the murdered squire, moving from one to the other throughout the piece, operating in almost oppositional ways. The work begins with an air of “it was a dark and stormy night”: the narrator lays the groundwork of the story to follow over a largely static bass, and with a limited vocal range, more akin to a spoken style than to the lyrical outpourings of the ghost. The music picks up pace as the narrative travels back in time in order to relate the events that led to the murder, moving into triple meter before the highly dramatic, high, syncopated exclamation that signals the entrance of the apparition. The narrator signals this handover through a whispered confirmation, in brackets, low in the register, before the ghost’s voice rises again in a wail. The music for “Henri the Beautiful” takes a number of different forms – recitative, aria, ritornello – but the final words belong the narrator, who returns the music to the more prosaic delivery of the opening, before the bizarre sound effect flourish of the finale.

It is in the sacred works in particular that Strozzi makes use of this feature. Of the fourteen pieces contained within Opus 5, four contain multiple speakers for a single voice. In “In medio maris,” the singer must portray four different characters/groups of characters: the narrator, the disciples, Peter, and Jesus (see Example 3.16 – narrator, disciples, Jesus). “Erat Petrus” demands at least three, but arguably four characters: the narrator of the biblical story, the angel who summons Peter, and the disciples gathered at John’s house. The narrator of the final section could be seen as an extension of the first narrator, but each serves a very different function: the first tells the gospel story, but the second reflects on the role of Peter for contemporary believers, and beseeches Peter directly for help. This double-roled narrator features also in “Mater Anna”. As well as portraying the saint herself, the singer of “Mater Anna” must convey both the message and meaning of Anne’s miraculous pregnancy, and then, later, serve as a conduit of devotion, beseeching Anne directly for aid.

Example 3.16. Bars 26-39 of "In medio maris"

The image shows four staves of handwritten musical notation for a vocal piece. The music is in common time, with a key signature of one flat. The vocal line consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with several fermatas and grace notes. The lyrics are written below the notes in Italian, with some words in quotes. The first staff contains the lyrics: "Tur-ba-ti, tur-ba-ti sunt stu-po-re, ti-". The second staff contains: "mo-re, Cla-ma-bant pa-vi-di: "Fan-tas-ma, fantas-ma, fantas-ma est!"" The third staff contains: "Lo-cu-tus est Je-sus: "E-go". The fourth staff concludes with: "sum, e-go sum, e- - - go sum.". The notation includes various dynamics like piano (p) and forte (f), and performance instructions like "riten." (riten.) and "tempo." (tempo).

Overall, what emerges from the study and performance of Strozzi's works, is a real sense of stylistic ownership. The music is idiosyncratic, polished, and catchy, with more extreme elements appearing as deliberate choices that fit a consistent pattern and act as a compositional calling card. It is hard to doubt the care and attention which went into the conception and execution of these pieces, the concurrent multiple meanings and readings which they offer, and the opportunity for further deep analysis through repeated workings.

#### **Section Four: A Contrasting Case Study**

**This section is complemented and illustrated by the second group of recordings found as Tracks 1 - 3**

In the late autumn of 2019 I was contacted by the organisers of the East Cork Early Music Festival with a request. They wanted me to close their 2020 festival with a performance of Barbara Strozzi's music, but with a twist: would I consider performing her music along standard early music lines, then performing my own songs at the piano, and *then* performing a selection of Strozzi's songs in my own style, self-accompanied? With some degree of nervousness, as well as excitement, I accepted. In looking to write a case study of two contrasting Strozzi pieces, I thought immediately of my rehearsal sessions for this performance, for three reasons. Firstly, it would give me the chance to illustrate, aurally and through this written component, what I mean when I talk of understanding Strozzi's music from a performing perspective. Secondly, it would allow me to do in my thesis what I have long been doing in performance: match two songs together for the pro and contra positions of their words, in homage to the Unisoni debates. Thirdly, it would give me a chance to bring an element of the personal reflection and analysis of Chapter Four into Chapter Three, allowing an autoethnographic thread to carry through the work before coming to completion in its final part.

As a singer, I could not resist the chance to highlight two works which play with multiple ideas of what it is to sing: "Giusta negativa" from Opus 2, and "L'Astratto" from Opus 8. Earlier in this chapter I described their oppositional debate as "Should you sing of love?"; "Giusta negativa" (Justified Refusal) begins with an outright and determined refusal to sing of love before a twist at the half-way point reveals that this is, in fact, a love song. Meanwhile, the singer of "L'Astratto" (The Distracted One) would very much like to sing of love, but finds that he cannot find the right way of doing so. He tries, in multiple ways, to express his feelings, but fails each time, for a total of five aborted attempts. Finally, in his frustration over being unable to express himself, he expresses himself by accident. The words are only one point of difference between the two pieces; while both are for solo voice and basso continuo,

"Giusta Negative" is a shorter and simpler strophic song, while "L'Astratto" is a more developed cantata. The authorship of the words for the earlier work is unmarked, raising the strong possibility that Strozzi wrote them herself, while the lyrics for "L'Astratto" are by Giuseppe Artale.

I decided to work by order of publication and start with the earlier song. Immediately, in the falling pitch and drumming semi-quavers of the voice in the first two bars, I felt dragged along by a strong sense of direction. Of the first seven bars of the vocal line, the majority of the notes are semi-quavers, as the singer repeats, again and again, their refusal "non mi dite" (don't tell me), in a syllabic text setting requiring a degree of practice to get the consonants out in time. As I played, I felt caught between different possibilities of emotional approach; while the overall effect from reading the words and the music is one of wryness, of wittiness, that drumming, spitting feeling while singing made it feel quite different. In one run-through I would feel a sense of exasperation, in another a gritted teeth kind of annoyance rising to a banked rage, and, finally, a sense of desperation and almost claustrophobia. This last feeling was exaggerated by the use of rests in the vocal line of bar seven, particularly over the static and unresponsive bass: my (repeated) refusal engendered no response. The movement of the bass in bar 8 came as a relief, as the hands and the voice could begin to move as one, the bass demonstrating (bar 9, bar 15) and the voice following. The voice immediately felt freer as melismas and vowel sounds replaced the syllabically-set text, and from words that had the quality of a child's "you can't make me" to a more laconic, and immovable, stonewalling: "bocca non aprirò" ([my] mouth won't open.) This darker emotional engagement prepared me for the twist to come: that the singer refuses to sing of love because their *own* love is far from them, and that they will sing of love when they return. The only notable moment of discord in the piece comes in this moment, in bar 24, as the singer reveals, through the elongation and pulling around of the word, just how far away their love is. The harmonic world of this song is boundaried – it does not stray but remains contained and consistent within its own borders. Some of Strozzi's works require the singer to inhabit multiple characters, or multiple perspectives and emotional shifts from the same character – by contrast, "Giusta negativa" has the

consistent emotional and musical clarity over a short time period that reminded me of nothing so much as a modern art pop song. It translated almost effortlessly into a cover version in my own piano-driven, alternative singer-songwriter style (see Track 1).

“L’Astratto” required more work, not only because of its length and demonstration of a variety of styles, some highly florid and more difficult to perform, but because of its drama. Not just “drama” in the sense of its emotional stakes – the self-pity and frustration of the titular lover – but in the very real sense that I had to stand outside of my own musicking so that I could serve as my own accompanist (as a singer), my own singer (as instrumentalist) and, most importantly, as the director of the piece. “I want” begins the song, but the singer does not get what he wants, not until the very last moment where it turns out that he got what he wanted by mistake and does not want it anymore. The joke of “L’Astratto” is only funny when it arrives as a surprise – I had to find a way of holding an awareness of the overall structure, the number of times I would fail to express myself, and the final reversal, while also being the singer who cannot pre-empt his own failures, and must genuinely hope to succeed.

As I worked through these hopeless attempts at the piano, it reminded me of performances where I have been asked by fans to perform cover versions far outside of my usual style, or by directors and organisers to incorporate a nod to a popular song before launching into my own music. Sometimes these performances have been in loving homage, albeit with tongue firmly in cheek, as when I opened a 2017 performance with Marlene Dietrich’s “Falling in Love Again,” complete with bow tie and tails. Other times, such as duetting with another trans masculine musician on a fake-earnest cover of Britney Spears’ “I’m Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman,” the point has been the ridiculous nature of the gap between the performing artist and the original artist. In both instances the performances have only worked when I have thrown myself whole-heartedly into them; the joke is for the audience, not for me. This felt like the way I had to approach “L’Astratto” – to keep the part of me that was singing as earnest and sincere as possible, while the rest of me propelled him towards his rather pathetic ending. Thinking back to these performances also gave

me ideas of which modern songs styles might map well onto the singer's failed attempts; at the section beginning at bar 73 I attempt a "pop opera" approach (see Track 2), and at the section beginning at bar 104 a *Les Misérables*-inspired ballad style (see Track 3).

In keeping with the singer's multiple attempts, the music of "L'Astratto" employs multiple approaches through which to express the pangs of love. Strozzi alternates moments of self-directed monologue, such as "Sì, sì, pensiero aspetta" (yes, yes, I think I'm ready) in bar 19, with five fragments of the romantic verse the lover is attempting to set to music. Each fragment is unfinished, discarded by the singer as he finds fault in the verses' depiction of love, and each is followed by an interjection expressing the singer's confusion, anger, or disgust. Each of these demonstrations employs compositional techniques Strozzi uses throughout her works, but there is something about each that, to my ear, falls a little flat. To take one example: the contrast between the presto and the adagio (bars 56 to 77), which is employed to such striking effect in "Erat Petrus", here feels rather directionless and posturing. In each aria attempt, in the blustering divisions and static and directionless harmonies, there is a deep sense of a master composer satirising the attempts of an amateur. Strozzi contrasts the exaggerated madrigalisms employed by the singer (such as bars 44 to 53) with the marked parlato sections of the interjections (such as bars 54 and 55.) As the piece goes on the interjections become more urgent; the final interjection, at bar 111, interrupts the flow of the aria without stopping for a rest.

The bass responds not only to the direction of the words, but in real-time to the actions and emotions of the singer. At "let's start playing" in bar 20 the bass launches into the kind of well-known pattern that brings to mind laying down standard bass chords in a jamming session. The bass drives the humour of the interjections: in bars 54 to 55 its downwards motion emphasises the movement of the voice and the deflation of the mood, and in bars 78 to 79 it steals the punchline from the singer. While there are moments in the aria sections where the bass leads the voice in imitation (bar 56 onwards), or works in consort with the voice (bars 62 to 63), I had the sensation, while playing and singing together, that there were two

distinct lines at work. It was only towards the end of the piece, from bar 119 onwards, that I felt the hands and voice working with the kind of unity of purpose found throughout “Giusta negativa.”

At every turn there are contrasts to be found between “Giusta negativa” and “L’Astratto”: the number of moods required, the numbers of personas required, and the rate of change between emotions. “L’Astratto” is by far the more demanding piece in terms of juggling multiple elements, and in tackling more virtuosic vocal material, but I found “Giusta negativa” the more emotionally difficult work, with what I felt as a demand for uninterrupted intensity and vulnerability. “L’Astratto” felt both performed and performative – neither one a negative sensation – but I was able to lose myself more in “Giusta negativa.”

The more I played these pieces back-to-back, the more their contrasting approaches to questions of vocality – *would* you sing, *should* you sing, *can* you sing – made me wonder about the interaction between those debates and the gendered dynamics enacted in the voice and the body of the performer. I thought back to the idea of early modern gendered virtues, specifically masculine and feminine *virtù* in relation to who can and who can’t raise their voice with eloquence and authority, who is praised for doing so, and who is censured. Both pieces struck out from the same foundation; that it is Barbara Strozzi who decides how and when her music speaks. But more than that, these pieces felt like two complementary illustrations of the ways in which Strozzi’s compositional skill and public voice speaks from a place of authority. “Giusta negativa” has the singer claim that they won’t sing, that their mouth is closed, while they sing – but in that very contradiction the composer and singer, Strozzi, emerges as the authority with the power to control the sound, and the listener’s understanding of the narrative around the same. It feels as though “L’Astratto” goes even further, that Strozzi here is not only displaying her eloquence and right to public expression, but turning gendered standards of speech and silence on their heads. In this work it is Strozzi, the woman, who emerges as the expert rhetorician and composer – it is her very skill that allows her to demonstrate just how poorly the distracted lover is fairing. It is not just that she shows herself as the

better composer, but that she demonstrates the ways in which she is so skilled that she is able to make a pastiche of his mistakes. “As soon as I look at a page of music I’m reminded of my torment” sings the distracted lover; he can’t handle himself and isn’t up to the task of composition – but Strozzi is. And how much more of a virtuoso display of her right and ability to express herself and shape this debate is it, that she controlled this display not only through composing, but through performing?

More than ever, this experiment has proved to me the importance of experiencing Strozzi through the active embodying of her music. Her wit, her interplay between voice and instrument, her seemingly effortless vocal virtuosity, and most of all her surety of approach and deeply thought-provoking manipulation of text, cannot be truly appreciated and understood without engaging with the music *as sounding music*, and not merely as notes on the page.

### **Secton Five: Strozzi in Comparison**

In this section, I have chosen to concentrate my comparison of Strozzi’s works with three of her contemporaries, each through the lens of a different type of composition. For the solo secular song, I have chosen her forerunner, Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), with the “Lamento d’Arianna” (first published as a lament for solo voice and basso continuo in 1623), “Voglio di vita uscir” (likely dating after 1630), and “Io che nel’ otio naqui” (from the *Madrigali guerrieri et amorosi libro ottavo*, 1638). For the solo motet, or religious cantata, and sacred ATB trio, her teacher Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676), using the two solo works “O quam suavis” and “Cantate domino et exultate,” and the two ATB trios taken from the *Sacra Corona*, “Plaudite, cantate” and “In virtute tua”. And for the duet, and a specific instance of direct inspiration, her fellow student Antonia Padoani Bembo (1640-1720), using the double soprano duet “Amor mio,” and the solo song “Mi basta così”.

### Strozzi and Monteverdi

Popularly represented as “the most important musician in late 16th- and early 17<sup>th</sup>- century Italy,”<sup>19</sup> Claudio Monteverdi’s influence on Barbara Strozzi must be understood both through his broader impact on Italian musical and paramusical cultures, and also through his specific working relationship with her father Giulio. Giulio Strozzi served as Monteverdi’s librettist for the (now lost) operas *La finta pazza Licori* and *Proserpina rapita*, and his five sonnets *I cinque fratelli* were set by Monteverdi for two voices and continuo, a specific commission for a noble banquet in 1628, also, sadly, lost.<sup>20</sup> Monteverdi’s involvement in the early days of the Unisoni is documented (and lamented) by the *Satire*, demonstrating the fact that not only would Barbara Strozzi have had access to Monteverdi’s works through her father, but that Monteverdi would have had access to Strozzi’s through her own performance. The Unisoni met at the Strozzi’s house, and it is tempting to wonder if Monteverdi and Giulio’s previous collaborations together would also have occasioned working visits and sessions at the Strozzi home, forming an important ingredient in the musical background of Barbara’s youthful training and passive development. It seems unlikely that Giulio, so heavily invested in his daughter’s musical education, would have failed to make use of Monteverdi’s example in her instruction.

The choice of these three pieces lie both in their cultural importance and in their specific relevance to Barbara Strozzi’s output. While the “Lamento d’Arianna” appeared first in the (lost) eponymous opera of 1608, its popularity swiftly spread as a stand-alone extract: “it was taken up as a separate piece, it was given the function of a piece of vocal chamber music, in the same manner as a cantata.”<sup>21</sup> In the introduction to her 2001 performing edition, Barbara Sachs quotes Monteverdi’s contemporary Severo Bonini, who wrote: “*Arianna* was so liked that there was not a house which, having harpsichords or theorboes in it, did not have her lament.”<sup>22</sup> It

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<sup>19</sup> Carter and Chew, “Monteverdi [Monteverde], Claudio.”

<sup>20</sup> Carter, “The Venetian secular music,” 180.

<sup>21</sup> Rose, “The Italian Cantata,” 663.

<sup>22</sup> Monteverdi, “Lamento d’Arianna,” edited by Barbara Sachs.

would seem likely that the Strozzi household would have fitted into this category. “Voglio di vita uscir,” probably written some time after 1630, has also been chosen for its cultural impact – Barbara Sachs again: “Its attribution to Claudio Monteverdi...and its trend-setting importance are now accepted.”<sup>23</sup> It is also an excellent example of the subversive love text setting, a mode so favoured by Strozzi. Finally, “Io che nel’ otio naqui” has been chosen as an example of virtuosic solo music, as a fine example of the *stile concitato*, and because it is contained within the same volume, the *Madrigali guerrieri et amorosi*, as one of Monteverdi’s surviving settings of Giulio Strozzi’s words.

But before looking at the music of each of these pieces, it is important to examine the ways in which Monteverdi’s compositional strategies and approaches, both in terms of musical style and broader career, can be seen to influence and illuminate those of Barbara Strozzi.

Monteverdi’s development of the *seconda practica* is an obvious place to begin, even as the strict definition of that practice remains disputed. What is clear is that Monteverdi’s developments in harmony, texture, and text presentation are essential for the development of Strozzi’s own. Massimo Ossi’s description of Monteverdi’s compositional aims gives a useful overview of the musical problems facing not only the composer, but his contemporaries and followers:

As Monteverdi reflected on it some thirty years later, the *seconda practica* had never really been about dissonance treatment, which in retrospect was only a means to an end – text expression – that quickly became subordinated to a still larger aim, that of expressing the affective subtext of human psychology. The core of the compositional problems he sought to solve, first within individual madrigals, then across the span of entire books, and eventually in operas, Monteverdi later described as the “via naturale all’imitatione” – the “natural means of imitating human emotion.”<sup>24</sup>

Geoffrey Chew, demonstrating the insufficiency of the term *seconda practica*, gives a broader definition of the host of musical problems and innovations explored by Monteverdi and his contemporaries in the early seventeenth century which could be

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<sup>23</sup> Monteverdi, “Lamento d’Arianna,” edited by Barbara Sachs.

<sup>24</sup> Ossi, “The Mantuan madrigals,” 105.

signaled by the use of that term: “the monodic style; the rhythmic regularity in one or more of the new aria styles; the new harmonic, ‘vertical’ organization of textures; the new *basso continuo* textures; and several more.”<sup>25</sup> Developments in all of these areas are to be found in the works of Barbara Strozzi, seen here not as standalone features of a single composer, but ongoing developments in a shared cultural conversation.

This cultural conversation extends to individual musical features shared between composers. Tim Carter, in “The Venetian Secular Music”, details Monteverdi’s use of extremely melismatic word setting, the text “mangled beyond recognition”<sup>26</sup> in the duet “Non vedrò mai le stelle,” and the repetitions contained within “O sia tranquillo il mare, o pien d’orgoglio” that “again far exceeds its textual bounds but gives the moment a remarkable rhetorical intensity as the ‘lament’ of the lover takes song.”<sup>27</sup> If Monteverdi’s use of textural breakdown is in service of the text itself, the broader rhetoric of the argument, could we say the same for Strozzi’s? Likewise Monteverdi’s use of romantic, if not overtly erotic, material: his song “Con che soavità labbra odorate” concerns the conflicting desires for kisses and music from the beloved’s mouth, a self-reflexive work<sup>28</sup> that finds an echo in Strozzi’s later pieces “Canto di bella bocca” and “Morso, e bacio dati in un tempo”. Without a thorough understanding of his example, how are we to understand the implications of her compositions? The same could be said for the confusion of sacred and secular style noted in the (few) discussions of Barbara Strozzi’s Opus 5. This is not something unique to Strozzi, but something also noted in discussions of Monteverdi’s sacred works, which were not only similar stylistically to his secular composition, but which had the potential to be performed in paraliturgical settings. Richard Wistreich, writing here of the 1610 *Vespers*: “the title page of the *Vespers* declares the concertos to be ‘suited to the chapels or chambers of princes’.”<sup>29</sup> When the sheer fact that Barbara Strozzi wrote religious material is often seen as an anomaly, given

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<sup>25</sup> Carter and Chew, “Monteverdi [Monteverde], Claudio.”

<sup>26</sup> Carter, “The Venetian Secular Music,” 191.

<sup>27</sup> Carter, “The Venetian Secular Music,” 192.

<sup>28</sup> Carter, “The Venetian Secular Music,” 193-194.

<sup>29</sup> Wistreich, “Monteverdi in Performance,” 269.

her lack of church position, the fact that one of the most famous religious works of her era gave explicit allowance for chamber performance cannot be ignored. These three examples alone show how musical elements presented as unique to Strozzi, or uniquely indicative of her social and sexual status or compositional philosophy, can instead be given different meanings once she is considered alongside her fellow composers, rather than apart from them. Even one of the most distinctive hallmarks of Strozzi's style, the sting in the tail ending, links her to her broader musical culture; the epigrammatic close was a feature of many madrigals,<sup>30</sup> and frequently used by Marino in his poetry.<sup>31</sup> Geoffrey Chew describes Monteverdi's use and development of this feature in his third, fourth, and fifth book of madrigals, through his settings of works by the poet Giovanni Guarini: "The epigrammatic style of many of these Guarini poems closely matches a poetic and musical ideal of the period: the resolution, in a final clinching 'acumen' or dénouement, of a witty (often paradoxical) conceit developed in a preceding 'exposition'."<sup>32</sup>

What can be seen as a failing in Strozzi's compositional career – her lack of solo instrumental music – can, again, be seen in Monteverdi's example. His instrumental writing is analysed and praised, even as it is written alongside, as part of, his vocal works. While he exploited larger scale forces than she had access to, his lack of independent instrumental compositions certainly makes sense of hers, and the critical attention paid to his instrumental lines, even as they form part of a broader ensemble, forces us to question the ways in which Strozzi's music is described as *solely* vocal music, rather than small ensemble.

Finally, there are practical aspects of Monteverdi's life as a composer that give us insight into Barbara Strozzi's. The first is in terms of payment: we know that Monteverdi was compensated for his Seventh Book of madrigals by a necklace from his dedicatee, Caterina de' Medici, which he later pawned.<sup>33</sup> This fact suggests that

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<sup>30</sup> Macy, "Speaking of Sex," 8-9, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Schneider, "Claudio Monteverdi's Seventh Book of Madrigals", 4.

<sup>32</sup> Carter and Chew, "Monteverdi [Monteverde], Claudio."

<sup>33</sup> Carter, "The Venetian Secular Music," 182.

Strozzi's payment from her dedicatee Anne of Innsbruck, in the form of a ruby necklace and golden box, was not out of the ordinary.<sup>34</sup> The second is in the use of publication for career advancement: Tim Carter and Geoffrey Chew note the ways in which Monteverdi published widely as a young man, through the Venetian publishing houses, specifically to further his career, with his publication schedule slowing as his fame grew.<sup>35</sup> Did Monteverdi's use of publication as self-promotion inspire Strozzi's use of the same? It surely must have shown her one of the few options for career advancement open to her, as a woman outside of the bounds of court or church.

Coming to the music itself, it is clear from the outset that Monteverdi's influence is deeply embedded in Strozzi's style; not only *her* style, but in that broader category of early to mid seicento vocal music. But looking at each selected piece closely does point to some specific tropes and devices used by Monteverdi which were later used and developed by Strozzi.

The role of Arianna was written for the singing actress Virginia Ramponi Andreini, the opera premiered in 1608, and the importance of the lament immediately recognized. Later in his life, Monteverdi was to explain the difficulty he had in trying to craft a lament drawn from realistic observation. Barbara Sachs, quoting from a letter written by Monteverdi in 1633, writes:

He intended to write a book [*Melodia, overo seconda pratica musicale*] which "will not be without usefulness in the world, since I found in practice that when I was composing the lament of Ariadne, not finding any book which explained to me the natural means to imitation, nor one which told me what an imitation should be...I found, I say, what hard work is necessary to do even what little I did in this matter of 'imitation'."<sup>36</sup>

It is this "imitation," the rhythm, sounding, and meaning of emotion and text driving the music, which lies at the heart of the Lament, and which links this piece to Strozzi's later works. Much of the similarity lies in the compositional techniques that

<sup>34</sup> Glixon, "New Light," 322.

<sup>35</sup> Carter and Chew, "Monteverdi [Monteverde], Claudio."

<sup>36</sup> Monteverdi, "Lamento d'Arianna," edited by Barbara Sachs.

had passed into common practice: the use of dissonance to express pain, from the very first “Lasciatemi,”(let me) to the crushing harmony of voice against bass on the tied “feri” of bars 77 to 78, and the use of rising chromaticism to express pleading, most characteristically in bars 57 to 59, “in van piangendo, in van gridand’aita”(weeping in vain, calling for help in vain,) But there are four points in particular that we can later find throughout Strozzi’s own laments and lament-like cantatas. The first is the use of a rest to create the effect of a sob, a moment of heightened realism and drama, such as the rest at bar 18 before “oh Dio!” (Oh God!) or at the end of the second section, in bar 44. This gasping delay is used over and over again in Strozzi’s works – sometimes in imitation of speech patterns, and sometimes self-referentially as the singer refers back to sighing or weeping as the hiccoughing rest illustrates the word. While the effect itself was a compositional device in common usage, the frequency with which Strozzi uses a rest to create the impression of confusion, hesitation, exclamation, pain, or wonder (and the very range of emotions she conjures up through its use) makes it an important component of her compositional toolbox. Monteverdi creates a geography of pitch in the voice setting which relates to the emotion and action of the narrative, a second point of similarity and likely influence. The geography functions metaphorically, but also as a practical illustration of meaning. At bar 85, as Arianna sings “Extinguish, Death, at last the unworthy flames” the voice literally extinguishes the words by pulling them down in pitch, from the top of the voice which easily carries across the instruments, to the bottom/middle of the range, far more likely to blend into and be hidden by the instrumental sound. The third point lies in the use of high fast syllabic semiquavers in the voice to communicate fury – Arianna’s condemnation of Theseus at bars 69 to 70 is very close to Henri de Cinq-Mars’ explosion of anger in Strozzi’s “Sul Rodano severo.”Finally, in the use of the dramatic cut off, we can see the profound influence of Monteverdi’s text setting and use of the dramatic on Strozzi’s music; in the abrupt end of Arianna’s curse, and the astonished “What am I saying?” that follows, we can posit a model for many such moments in Strozzi’s pieces.

“Voglio di vita uscir,” by contrast, shows Monteverdi in a subversive and reflexive mode, a slyly humorous take on the lament form that he himself helped to establish. The words themselves are tragic – the lover not only wishes for life to be over, but goes into detail as to how this should happen. The music, however, is set in a major key, with a dance-like swing, even as it later incorporates the characteristic falling tetrachord lament pattern (beginning at bar 100). It could be that Monteverdi is using this contrast to underscore the tragedy of the words, but it seems most likely that this song is intended as a parodic send-up, a wry comment not only on the narrator of the piece, but on the very musical and poetic genre of the lament. In this way, it is hard not to see a model for a work such as Strozzi’s “L’Astratto,” a piece which demonstrates the conventions of the amorous lament even as it picks them apart and holds them up for display. As is to be expected, there is extensive word painting: the long drawn out melismatic setting of “crumble” in bars 8 to 10, the dynamic upward flow of “flees” in bars 32 to 33, and the longest melismas of the piece to illustrate the shattering of the narrator’s hopes in bars 94 to 98. As featured extensively throughout Strozzi’s works, Monteverdi relegates words related to hell and damnation to lower pitches, at bar 52 and with the same setting at bar 67, and uses falling chromaticism to express pain, at bars 63 to 64 and 68 to 69. A more involved basso continuo also speaks to an influence on Strozzi: it pre-empts the singer’s line at bar 6, and runs away from the singer in contrary motion at the word “flee” (bar 33). The bass here has become an integral part of communicating the totality of the text meaning. But it is in the use of humour that we see most clearly the influence on Strozzi. Gloria Rose details the ways in which the self-parody cantata was an established type, giving the example of Cesti’s “Aspettate, adesso canto,” and noting that there are others.<sup>37</sup> I believe that “Voglio di vita uscir” could be classed as one of those others, as could a number of Strozzi’s works, most notably “L’Astratto” – and that the use of and development of this subset of the cantata style shows clearly the link between the two composers.

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<sup>37</sup> Rose, “The Italian Cantata,” 667-668.

The final Monteverdi work to be considered here features one of the most interesting stylistic links between Monteverdi and Strozzi, the *stile concitato*. The vocal setting of “Io che nel’ otio naqui” is utterly governed by the needs of the text – there is no movement, melodic or harmonic, throughout the opening as the voice intones, over a static bass “I, who was born in idleness and lived in idleness, who desired nothing but tranquil rest.” Only very gradually does the music begin to move, with no real sense of movement until the “gentle breezes” (bar 19) and “murmuring stream” (bars 21 to 23) make their appearance. Madrigalism is pushed to extremes, as in the rising of the sun through flourishes up and down the range through bars 50 and 54, and highlights the comedic elements of the text, as in the syncopation and delays echoing the movements of the “obstinate” Belgian fighter in bars 66 to 70. High and low pitch are again charged with moral/geographical meaning – the voice drops for the obscuring shadows of bar 56, and rises to express the lofty virtue of valor in bars 65 to 66. And it is in the “sound of battle,” from bar 129 onwards, that the *stile concitato* is found: a martial rhythm, repeated notes, a drumming bass on G and g and a voice moving through the arpeggio (see Example 3.17).

Example 3.17. Bars 144-147 of “Io che nel’ otio naqui”

The musical score consists of four staves. The top two staves represent the vocal parts: soprano and alto. The soprano staff has a clef of G and the alto staff has a clef of C. Both staves show eighth-note patterns. The lyrics for these staves are: "pien di spavento ed i ter-ro - re" and "pien di spavento ed i ter-ro - re l'O-ri-". The bottom two staves represent the basso continuo and tenor. The basso continuo staff has a clef of G and the tenor staff has a clef of C. Both staves show eighth-note patterns. The lyrics for these staves are: "en-te so-nar" and "bel-li-che bel-li-che squil-le so-nar so-nar". The music is in common time.

*Stile concitato*, also known as *generere concitato*, was used extensively by Monteverdi in his later works, including the *Combattimento di Tancredi et Clorinda*. Geoffrey Chew explains it using Monteverdi's own terms: "he provided a precise description of the *concitato* genus in technical terms; and the description matches the passages in the collection that prominently feature semibreves divided into semiquavers in this manner, often using no other notes than those of the G major triad in any voice, and uncomplicated rhythms without syncopation, at points where 'war' or related ideas are touched on in the text."<sup>38</sup>

Example 3.18. Bars 231-235 of "Sul Rodano severo"

The image shows a handwritten musical score for four voices. The top staff is in G major, common time, with a bass clef. The lyrics are: "Tre - mó Pa - ri - gi, tre - mó Pa -". The second staff is in G major, common time, with a soprano clef. The lyrics are: "ri - gi e tor - bi - dos - si, tor - bi - dos - si Sen - na -". The third staff is in G major, common time, with an alto clef. The fourth staff is in G major, common time, with a tenor clef.

<sup>38</sup> Carter and Chew, "Monteverdi [Monteverde], Claudio."

This usage by Monteverdi here immediately brings to mind Strozzi's use of a *stile concitato*-like effect in both "Sul Rodano severo" (see Example 3.18) and "Erat Petrus," her development of the usage to include divisions into quavers and crotchets, and her extension to the subject of natural disaster and the joyful pounding on a door by a saint.

Two further points remain, illustrated by "Io che nel' otio naqui," that link Strozzi to Monteverdi. The first is in the virtuosic demands made on the voice. Throughout the piece, it is not only the range of the voice which is striking, but how dexterous is it required to be. Far more is asked of this particular bass voice than is required of the higher voice in the two other Monteverdi works examined here, and it feels to me as though Strozzi can be seen to develop the role of the high voice just as Monteverdi developed the use of the low. All that is distinctive in her demands of the high voice we can see here: arpeggios running through the range (bars 41 to 43), jumps over the entirety of the range (bar 56 to 58), the leaping up of an octave to begin a new statement (bar 106), and the need to demonstrate seemingly effortless skill in both the most flexible passages and in the sustained. It is not hard to imagine the temptation a young soprano, both singer and composer, may have felt, to show that she too could execute the vocal feats of the day in her twin mediums.<sup>39</sup>

The second point circles back to Rosand's idea of "sheer voice," and the possibility of a difference in stress and setting of the Italian text. It is not only in Strozzi that we find examples of "unimportant" words being emphasized, but in Monteverdi. In the phrase "singing your great praises," bars 126 to 127, it is the *your*, the "tuoi," that is ornamented. Unnatural to an English speaker, but if Matteo dalle Fratte is correct, a convention of poetic Italian that further demonstrates the importance of the text, of rhetoric, to this style of music, and acts as a reminder of the links between

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<sup>39</sup> Though it lies beyond the scope of this thesis, there is further research to be done in comparative study of the gendered similarities and differences in the works of female and male *virtuose* of the different musical centres of early modern Italy, which would present the opportunity for gaining a deeper understanding of Strozzi as part of her specific and broader musical cultures.

Monteverdi and Barbara Strozzi through their shared compositional and performance culture.

### Strozzi and Cavalli

It is in the dedication to her Opus 2 that Barbara Strozzi named Francesco Cavalli as her teacher. This would be reason enough to necessitate a comparison between the two composers' works. But there are two additional reasons for analyzing Cavalli's style alongside Strozzi's: the fact that, through Cavalli's own training and early positions, he provides a further link with Monteverdi, and because his work with Strozzi did not finish with her training. It is highly likely that her inclusion in the 1656 anthology, *Sacra Corona: Motetti a due, e trè voci di diversi eccellentissimi autori moderni*, was due, in whole or in part, to her connection with him.

It is from this volume that three of the five pieces discussed in this section are taken: three ATB trios, two by Cavalli, and one by Strozzi – the same form, the same forces, and from the same source. The remaining two pieces chosen are Cavalli's solo motets "Cantata Domino" and "O quam suavis," considered alongside Strozzi's religious works for solo voice found in Opus 5. While only a few of Cavalli's solo motets have survived,<sup>40</sup> it appears that he wrote a considerable number of them, some during the period in which he would have been instructing Strozzi. I believe it is fair to assume that Strozzi would have known of her teacher's works, particular in a genre that she was later to devote an entire volume to, and while the loss of the majority of Cavalli's works in this genre leaves a great many unfilled gaps in our knowledge and potential for analysis, I still believe that comparison will prove useful.

Before turning to the motets themselves, a word on the form. Denis Arnold, in his paper "The Solo Motet in Venice (1625-1775)," explains that it is in Venice that we can find the longest continuous Italian tradition of solo motet writing.<sup>41</sup> Often similar to the cantata or, indeed, designated as a religious cantata form, there was not a

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<sup>40</sup> Cavalli, *Sei pezzi vocali sacri*, edited by Francesco Bussi, viii.

<sup>41</sup> Arnold, "The Solo Motet in Venice," 56.

strong distinction of style between this sacred genre and the secular vocal practices that influenced it. Arnold notes the influence of opera on the development of the solo motet, speaking first of Natale Monferrato's "O quam pulchra es," and later of Cavalli's offerings. He writes:

The recitative passages in which the bass usually moves quite slowly to allow exclamatory phrases to be deployed would not be out of place in an opera of the 1640s or '50s. Nor would the arias, which vary from smooth ariettas using hemiolias and passionate minor harmonies to those with easily memorable, short breathed phrases over a "walking" bass. There are "sobbing trills" at cadences, echo effects, in fact all the traits of opera; which, considering that Monferrato had not joined that particular band wagon with Cavalli and Rovetta is quite remarkable.<sup>42</sup>

The solo motet was popular enough as a form that the 1625 collection *Ghirlanda sacra* (in which Cavalli was included), went through three editions.<sup>43</sup> Like the cantata, there was no firm consistent definition of the solo motet, and slippage of terminology and content applies not just to that of the solo motet/religious cantata, but also to the idea of the *sacri affetti* (the term used by Strozzi in the title of her fifth opus). Francesco Bussi, in his introduction to his edition of Cavalli's solo religious works, describes these solo motets as *sacri affetti*, which "served both for daily use in church and as 'spiritual recreation' in the private chambers of the aristocracy...and the higher levels of the clergy...to the extent that they were considered sacred chamber music rather than church music."<sup>44</sup> So we could broadly define these pieces as solo religious works, designed for paraliturgical performance, highly influenced by the vocal standards of solo secular music.

"Cantate Domino" is currently Cavalli's earliest known work, "almost indistinguishable in style from Monteverdi,"<sup>45</sup> published in Venice in an anthology of composers including Monteverdi and Rovetta in 1625.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, "O quam suavis" was published in a multi-composer anthology, twenty years later, in 1645. Francesco

<sup>42</sup> Arnold, "The Solo Motet in Venice," 61.

<sup>43</sup> Arnold, "The Solo Motet in Venice," 56-68.

<sup>44</sup> Cavalli, *Sei pezzi vocali sacri*, edited by Francesco Bussi, ix.

<sup>45</sup> Walker and Alm, "Cavalli [Caletti, Caletto, Bruni, Caletti-Bruni, Caletto Bruni], (Pietro) [Pier] Francesco."

<sup>46</sup> Cavalli, *Sei pezzi vocali sacri*, edited by Francesco Bussi, xi.

Bussi, in the introduction to his new edition of both works, notes the ‘musical hedonism’ of the Venetian musical culture reflected in both works, and the ways in which Cavalli reflected also the prevailing musical tropes of his time and place:

mainly in triple time, with simple harmonies, a clear tonal framework and a simple modulatory scheme...The chamber cantatas were also governed by that structural principle which divided each piece into a number of relatively short sections, based on contrasting or clearly distinguishable themes and motives, which coincided with the single sections of the text.<sup>47</sup>

“Cantate Domino” is clearly the earlier work, simpler than “O quam suavis,” and strikingly simpler than any of Strozzi’s religious works, across all measures: voice setting, basso continuo writing, use of rhythm and harmony, and dramatic contrasts. While complexity is not always a reliable marker of compositional progress, it is notable that the degree of compositional complexity present in Cavalli’s works, and in Strozzi’s, developed throughout their respective careers. Still, even in this earlier work, there is much that is illustrative both of the general style that both composers later developed, and of specific features which Strozzi was to utilize. The work opens with an instrumental sinfonia, repeated throughout the piece – but when the voice enters, it is on a declamatory note, a literal command to sing (bar 14), followed by a melodic outpouring in obedience to that demand through bars 17 to 20.

Immediately, we can see a link to Strozzi’s usage of the same device, specifically in Opus 5’s “Salve, sancta caro” (See Example 3.1). Repetitions of phrases are modulated through different pitch regions, but in a less extreme manner than found in Strozzi’s later works – although one downward octave leap at bar 87 does seem to presage one of Strozzi’s most frequently used devices. The final Alleluja section forms the most “showy” part of Cavalli’s vocal setting here.

“O quam suavis,” published twenty years on, while still simpler than the works Strozzi was to produce a decade after its publication, clearly shows the development of the genre, and the impact of the new operatic style on the treatment of the voice and the choice and treatment of the text. A crucial element of the solo motet style was in the use of “devotional” rather than “liturgical” material, as Bussi explains in

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<sup>47</sup> Cavalli, *Sei pezzi vocali sacri*, edited by Francesco Bussi, ix.

his introduction: “It derives above all from the *Song of Songs*...with its ‘mosaic-like’ text, inspired, if not directly derived from, the *Song of Songs*, and thus tinged with eroticism, Cavalli’s work belongs more to the Venetian spiritual world or that of San Marco than to that of Rome.”<sup>48</sup>

Several stylistic elements found in the earlier work are retained and developed here: a declamatory opening, a vocal leap down the octave to mark a new thought (bars 19-20), and the use of repetition through different pitch centres to develop a phrase, seen in the treatment of the word “regina” (queen.) But there are significant changes in the use of madrigalism and basso continuo writing that hint to influences on Strozzi’s own style. Rather than remaining largely static, the movement of the bass serves a crucial function in driving the piece forward, such as the falling motion at bar 36 that heralds the change into triple time. The bass does not stand apart from the voice, but begins to interact with it, with moments of imitation in bars 29 and 31, 70 and 73, 86 and 87, and 89 and 90. The bass sometimes leads the voice, and sometimes demonstrates a motif to be echoed, giving a more unified sense of ensemble not by being in unison, but by being in dialogue.<sup>49</sup> A particularly interesting use of madrigalism is found in Cavalli’s setting of flower words – the religious/erotic ambiguity of the rose and the lily – in the initial setting at bars 75 to 77, and the development at bars 79 to 85, with the octave leap repetition so common to Strozzi’s works. While the voice does not move through such a large range as featured in Strozzi’s motets, nor is the setting as taxing, it is notable how much floriture is used in this work compared to the earlier.

Comparing these two motets with Strozzi’s Opus 5 points strongly to the originality of Strozzi’s writing, the ways in which her solo religious works approach the status of monodrama. Cavalli’s works, while foregrounding many of the tropes Strozzi was to use and develop, are simpler, neater, and more contained. Why might this be so?

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<sup>48</sup> Cavalli, *Sei pezzi vocali sacri*, edited by Francesco Bussi, xii.

<sup>49</sup> The use of the semi-independent bass line had already been established in compositional practice; for more information on Lodovico Agostini’s bass writing see Laurie Stras “Musical Practices of the 1580s *Concerto*” in *Women and Music in Sixteenth Century Ferrara*.

The obvious answer is that of time – Strozzi’s works were written later and benefited from the developments within the genre that her teacher himself had so contributed to. But it is interesting to consider whether these differences are due also to the discrepancies in the roles between teacher and pupil, their positions as insider and outsider to the religious establishment. While the solo motets of both composers were intended for paraliturgical performances, would Strozzi’s inability to hold an official position as a church musician have granted her a paradoxical freedom as a composer? Would their differences in circumstance have given them different expectations of their singers? Was Cavalli composing more for the general sight-reading professional, and Strozzi more towards a virtuoso like herself – or for the famed virtuoso musicians of Anne of Austria’s court? And, finally, did Strozzi simply have more to prove? Cavalli’s reputation rested on many different public-facing aspects of his career, and his religious motets form a far smaller percentage of his overall compositional output than do Strozzi’s of hers. Did Strozzi, presenting herself to a broader public solely through her published works, feel more pressure to make sure that each one of her pieces showed off her skills to their fullest extent?

In the ATB motets of the *Sacra Corona*, we can provide more material for those questions. The *Sacra Corona* was a 1656 Venetian anthology, and the composers can be divided into the Venetian and the non-Venetian, with the Venetian musicians linked by their work at San Marco. Strozzi is the only woman included, linked to San Marco through her studies with Cavalli, and while the other composers are listed with their professional titles, Strozzi, having no official post, is described as the “Virtuosissima Signora.”<sup>50</sup> In his introduction to the 2015 A-R edition of the *Sacra Corona*, Paolo Alberto Rismondo notes the popularity of the small-scale motet, and details the ways in which this music would have been performed. In so doing, he provides a possible answer to the question as to when and where Strozzi’s religious music would have been performed, itself an answer to the question as to why Strozzi would have written religious music at all:

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<sup>50</sup> Rismondo, *Sacra Corona: Venice 1656*, xi.

Yet academies occasionally held meetings for devotional purposes in churches close to their usual meeting places, and such meetings could certainly include performances of motets, masses, and other sacred compositions, especially in academies like the Unisoni that placed particular emphasis on music. Although there is relatively little specific documentation on the Unisoni compared to other academies of the time, it is possible that they too may occasionally have engaged in prayer or quasi-liturgical activities, during which Strozzi's deeply devotional motet may have found a place. The piece might also have been suitable for the musical performances that accompanied Holy Week observances at San Marco, which in 1656 featured "extraordinary" singers brought in from outside the chapel, just as had been done for the dogal entry earlier that year and for the celebration of the victory at the Dardanelles.<sup>51</sup>

Rismondo then lists other avenues for possible performance: the charitable institutions of Venice – the *ospedali* and the *scuole* – and the smaller churches.

Example 3.19. Bars 1-4 of "Plaudite, cantate"

The first of Cavalli's ATB motets, "Plaudite, cantate," begins with the same kind of declamatory, "command" opening as "Cantate Domino," here developed through

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<sup>51</sup> Rismondo, *Sacra Corona: Venice 1656*, xiii.

the use of an echoing effect (See Example 3.19). As is to be expected, the vocal writing in this ensemble work is simpler than that of a solo piece, and the opening contains much repetition over a static harmonic bass focused around c. The madrigalism of the text setting comes not through elaborate ornamental writing, but though the dance-like, dotted rhythm of the joyful “praise.” The declamatory element continues in the first small solo, as the bass sings “cantate”(sing) in bars 42 to 43, complete with an octave leap. Overall, though, this work tends towards the consonant rather than the dramatic, with open, sweet harmonies throughout, the brief moments of harshness serving only to heighten the resolution that follows, rather than as a result of word painting or emotional effect – as seen at bar 69. The piece finishes with a full repetition of the opening, underscoring a total effect of stasis rather than drama.

Example 3.20. Bars 49-56 of “In virtute tua”

The musical score consists of three staves of handwritten musical notation. The top staff is for the Basso Continuo (BC), indicated by a large 'B' and 'C' above the staff. It features a single bass clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one sharp. The middle staff is for the Tenor (T), indicated by a 'T'. The bottom staff is for the Alto (A), indicated by an 'A'. The notation uses vertical stems and horizontal dashes to represent note heads and stems. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first section of the score (bars 49-53) includes lyrics such as "tu — um", "ex-sul-ta-bit, ex-sul- ta-bit, ex-sul-ta-bit, ex-sul-ta-bit", and "ex-sul-ta — —". The second section (bars 54-56) includes lyrics such as "bit ve-he-", "men-", and "ter,". The score concludes with a final basso continuo note on a sharp.

"In virtute tua" is the longer of the Cavalli motets, and the more elaborate. The music is highly responsive to the emotions of the text, beginning in common time with the somber opening words, before moving to triple time in bar 6 for all three voices to rejoice in dotted rhythm to "rejoice." Harmony, as in "Plaudite, cantate," is overwhelmingly consonant, with dissonance reserved for the passing notes on their way to resolution, such as that found at bar 43. It is interesting to note the points at which the individual melody lines of the voices feel determined and constrained by the overall needs of the harmony, such as the tenor line at bars 63 to 65. Where Strozzi allows her harmony to be affected by the needs of the solo voice writing, we see there opposite in Cavalli's writing here. What is more pronounced is the sense of madrigalism. This manifests in melismatic writing, but also in the use of pitch. The word "exult" is set in a rising-falling pattern in the bass voice, building excitement through syllabic quavers before breaking into a descending semiquaver pattern over three bars, and ending right at the bottom of the range on D at bar 56 (See Example 3.20). But it is not only through widening the range, but limiting it, that the meaning of the words is conveyed. The "praevenisti"(you have come) phrase, beginning in the tenor in bar 115, is passed between the voices, with the alto, tenor, and bass coming into each other's pitch territories in bars 124 to 126, with a satisfying crunch and resolution in the harmony for the benediction of bar 129.

While not featuring the kind of virtuosic vocal writing so often described as her defining compositional feature, "Quis dabit mihi" is full of Strozzi's distinctive compositional signatures. The rest at the very beginning of the piece makes for a familiar Strozzi opening, and while the motet utilizes common features of the genre, such as the passing of a melodic motif between the parts (beginning at bar 15), the early appearance of dramatic and inventive harmony marks this motet as unusual. The descending chromatic lament pattern from bar 22, noted by Kendrick as a possible homage to Monteverdi, is an obvious example.<sup>52</sup> But harmonic interest comes not only through extended chromaticism, but in unexpected harmonic

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<sup>52</sup> Kendrick, "Barbara Strozzi Revisited," 172.

changes, such as the sudden appearance of E flat major in bar 37 and bar 40. The effect is thrilling, a feels like a bold development from the more consonant and straightforward harmonic progression of Cavalli's motets. In the same vein, although to a lesser extent, the harmonic progression between bars 43 and 46 seems more individual, and less expected, than that of Cavalli's.

Strozzi heightens the sense of drama throughout the piece in other ways: through rhythm, silence, ornamentation, the use of unison, and the interaction of the voices with the basso continuo. Throughout, Strozzi is freer in her switching between duple and triple meter than is Cavalli; beginning at bar 59, there are five changes between these two meters within seven bars. Harking back to her previous usage of the *stile concitato*, she uses a drumming quaver patter for “vera spes, vera salus, vera vita animae meae” (true hope, true salvation, true life of my soul) (bar 80 onwards), the tension rising with the ongoing rising pulsing of the words. The meaning of the words is revealed through rhythmic contrasts: beginning at bar 127, an abundance of quavers illustrates “my heart desires to see you,” while crotchets and minims are employed for the second part of that statement “and to rest in you alone.” The use of silence is heavily linked to the sense of exclamation and declaration; the switch to common time for a collective “O” at bar 60, followed immediately by a change to triple meter complete with another rest for a second “O” at bar 61 adds a real moment of drama, a sense of the singers experiencing and communicating the words in real time. The final Alleluia section is full of dramatic use of rests, as the piece ramps up towards its final crisis, at bars 167, 178, 186, and 191. The basso continuo writing is similar to that found in Strozzi's solo pieces, doubling the tenor and the bass in bars 96 and 99, and later at bar 118 when all voices are at c' or above, and with a characteristic voice and basso interaction in the alto solo, beginning on the exclamatory “o” of “o bone Jesu”(O good Jesus) at bar 161. The “sheer voice” effect is used, but in a way that is deeply expressive of the emotional content of the work. On the word “animae” (soul) all three voices rise together, beginning at bar 91 – the extension of the same vowel begins at bar 100 with the “a” of “amor”(love), complete with ties, slurs, and stepwise sliding. The open cadence at bar 103 denies a sense of closure, and the tension is ramped up through a recitative-

like setting, further additional flourishes on “anima”(soul), further use of discord in bar 111, and a final expansive, unison release on bar 112. Strozzi uses unison throughout to highlight moments of emotional release – other examples include the sectional end at bar 59, and the utterance of “Jesu” at bar 77. In a final dramatic, harmonically intriguing move, Strozzi leaves the ending of the motet open, denying the listeners a sense of closure.

### Strozzi and Bembo

While it would be inaccurate and unfair to assume that Barbara Strozzi and Antonia Padoani Bembo emerged from exactly the same cultural background and faced exactly the same career challenges by virtue of being Venetian women of roughly the same era, a comparison between the two musicians is nevertheless highly instructive. Not only were they both gifted musical performers, but both were students of Cavalli – and it is possible that Bembo, as the younger of the two composers, could have been influenced by Strozzi in her turn. The majority of information we have on Bembo is due to the work of Claire Fontijn, and before comparing the music of Strozzi and Bembo, it is necessary to recap some of the important points Fontijn has already made about the two composers.

Antonia Bembo studied under Cavalli during the 1650s, by which point Strozzi was already established as a composer, herself collaborating with Cavalli for the *Sacra Corona* discussed above. Sadly, the only music of Bembo’s to survive dates not from her Venetian period, but from after her later move to France, where her *Produzioni armoniche* (c1695-1700) became the first of many works to be completed and publicized there. Fontijn describes this volume as “a compilation of forty-one arias, cantatas, motets, and a serenata...most of which are scored for soprano and *basso continuo*. Bembo stated in her dedication that she was a singer; it is likely that she performed these pieces and wrote many of their texts.”<sup>53</sup> Fontijn notes the extensive Italian elements present in this volume – the virtuosity of the vocal writing, the high

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<sup>53</sup> Fontijn, “Antonia Bembo,” 201.

degree of madrigalism, and the reliance on expressive dissonance<sup>54</sup> – and believes it likely that the volume could contain works both inspired by Venice and, possibly, composed by Bembo during her Venetian years.<sup>55</sup> Because of this, I have chosen pieces from this volume to compare with Strozzi’s works: the soprano duet “Amor mio,” and the solo song “Mi basta così”.

Before looking to the music itself, it is important to note further similarities between the lives of the two composers beyond their shared teacher. Both Bembo and Strozzi were only daughters of supportive fathers – those fathers both being heavily involved in the cultural life of Venice, and enjoying the support of the Mantuan Gonzaga family.<sup>56</sup> Beth Glixon has already detailed the links between Barbara Strozzi and Carol II, Duke of Mantua; Fontijn demonstrates that he also took an interest in Antonia Bembo.<sup>57</sup> Just as Strozzi paid homage to influential women in the dedications of her volumes, so too did Bembo – the *Produzioni Armoniche* has three pieces written for the wedding of the Duchess of Burgundy, and a later volume is dedicated to her.<sup>58</sup> Although these details are few, they do provoke some suggestive questions concerning the possibilities of career advancement for artistic women, the conditions required for success, and the interlocking (if not incestuous) nature of the social networks of cultural power and privilege.

With their lives and careers already linked through teacher, family affairs, and patron, it does not seem like much of a leap to suppose that Bembo would have felt the impact of Strozzi’s compositions. Fontijn clearly believes that there is a direct compositional influence, writing: “Bembo’s heritage stand at the core of her compilation: the majority of her pieces feature chamber music in her native tongue in apparent emulation of the most published Venetian composer of the day, Barbara Strozzi.”<sup>59</sup> This emulation takes a more generalized form, in the use of tropes typical of Strozzi’s works, and a more direct one, in certain specific song responses. Fontijn

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<sup>54</sup> Fontijn and Laini, “Antonia Bembo.”

<sup>55</sup> Fontijn, *Desperate Measures*, 85.

<sup>56</sup> Fontijn, “‘Sotto la disciplina del Signor Cavalli’,” 165.

<sup>57</sup> Fontijn, “‘Sotto la disciplina del Signor Cavalli’,” 178.

<sup>58</sup> Fontijn, “Antonia Bembo,” 201.

<sup>59</sup> Fontijn, *Desperate Measures*, 131.

notes two particular compositional tropes in Bembo's works that are commonly found in Strozzi's: the use of silence<sup>60</sup>, and the use of multiple roles for one singer in the religious cantatas.<sup>61</sup> One of these religious cantatas, the "Lamento della Vergine," is, according to Fontijn, modeled on Strozzi's "Sul Rodano severo."<sup>62</sup> But before that direct response, there was another – "Mi basta così."

A short solo song for high soprano, "Mi basta così" is comprised of two different sections: the exclamatory "I've had enough," and the melodious explanations of the same. These exclamations have an abrupt, unfinished quality, appearing only in the vocal line, with no doubling or interplay with the running, repetitious basso continuo. The end of the first of these exclamatory sections hangs open, with the bass finishing on c, adding to a sense of drama, and highly evocative of Strozzi's open endings. The B section, in which the voice develops into the melody proper, does allow for an opening up of the bass continuo; as the voice begins to repeat and develop the melodic material in different pitch centres (bars 7-22), so too does the basso continuo demonstrate a sense of mimicry and development, such as at bars 7 to 9. The harmony, overall, is simple, and centres strongly around F major and its closest keys. The first real moment of harmonic interest occurs at bars 35-37, but as a result of madrigalic word-painting, rather than an unusual progression or sequence, and the piece soon returns to a stable harmonic centre. The work feels later, and slighter, than Strozzi's similarly titled "Basta così, v'ho inteso" – but Fontijn makes a persuasive argument for a relationship between the two works, quite beyond the word choice. She writes:

A comparison of the two arias "Basta così" and "Mi basta così" points strongly to the possibility that Bembo composed hers, too, in Venice. The two arias share poetic themes, characteristic *tronco* scansion, tonalities, similar titles, and identical musical form...Although F major sounds as the tonic key of Bembo's arias, its secondary tonal area explores the main key of Strozzi's aria, G minor (mm. 42-50). Like Strozzi's, Bembo's refrains are set in measures of four beats with B and C sections in triple time. The interjecting nature of Bembo's title phrase "mi basta così" resembles Strozzi's short phrases from the refrain, "basta così, v'ho inteso."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Fontijn, *Desperate Measures*, 98.

<sup>61</sup> Fontijn, *Desperate Measures*, 104.

<sup>62</sup> Fontijn, *Desperate Measures*, 105.

<sup>63</sup> Fontijn, "Sotto la disciplina del Signor Cavalli," 114.

I agree with all of Fontijn's points here, and also her more general observation that a sense of musical humour links the two composers,<sup>64</sup> clearly apparent in both of these pieces. However, there are significant differences in compositional approach between the two works. Despite the points that argue for a direct compositional tribute – the B flat key signature, the same starting note, the choice of words, the length of exclamatory opening phrases – there are vital hallmarks of Strozzi's style entirely missing from the Bembo. Bass line and vocal line are woven much closer in Strozzi's "Basta così, v'ho inteso"; the bass is not only more active and engaged in and of itself, but the ensemble between the elements of the music is more developed, such as with the moments of imitation at bars 3 to 5. Strozzi pushes her basso continuo line more than Bembo does hers; as well as the lowest notes, Strozzi also includes above-the-stave writing at bars 28 to 29, so that the bass joins the voice in soaring upwards towards the higher moments of tension and drama. Strozzi bends the harmony far more than Bembo does, such as at bars 16 to 17 and 29 to 30, and her vocal writing allows for a greater display of skill. So while I am convinced that Bembo's "Mi basta così" is a direct tribute, I am less convinced that Bembo's writing on the whole shows the influence of, and development of, Strozzi's key compositional elements.

"Amor mio," a duet for two sopranos, demonstrates just how different Bembo and Strozzi's styles can be. The words "Give me your heart, take mine" underscore the underlying meaning of the entire work, the equality of lovers within the equal bond of love – and the music certainly demonstrates this equality. The two equally pitched voices work largely in thirds throughout the piece, neither one extending beyond a conservative range; this is most definitely a duet, rather than a dialogue. When the voices do move apart from one another, such as on the "give me yours" beginning from bar 3, they swiftly return to each other ("take mine"), moving in contrary motion to arrive at a unison note for the first syllable of "heart," before illustrating their (emotional) harmony with a third. The time signature is the same throughout,

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<sup>64</sup> Fontijn, "'Sotto la disciplina del Signor Cavalli,'" 179.

and the rate of harmonic change is slow, maintaining a strong sense of the home key of D major throughout the piece, with brief moments of discord appearing only on their way to resolution. Unison vocal writing marks key moments of loving unity: the triumphant high conclusion of “of love” beginning at bar 15, and the conclusion of “making peace” (briefly) at bar 29 and at bar 34. There is some dramatic interest in the use of rests in the quaver “Facciam la pace” (make peace) section beginning at the end of bar 19, and the repetitive quaver drumming brings to mind the more exaggerate *stile concitato* of Monteverdi and Strozzi. Madrigalism appears in the dovetailing of the voice on “Tie with sweet affection a tenacious knot of love,” and with the extension of “tenace” (tenacious) at bars 48 to 49 (See Example 3.21), the further extension at bar 57 – the way in which one voice holds to “tenace” while the other ties the knot of love, building to the unison climax on a joint “tenace.”

Compared to Strozzi’s duets – even the earliest of Opus 1 – this is an exceedingly simple piece (See Example 3.22). The use of harmony, and its greater regularity, also mark it as a later one. While Bembo demonstrates broader hallmarks of the Italian style and, as Fontijn notes, shows some similarity to the chamber duets of Steffani, I would be hard-pressed from this piece alone to trace a specific link to Strozzi’s influence. This does not feel, to me, to be a negative. Rather than witnessing two carbon copies of Cavalli’s style in Strozzi and Bembo, we see instead the emergence and development of two distinct voices, particularly in the later French influences on Bembo’s compositional voice. Through environment, professional opportunities and limitations, and the dictates of individual inspiration and working methods, we can begin to appreciate what is unique to each composer – how each one in turn took what they were given and made it their own.

Example 3.21. Bars 40-51 of "Amor mio"

Handwritten musical score for "Amor mio" featuring three vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Bass) and lyrics in Spanish. The score consists of eight staves of music, each with a different vocal line and rhythmic pattern. The lyrics are written below each staff, corresponding to the notes. The music is in common time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The vocal parts are: Soprano (S), Alto (A), and Bass (Bass). The lyrics are: "string - - ga con dol- ce af-fet-to strin -", "strin - - ga con dol- ce af-fet-to string - - ga con", "ga con dol- ce af-fet-to no - - do d'a-mor, no -", "dol- ce af-fet-to no - - do d'a-mor", "do d'a-mor te- na - - ce, te- na -", "no - - do d'a-mor, no - - do d'a-mor te- na -", "ce, te- na - ce, te- na - - ce.", and "ce, te- na - ce, te- na - - ce.".

Example 3.22. Bars 65-76 of "Dialogo in partenza"

Musical score for Example 3.22, showing vocal parts Soprano (S), Alto (A), and Bass (B) for bars 65-76 of "Dialogo in partenza". The score includes lyrics in Italian.

**Bar 65:**

- Soprano (S): Il tuo qui re-sta,
- Alto (A): Il mio qui
- Bass (B): El tuo, el tuo me-co sen vie-ne

**Bar 66:**

- Soprano (S): re-sta
- Alto (A): mio be-ne, il mio te-co sen vie-ne, te-co sen vie-ne
- Bass (B): El tuo mer-co sen vie-ne

**Bar 67:**

- Soprano (S): il mio te-co sen vie-ne, il mio, il mio
- Alto (A): two mer-co sen vie-ne El tuo, el tuo me-co sen
- Bass (B): \* \* \*

**Bar 68:**

- Soprano (S): te-co sen vie-ne
- Alto (A): vie-ne
- Bass (B): 4 \*

### Section Six: Strozzi's Texts in Context

Having examined Strozzi's musical setting of text as an element of her compositional style, this section of Chapter Three moves on to consider Strozzi's use of poetry in cultural context, in light of a crucial point: that the cantata cannot be understood solely as a musical form, but must instead be looked upon as a hybrid intertwining of poetry and music. Colin Timms writes: "The cantata was essentially a musical genre, but it fathered a substantial corpus of verse that was specially designed to be sung (*poesia per musica*)."<sup>65</sup>

While not all of Strozzi's works are classified, either by her or by later musicologists, as cantatas, it is important to note the vagueness of that term and the fact that it can (at this point) be applied to many different kinds of composition. Not all of Strozzi's solo songs are officially designated as cantatas, yet a great many of her solo songs fit under the broad rubric of cantata development, and even her strophic songs show the influence of the poetic and musical developments linked to that form.

What kind of verse did the cantata form use? Gloria Rose describes the literary style of the Italian song of this time as "intentionally and successfully artificial. The subjects are usually variations on the theme of unrequited love."<sup>66</sup> The most popular subjects of cantata texts are, according to Rose: the hopeful lover, the unlucky lover, the cruel lady, and the lover wanting to die from the pains of love. Occasionally, cantata texts will focus on the beauty of pastoral scenes, and include figures from mythology and history.<sup>67</sup> Many cantata texts are anonymous, most likely written to serve as musical lyrics, and there is a focus on rhetoric and the sounds of the words themselves.<sup>68</sup> All of these features are to be found in the texts chosen by Strozzi.

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<sup>65</sup> Timms, et al. "Cantata."

<sup>66</sup> Rose, "The Italian Cantata," 657.

<sup>67</sup> Rose, "The Italian Cantata," 668-669.

<sup>68</sup> Rose, "The Italian Cantata," 669.

Carolyn Gianturco's 1990 essay "The Italian Seventeenth-Century Cantata: A Textual Approach" also emphasizes the fact that the vast majority of cantata texts, styled after the works of influential poet Giambattista Marino, deal with matters of love.<sup>69</sup> Rather than emerging as a feature of *Strozzi's* style, it is clear that this use of love poetry is, instead, a hallmark of the Italian cantata at this point in time. Gianturco examines the argument, historically popular in musicological examination, that cantata lyrics were by-and-large irrelevant vessels for musical exploitation, and forwards a contrary claim:

Would the patron and his friends, most of whom considered themselves *cognoscenti*, have enjoyed a composite art form in which the art that they undoubtedly understood best – the poetry – was glossed over? The musical cantata proves that the answer to all these questions is no. On the contrary, the composer created with regard for and with an understanding of the text before him...a number of other, more subtle aspects of the music may also be attributed not to an arbitrary aesthetic consideration on the part of the composer, but simply to his decision to implement the dictates of the texts.<sup>70</sup>

Roger Freitas, writing in 2001, agrees both with Gianturco's understanding of the historical supremacy of the "meaningless text" argument (the "view of cantata poetry as insincere and unoriginal soon became normative in the young discipline of historical musicology"<sup>71</sup>) and expands upon the claim that the cantata text is a vital component of the genre as holistic whole. In particular, Freitas argues that in hearing cantata texts as repetitious, shallow, or derivative, modern listeners are missing the most crucial element of this form of poetry – its self-conscious rhetorical display. Freitas argues: "contemporaries more likely experienced cantatas – both textually and musically – as convivial exhibitions of rhetorical skill than as the personal disclosures of the poet, composer or performer."<sup>72</sup> With this understanding in place, Freitas urges a more playful approach to the cantata, finding evidence for this playfulness across the Italian cantata oeuvre; it is certainly easy to find in Strozzi's works.

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<sup>69</sup> Gianturco, "The Italian Seventeenth-Century Cantata," 47.

<sup>70</sup> Gianturco, "The Italian Seventeenth-Century Cantata," 47-48.

<sup>71</sup> Freitas, "Singing and Playing," 509.

<sup>72</sup> Freitas, "Singing and Playing," 509.

Nor is Freitas content with a surface reading of the “love” themes in cantata texts as straight-forward “love poetry.” Instead, Freitas traces the history of the Italian intelligentsia tradition of conversation-as-performance – *conversazione* – with its particular use riddles and debates, using love as a focus for the display of linguistic skill in the setting of *questioni d’amore*.<sup>73</sup> He gives specific examples of the kinds of love debates found in *conversazione* – questions that feed into and feed back from musical explorations of the same. Freitas writes:

the participants in a *conversazione* might improvise a love lament, present a prepared poem or speech on the subject, or focus on the traditional *questioni d’amore*. Some further examples of the latter include “Can love exist without jealousy?”, “Can a lover die from excessive love?” or “Is Love blind?” Many madrigal (and cantata) texts could easily be thought of as lyric responses to questions of this type.<sup>74</sup>

This tradition continues into the seventeenth century with, as Freitas notes, an increase in the virtuosity of the musical setting. This intellectual/musical tradition and its contents maps precisely onto Strozzi’s use of text and contemporaneous descriptions of the form and content of Unisoni meetings.

Through this exploration of the poetic and cultural context of the poetry set (and, in some instances, possibly written) by Barbara Strozzi, two crucial points emerge. The first: that a surface level reading of Strozzi’s texts as “proof” that she was a courtesan ignores, even erases, the specific artistic tradition from which these texts and performance practices emerged. The second: that through a full consideration of this tradition, it is possible to better integrate the specifics of the chamber environment with the specifics of chamber composition, performance, and academic discourse – music and debate not as separate elements, but as continuation of each other. Through this positioning, it becomes insufficient to describe Strozzi as “entertaining” the Unisoni (or “seducing” them) through her musicking. Instead, her musical exploration of matters of love emerges as a foundational element of what the Unisoni *was*.

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<sup>73</sup> Freitas, “Singing and Playing,” 511-512.

<sup>74</sup> Freitas, “Singing and Playing,” 517.

Holding this framing in mind, Strozzi's use of and extension of the cantata genre becomes clear not only through her musical developments, but in terms of her use of text. There are three points in particular in which Strozzi's ties to, and responses to, popular literary tropes of her era are apparent: in the setting of the "biting kiss," in the use of homoeroticism, and through her exploration of gender.

The most overtly erotic of all of Strozzi's works is most likely the Opus 2 duet for soprano and bass, "Morso, e bacio dati in un tempo" – "Bite and kiss at the same time" – in which the performers rejoice in the ecstasy induced by a combination of pain and pleasure, singing "in biting and kissing the beautiful mouth delights me." No author is given for the text; the majority of the Opus 2 texts have no author listed, in marked contrast to the note accompanying "L'Amante segreto" which reads "Parole d'incerto," raising the distinct possibility that Strozzi herself is the author. "Morso, e bacio dati in un tempo" is also one of Strozzi's works most easily linked to the poetry of Giambattista Marino and Monteverdi's use of the same. Tim Carter explains:

Giambattista Marino had taken Italy by storm with the publication of his *Rime* in 1602, and although in the Sixth Book Monteverdi tended to stick with the more conservative sonnets, in the Seventh, he embraced Marino's madrigalian kisses and love-bites with at least some of the enthusiasm typical of the period.<sup>75</sup>

Marino's form of love poetry, with its focus on detailing and debating the physical expression of passion, was enormously influential, and set not just by Monteverdi, but by many of the leading Italian composers of his age. Elisabeth Wright, in 1994 essay "Marino and Music: A Marriage of Expressive Rhetorical Gesture," states that: "The Veronese composer Marc' Antonio Negri, for example, devoted his entire second book of madrigals to the myriad facets of the kiss – *Affetti Amorosi* (1611) – inspired by Marino's amorous texts."<sup>76</sup> It is worth noting that Negri served as Monteverdi's assistant at San Marco for eight years.

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<sup>75</sup> Carter, "The Venetian Secular Music," 183-184.

<sup>76</sup> Wright, "Marino and Music," 510.

Massimo Ossi's 2004 essay "Pardon me, but your teeth are in my neck": Giambattista Marino, Claudio Monteverdi, and the bacio mordace" makes the link between Strozzi's Opus 2 duet and the broader musical exploration of Marino's biting kiss absolutely clear. In this work, Ossi analyses Monteverdi's setting of Marino's *Eccomi pronta ai baci*, in which a woman warns her lover (in vain) not to bite her, lest their affair be revealed. Ossi notes the humour in Monteverdi's setting, also present in Strozzi's "Morso, e bacio dati in un tempo," and describes the history of the trope of the biting kiss in Italian poetry, noting its popularity in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>77</sup> There is even an element of gender/sexual subversion and humour in Monteverdi's setting of a woman's words in the voice of a tenor; Strozzi's duet, by comparison, is part of her collection dedicated to the "divine voice" of castrato soprano Adamo Franchi, raising the possibility of the queering of desire and identity through a castrato soprano/bass performance.

It is this homoerotic potential, found scattered throughout Strozzi's works, that ties her again to her Venetian artistic and intellectual culture. Edward Muir, describing the topics favoured by the Incogniti in their writings, notes: "Their interests were wide-ranging and eclectic, including Cabalistic magic, eroticism with overt homosexuality, parody of the Christian virtues, blasphemy and religious speculations that were certainly heterodox and skeptical."<sup>78</sup> Wendy Heller moves from the general to the specific in her 1999 article "Tacitus Incognito: Opera as History in 'L'incoronazione di Poppea,'" describing Busenello's use of same-sex desire in a number of his poems, in which "desire between men appears in the hypothetical realm of the deities and allegorical figures as an idealized form of sexual self-expression, unmediated by female interference."<sup>79</sup> While the Incogniti (frequently also Unisoni) members included homoeroticism in their works, it is also important to note, as Heller does, the homosocial environment in which and for which many of

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<sup>77</sup> Ossi, "Pardon me," 178.

<sup>78</sup> Muir, "Why Venice?", 388.

<sup>79</sup> Heller, "Tacitus Incognito," 49.

these works were created.<sup>80</sup> Busenello was not the only Accademici to openly explore same-sex desire: Antonia Rocco's 1651 work *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola* (previously mentioned in Chapter Two) was a graphically sexual examination of and apologia for pederasty, possibly written for the Incogniti alone, and circulated by Loredano.<sup>81</sup> While there is no way of knowing whether Strozzi would have had access to these specific texts, it is hard to imagine that she would have been ignorant of the possibilities for cultural exploration of homoerotic potentialities, given the homoerotic elements present in her own works.

The first of these elements comes through the performance possibilities of the duet described above: the unfixed gender of the soprano singer, and the subsequent subversion of desire that that implies. The second comes from the same volume (later reprinted in Opus Three): the Lament "Sul Rodano severo". In this solo work for high voice Strozzi mixes a contemporaneous political account with a fantastical ghost story, as the spirit of Louis XIII's young favourite, Henri de Cinq-Mars, returns to reproach his beloved king for his death, following a failed plot against Richelieu. Much of the homoerotic potential of this piece is found in the text itself. Playing the role of Henri, the performer emphasises the close nature of his relationship with Louis: "While about my devoted neck you extended your gracious arm" and, later, "I do not condemn my king of any fault other than that of excessive love." Henri's beauty, even in death, is described in florid and feminine terms: "the beautiful Henry's rosy cheeks are changed to pale violet," "blood flows upon his milky white breast." But it is not only the text, but the categorization of the genre of the lament itself that hints at subversive possibilities. The public act of lamentation was a particularly gendered form of display, not only typically assigned to women, but, in Alan Howard's words, "characterized by emotional excesses often strongly embodied in erotic terms."<sup>82</sup> Wendy Heller, speaking from an analysis of Cavalli's use of the lament, describes the titillating spectacle of the lamenting woman in musical

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<sup>80</sup> Heller, "Tacitus Incognito," 47.

<sup>81</sup> Fasoli, "Bodily Figurae," 98.

<sup>82</sup> Howard, "Eroticized Mourning," 266.

performance, and the “pleasurable arousal”<sup>83</sup> she inspired in audiences. Fontijn explicitly names “Sul Rodano severo” as a subversion of the typical lament wherein a woman mourns because of her love for a man.<sup>84</sup> In Strozzi’s work a man laments his relationship with another man, in a feminized musical form, in a volume of works notably sung by a celebrated castrato soprano, with the possibility of being performed by a singer of any gender; the levels of gender-switching and homoerotic potential are multiple. This queer twist is another link between Strozzi and the Accademici, a recognition of their mutual exploration of the bounds of gender and desire.

Finally, the third site of homoerotic potential in Strozzi’s works comes through her semi-frequent use of the high voiced duet form, in which two women, two castrati, or a mixture of the two, sing romantic/erotic duets both with and to each other.<sup>85</sup> It is now a musical convention, in some classical music spaces, to de-emphasise the queer potential of such settings – this does not mean, however, that such potentials are not and have not previously been present and acknowledged. This potential in Strozzi’s duets is openly stressed by Laurie Stras, in her introduction to 2015 volume *Eroticism in Early Modern Music*. Stras writes:

The direct musical representation of female same-sex desire was not unusual, but it does appear to have been delivered in a particular context, as borne witness by the soprano duets of Cavalli’s pupil Barbara Strozzi...The texts of many of her ensemble works...which were supplied to her by members of her father’s academy, are ambiguous in relation to the sex of their addressees, but when set for women’s voices appear transparently dedicated to projecting female same-sex desire.<sup>86</sup>

These moments of fluidity and subversion of desire and gender status tie into the third feature of Strozzi’s use of poetry: her exploration of gender and musical

<sup>83</sup> Heller, “Ovid’s Ironic Gaze,” 209.

<sup>84</sup> Fontijn, *Desperate Measures*, 105.

<sup>85</sup> There is currently no documentary evidence of the person/people with whom Strozzi sang. The mention of Strozzi’s relationship with a castrato in the *Satire* might indicate a potential musical relationship also, as might her working relationship with Adamo Franchi, but these are mere possibilities. Regardless of the gender of the high voiced duettists, there is an argument to be made for the queer potential of all of these different combinations, in their aural demonstrations of pitch similarity, mutuality and exchange of material, and erotic timbral closeness.

<sup>86</sup> Stras, “Introduction: Encoding the Musical Erotic,” 15-16.

development of the literary *querelle de femmes*. As previously detailed in Chapter Two, the Incogniti and Unisoni were part of a broader cultural moment of gender debate; the blossoming of free speech in Venice during Strozzi's lifetime, following the lifting of the Papal Interdict against Venice in 1607, provided an ideal environment for such debates. As Edward Muir explains:

During those two generations, Venice was the one place in Italy open to criticisms of Counter-Reformation papal politics. That moment brought libertines and religious skeptics to Venice from all over Italy. These wandering aristocrats, displaced priests, and speculative thinkers found aid and comfort in the intellectual politics of the Venetian academies, the members of which wrote the librettos and financed the theaters for the early Venetian operas. At the same time, the harsh misogyny in the writings of the Venetian libertines provoked a protofeminist reaction from a group of Venetian women writers, creating a gender debate that further played out in Venetian operatic librettos.<sup>87</sup>

Strozzi was surrounded not only by intellectual and artistic communities fascinated by concepts of gender, but by a society that regularly allowed for expressions of gender subversion during the celebrations of the Carnevale. Wendy Heller has charted the importance of this background in the creation of Monteverdi's *Poppea* – the same background to Strozzi's creative practices. "This was a realm in which reality was elusive, appearances deceptive, power structures inverted, and genders exchanged."<sup>88</sup> Heller makes the link between Carnevale and Strozzi even clearer in her later work, explaining that if Carnevale offered a place in which to upend social norms and explore hidden desire then "the Incogniti seem to have offered a parallel experience in the literary world."<sup>89</sup>

How does Strozzi explore gender in her works? Through multiplicity, through celebrating women, and through parody and humour. This first approach is easily discerned through reading/performing her works; even as the majority of her texts are set for high voice, those texts contain a variety of characters for the performer to portray. Sometimes these characters are named: Henri de Cinq Mars (Opus 2 and 3), Saint Peter (Opus 5), Saint Benedict (Opus 5), Saint Anne (Opus 5), and Fileno

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<sup>87</sup> Muir, "Why Venice?" 331-332.

<sup>88</sup> Heller, "Tacitus Incognito," 42.

<sup>89</sup> Heller "Barbara Strozzi and the Taming," 170.

(“Lamento appresso ai molli argenti” Opus 7). Sometimes, instead, these characters emerge through description: the “Athenian Maiden Raped by the King of Thrace” (Philomena) in “L’Usignuolo” (Opus 1), “The Simple Maiden” (“La fanciulletta semplice” Opus 2), “The Timid Lover” (“L’amante timido eccitato” Opus 1), the “King of Cuckolds” (“La sol, fa, mi, re, do” Opus 2) and “The Distracted Lover” (“L’Astratto” Opus 8). Throughout her works, the performer of Strozzi must portray a range of gendered traits and characteristics, by turns heartfelt, furious, holy, and comedic.

Strozzi’s second approach – the overt praise of virtuous women – calls to mind the works of Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, and Arcangela Tarabotti. This approach is most obvious in her works praising the dedicatees of her volumes: Opus 1’s “La Vittoria” in honour of Vittoria della Rovere, and Opus 2’s “Donna di maestà” – “Woman of Majesty” – written for the marriage of Leonora II of Mantua to Ferdinand III of Austria, in which the (masculine) horrors of war are vanquished by the (feminine) promise of conjugal love and female fecundity. Opus 5’s sacred cantatas are fulsome in their praise of Mary and of Anne – not only the “Mater Anna” already mentioned, but also “Gaude Virgo,” “O Maria,” “Salve Regina,” and “Nascente Maria”. Opus 1’s madrigalic depiction of Philomena is interesting; rather than portraying a victim of rape as broken or powerless, Strozzi tells us that the maiden uses her beautiful voice to sing not of love, but of divine revenge against men who betray women with violence. This praise of women could also be extended to include self-praise for Strozzi herself, in the texts written by her father and set in Opus 1. The conclusion to Opus 1, in which the Strozzi appear to repudiate slander against them, has already been considered in Chapter Two: the opening to Opus 1, meanwhile, famously hopes that the singer/composer/author will be crowned with a laurel wreath and, “perhaps be considered a new Sappho.”

Finally, in her treatment of texts describing women’s beauty and/or moral failings from a male perspective, Strozzi frequently complicates and subverts the otherwise straight-forward presentation of the poetry itself through her music. Wendy Heller has written extensively on this approach; in 2014 work *Music in the Baroque* she explains:

An intriguing aspect of Strozzi's music is the fact that many of the poems she set condemned female beauty as dangerous, while she herself was so renowned for the seductive nature of her performances, in which her own voice and body gave credence to the poets' ambivalence toward female sexuality. To what extent did Strozzi's musical choices in her compositions confirm or contradict the anti-female tone of the poetry? A close look at her compositions shows that she brilliantly captured the essence of the poetry written by her male colleagues, while interjecting her own female perspective.<sup>90</sup>

In some of her works – most obviously Opus 2's “La sol, fa, mi, re, do” and Opus 8's “L'Astratto,” discussed previously – Strozzi's parodying of the stereotypical male complaint is obvious and comical. However, Heller, notes another form of gender subversion apparent in Strozzi's use of anti-women texts: her usurpation of power – even dominance – through her meta-performance and reclamation of the trope of the seductive women. In “Barbara Strozzi and the Taming of the Male Poetic Voice”, Heller asks: “What is the nature of the listening experience when a beautiful woman sings about the fleeting and artificial nature of beauty and, by the very act of singing, gives voice to the silent object of desire?”<sup>91</sup>

There is much more research to be done, examining and contextualizing Strozzi's choice, use, and possible authorship of the poetry that forms so essential a component of her works.<sup>92</sup> Even this brief examination, however, demonstrates the insufficiency of writing off Strozzi's texts as “love poetry” without further analysis, and hopes to prove, instead, the multiple benefits (performance, musicological, historical) of a more detailed and considered textural analysis.

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<sup>90</sup> Heller, *Music in the Baroque*, 165-166.

<sup>91</sup> Heller, “Barbara Strozzi and the Taming,” 173.

<sup>92</sup> Two new works from Claire Fontijn promise to shed additional light on Strozzi's use of poetry: “Representing of Weeping in Barbara Strozzi's Laments,” in *Uncovering Music of Early Modern European Women (1250–1750)*, New York and London: Routledge, 2020; and the forthcoming “Strozzi's ‘La sol fà, mi, rè, dò: Code for Courtesan?’” in Sabine Meine and Daria Perocco, eds. *Proceedings of the Barbara Strozzi Symposium*. Initial publication preparation for Georg Olms Verlag, forthcoming 2021.

### Conclusion: Situating Strozzi's Music

Examining Barbara Strozzi's music in depth, using a variety of tools – musical analysis, musical comparison, and literary analysis – not only affords a far deeper understanding of her works and compositional style: it adds to the greater cultural awareness of seicento Italian vocal music as a whole. Many elements of Venetian music and its subsequent impact on the development of Western Art music can be better understood (and that understanding enhanced) through the study of Strozzi's compositions: the use of the virtuosic voice, the boundaries and challenges of and to harmonic development, the intertwining of text and music, the ongoing influence of Monteverdi and Cavalli's compositional style, and the cultural impact of "private" performance.

Approaching this music as a performer, and using a performer's insights as a basis for musical and textural analysis, has been profoundly useful in this instance. It also suggests avenues for developing performance practice of Strozzi's works that may prove of future interest. While I hope to have demonstrated the ways in which the assumption that Strozzi was a frustrated opera composer fails to appreciate the *actual* musical possibilities and barriers she would have encountered as a composer, the suggestion in some historical texts, that her Opus 7 performed as an opera, gives an idea for future performance. This description of Opus 7 might well be nothing but a mistranslation – but it calls to mind the looseness of definition found in some of the earliest works now considered operas, and raises the possibility of performing Strozzi in a similar way. Michael Robinson, in his 1966 work *Opera Before Mozart*, explains:

Parallel too with the first experiments in the direction of opera ran the movement towards the madrigal drama, in which groups of madrigals were joined together either to provide the outline of a comedy – and it was only the outline since there were obvious gaps in the story – or to suggest a social occasion such as a banquet or festival with successive entries of entertainers to sing, crack jokes, and act miniature plays.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Robinson, *Opera Before Mozart*, 50-51.

Might Strozzi's Opus 7 have been performed as a cantata drama, in a chamber setting designed for a mixture of performance styles and slippage between "audience" and "performers"?<sup>94</sup> Might her works lend themselves to a revival of Baroque tradition of the pasticcio opera, along the lines of the Metropolitan Opera's successful production *The Enchanted Isle*? On a more general note: have we previously limited ourselves in performing Strozzi's music by inaccurate assumptions about chamber performance – and might be adopt a more expansive and playful attitude in the future?

Barbara Strozzi's career as a composer was, in one reading, limited by the barriers to employment she encountered: no court appointment, no church appointment, no demands of a commercial opera house. But, through another, it was liberated not only by a greater ability to expand and experiment along her own lines, but by her full and deliberate exploitation of the new technology of musical printing. Rather than becoming stuck in asking "why didn't Strozzi write an opera?" or "what would she have done with a position at court?", it feels far more fruitful, and interesting, to consider all that she did with the tools at her disposal – the developments she brought about, and the legacy that she left: Strozzi's voice not as singular and domestic, but public and wide-sounding, deliberately spread by her throughout Europe through her printed volumes.

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<sup>94</sup> Beyond the brief, later mention that Opus 7 was given as an opera, there is currently no documentary evidence that suggests that this was so, although, given the paucity of primary material on Strozzi, this is not proof that it was not, or could not have been performed as such. A collection of solo cantatas and ariettas, "The Pleasures/Sport of Euterpe," as the volume is titled, could be understood as following a loose narrative of a love affair, with some of the pieces within best suited to the lover, others to the beloved, and the remainder to a narrator.

## **Chapter Four: An Autoethnography of the Performer and Researcher**

### **Section One: Musical Autoethnography: What, Who, Why**

I was first introduced to the concept of musicological autoethnography through Judith A. Peraino's essay "I Am An Opera: Identifying with Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*." The year was 2005 or 2006; I was an undergraduate music student researching my final dissertation project (transgender potentials in opera), and the 1995 collection containing this work, *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, was to play a critical role in both that assignment and in my broader musical development. Peraino's essay was deeply personal and at the same time musicologically assured, as intimated in her statement of intent:

The position of Purcell's opera within the present constructs of music history compares to the position of my perceptions and experiences as a lesbian within mainstream musicology. I have, in fact, come to identify with the opera itself – as a rebellious and queer participant in an entrenched outline of history and culture. This essay sets up an analogy between traditional musicology's discussion of *Dido and Aeneas* as an "outsider" and my own outsider's subject-position as a lesbian musicologist.<sup>1</sup>

While I was impressed by Peraino's confidence, I held concerns about her work. One part of that response was simple: I had been full of hope that her essay (and others like it) would include a nod to queer people like myself – transgender and/or bisexual – and was disappointed by a presentation of queer that included these concepts only as theoretical and metaphorical abstractions, rather than as lived realities.

But the overwhelming reason for my confusion was because Peraino's writing ran contrary to everything I had been taught musicological writing should be. Surely the point of analysing music was to maintain a critical distance, to aim for objectivity and impartiality? I thought academic musicians were meant to remove themselves from

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<sup>1</sup> Peraino, "I Am An Opera," 99.

their own writing, even and maybe especially when the subject at hand was so personally felt. Were musicians really allowed to write with such swagger, to make the kind of claims that would be met with ridicule in an undergraduate seminar, such as Peraino's assessment that "The marginal situation of *Dido and Aeneas* in music history (as it is constructed by musicologists) is analogous to the situation of a lesbian in society"<sup>2</sup>?

I did not use Peraino's essay in my final dissertation, and nor did I refer back to it in my later final dissertation for my MMus. Nevertheless, a seed had been planted, had taken root – and it seemed impossible, given the intertwining nature of my doctoral studies and professional musical life, to avoid both the inspiration set by Peraino's assured use of the self as a site of knowledge, and the particular challenge of her words: "When investigating 'hidden histories' it is important to keep in mind a distinction between the unattainable 'true' history, the '(re)constructed' history, and the history of that (re)construction. What is propagated and received as true history often masks a tangled lineage of convenient arguments and hidden agendas."<sup>3</sup>

Throughout my investigation into the "hidden history" of Barbara Strozzi, this analysis of the various reconstructions of who she was and what she meant, I cannot afford to ignore my own motives for doing this work – to hide my own agenda at the expense of a far more detailed, nuanced and multifaceted set of truths.

Making use of autoethnography as a method, therefore, seemed like a logical final step for this thesis. Before attempting to chart and clarify my own experiences with Strozzi, I felt it was necessary to find out more about the form itself: how it's done, what kind of people do it, its strengths and weaknesses. Even now I feel and have felt a desire to "get things right" in an academic context (almost certainly as a result of feeling like an outsider) – and so it was liberating to find that there is no one set form of autoethnography to adhere to. Psychologist Brent E. Sykes, following the example of Heewon Chang, underlines the importance of the unique nature of this

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<sup>2</sup> Peraino, "I Am An Opera," 108.

<sup>3</sup> Peraino, "I Am An Opera," 101.

approach, the fact that the method must flow from the subject itself:

"Autoethnography is a reflexive, individualized method that extracts meaning following an immersive experience."<sup>4</sup> Conductor and musicologist Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, writing of her struggle to open up her musical practice, makes a definite link between the *practical* elements of our work as musicians and the potential musicological creativity on offer through the use of autoethnography. I was deeply struck by her admission that "I began looking for ways to think and write about my musical experiences that were just as creative, exciting, and personal as my work on the podium. Somehow the tired and conventional methods offered by musicology just didn't seem to help."<sup>5</sup> These "tired and conventional" methods referred to by Bartleet here appear to refer to the standard Anglophone university music training. Bartleet's work with a pioneer of autoethnography, Carolyn Ellis, also explores and celebrates this performance-informed angle: "Just as the work of a musician is inherently corporeal, an autoethnography also draws on and works from embodied knowledge and experiences. This focus frees the voice and body from the conventional and restrictive mind-body split that continues to pervade traditional academic writing."<sup>6</sup> As to my sense of having to "get things right," I was encouraged by the ways in which researchers into autoethnographic form explicitly welcomed the kind of uncertainty and lack of control familiar to me from performing music, indicating that opening up possibilities was more important than guaranteeing a fixed conclusion. Stacy Holman Jones, quoted in the 2005 chapter "A History of Autoethnographic Inquiry": "autoethnography is setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation...and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives."<sup>7</sup>

As to the question of "who," it appears that Peraino is far from alone in making use of her outsider/insider status. Sally Denshire, in her explanation of autoethnography

<sup>4</sup> Sykes, "Transformative Autoethnography," 6.

<sup>5</sup> Bartleet, "Behind the Baton," 715.

<sup>6</sup> Bartleet and Ellis, *Music Autoethnographies*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas, Kitrina & Carless "A History of Autoethnographic Inquiry," 85.

for the International Sociological Association's online journal platform Sociopedia.isa, describes this state of belonging/not belonging as an almost essential element of the form: "In order to write autoethnography you can't feel completely at home in your discipline...the discomfort experienced at stepping outside your own received frame is part of the autoethnographic task."<sup>8</sup> So too does Garance Maréchal describe the doubleness inherent in autoethnography,<sup>9</sup> and his definition opens up questions of boundary placement and management. This links closely to the question of researcher position; Denshire, citing Laura Ellingson, makes clear the problems with assumed neutrality and lack of analysis: "When...researchers' bodies remain unmarked – and hence naturalized as normative – they reinscribe the power of scholars to speak without reflexive consideration of their positionality, whereas others' voices remain silent or marginalized by their marked status."<sup>10</sup> Laurel Richardson, one of the key figures of autoethnographic research, states it plainly: "The ethnographic life is not separable from the self. Who we are and what we can be – what we can study, how we can write about that which we study – is tied to how a discipline disciplines itself and its members, its methods for claiming authority over both the subject matter and its members."<sup>11</sup> While Richardson is writing specifically of ethnography, could not the same be said for the broad field of music? And, when thinking specifically of the organisational and institutional elements of music considered in this study – the ways in which we teach, programme, and broadcast music and musical knowledge – then this ability of autoethnography to illuminate the supposedly neutral seems like a great gift. Maree Boyle and Ken Parry, in their 2007 work on organisational autoethnography, state: "we propose that autobiographical and retrospective approaches are more likely to unearth and illuminate the tacit and subaltern aspects of organization."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Denshire, "Autoethnography," 2. Denshire refers here to "Encounters With the Self in Social Science Research: A Political Scientist Looks at Autoethnography" by DeLysa Burnier, published in 2006 by the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*

<sup>9</sup> Maréchal, "Autoethnography," 43.

<sup>10</sup> Denshire, "Autoethnography," 3. Denshire refers here to "Embodied Knowledge: Writing Researchers' Bodies Into Qualitative Health Research" by Laura Ellingson, published in 2006 by *Qualitative Health Research*.

<sup>11</sup> Richardson, "Evaluating Ethnography," 253.

<sup>12</sup> Boyle & Parry, "Telling the Whole Story," 186.

While the advantages of autoethnography as method were becoming clear, my research also pointed to the potential risks of such work, particularly for a person in an already frequently marginalised position. Maréchal makes clear the criticisms levelled at the form: “The elevation of autobiography in personal accounts to the status of ethnographic enhancement, on the grounds of its evocative power or experiential value, has been criticized by analytic proponents for being biased, navel-gazing, self-absorbed, or emotionally incontinent, and for hijacking traditional ethnographic purposes and scholarly contributions.”<sup>13</sup> Adams and Holman Jones, writing in 2011, note a similar reaction: “Autoethnography is criticized for being narcissistic, self-indulgent, simplistic, and just too personal.”<sup>14</sup> Transgender people are frequently described with all of the above adjectives; I began to worry that these misconceptions might be magnified by my use of autoethnography, itself considered an inexcusable dragging in of my “too personal” life into a more traditional scholarly arena.

I was excited to read about the ways in which autoethnographic writers and researchers addressed, head on, societal problems – and yet, used as I am to the ways in which musical fields often pretend that these problems don’t exist, I worried that to call attention to them through autoethnography would compound my marginalisation. I was profoundly moved to read Laurel Richardson’s questions to herself: “How can I make my writing matter? How can I write to help speed into this world a democratic project of social justice?”<sup>15</sup> I also wondered if it would be possible to ask the same question in a musical context without jeopardising the kind of cultural capital needed to put that project into action. I have been made deeply aware that there are many people in music who believe that our art form, and any writing around it, should be “apolitical” – and that to challenge that notion, the very possibility of that notion, is considered troublemaking. What Susan McClary described in her 1985 essay “The blasphemy of talking politics during Bach Year” is

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<sup>13</sup> Maréchal, “Autoethnography,” 45.

<sup>14</sup> Adams and Holman Jones, “Telling Stories,” 111.

<sup>15</sup> Richardson, “Writing: A Method of Inquiry,” location 3129.1/3675 (ebook).

something that I, and many of my friends and colleagues, have experienced throughout the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. That essay has inspired in me a deep sense of recognition and therefore comfort, but it also reads as a warning of what it is to be exposed, irrevocably, as a musical outsider and agitator.<sup>16</sup>

However, despite these fears, the more I learnt about this method of inquiry and the further I progressed with both my study of Strozzi and my musical career, the more obvious it became that addressing these questions and concerns head on would be more fruitful than trying to avoid them – and that, in any case, it felt as though I had reached a point of no return. And so, with both the advantages and disadvantages considered, I decided to proceed with my autoethnography, for the following reasons: Because I needed to be able to answer the question I am so often asked: “Why Strozzi?” Because I have been changed by what I studied. Because I am a performing and composing musician, and I feel a similar call to Bartleet to bring those elements of my musical life into my musical writing. Because if my feminist musicology is to mean anything, it must be transformative in method as well as in subject, and must apply a critique of neutrality to the researcher as well as to the research. And because these questions of gender and music are not academic to me, but are the everyday experiences of my life.

## **Section Two: An initial question and digging deeper**

Starting the autoethnography itself was a twofold process: beginning a diary in which to note my responses to and reflections on my research, and clarifying and exploring my initial research question, setting the parameters for the self-exploration and analysis that would follow. It is to this question that I turn first.

“What are the gendered implications of the singing voice?” is a question that ties together the realities of my performing of Strozzi with the ways in which she, as singer-composer and virtuosa vocalist, is and has been understood. It quickly

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<sup>16</sup> McClary, “The blasphemy of talking politics,” 17.

became apparent that the ways in which singing is gendered, particularly gendered as female, could be understood as falling into three broad categories: gendered as practice, gendered as an inescapable aspect of the sexed body, and gendered along particular stereotypical lines of femaleness and femininity.

As a working professional singer, my anecdotal experience is that there are far more female than male singers, and that those male singers frequently confront assumptions around the supposedly effete practice of singing, classical singing in particular. It has also been my experience that younger students are more likely to see singing as a girls' activity, rather than a boys'. These observations chimed with my research; Sam de Boise, writing of patterns of gender distribution in Higher Music Education, notes: "Vocal courses, and singing generally, are one area where women have consistently been much more highly represented than men in Western and global Northern countries."<sup>17</sup> When men and boys do sing, there is often stigma attached; observations that there is a long association between singing and femininity, with boys being labelled "sissy" for singing,<sup>18</sup> and men attacked with homophobia<sup>19</sup> can be found throughout the 2012 work *Perspectives on Males and Singing*. I was disappointed to find that this book did not include a single reference to trans men or masculinities – perhaps a reflection of the fact that singing itself seems inevitably bound up in binary and essentialist concepts of male and female, and that to make singing "allowable" for (cis) men, it is necessary to disavow any perceived or actual link to supposed femininity.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> de Boise, "Gender Inequalities," 32.

<sup>18</sup> Harrison, Welch, and Adler, "Men, Boys and Singing," 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> Harrison, Welch, and Adler, "Men, Boys and Singing," 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> While there has been a small amount of research to emerge on trans masculine singing voices, the majority of this has been through anecdotal and community learning, and the results of such research have been spread through word-of-mouth, within our online and in person communities; my own research with my own voice, and with my students, in this field falls into this pattern. Alexandros N. Constansis' published work on trans masculine singing voices is a notable exception to this pattern; it is also notable that this work has not been absorbed into more general treatments of gendered/sexed vocality, but has instead been relegated to the category of specialist interest. As a trans singer, I do not find it sufficient to be treated as "separate but equal"; it is an aspect of ongoing marginalisation that trans singers of all genders and biological make-ups are ignored or misrepresented in non-trans scholarship.

This erasure of trans voices necessitates the asking of an additional question: what is a “male” or a “female” voice?<sup>21</sup> What about the voice of a trans masculine genderqueer person, such as myself?<sup>22</sup> In my research, I found two distinct answers: the socially constructed, and the biological essentialist. In the “social construction” camp I could see the impact of the feminist philosophies familiar to me from my broader work in gender studies and trans feminism. Of particular importance to the concept of the male/female voice as a product of gendered interpretation is the work of Judith Butler – not only her famous theory of the performative, iterative nature of gender, begun in 1990 work *Gender Trouble*, but in her ongoing critique of the supposedly natural materiality of sexed bodies, clarified in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993), and developing and deepening ever since. A good introduction to this position can be found in the second edition of *Gender Trouble*, revised and re-issued in 1999. Here, Butler writes:

Are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests? If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.

It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category.<sup>23</sup>

Nina Eidsheim’s work of the early 2010s is an excellent example of the development of this branch of gender studies in a musicological sphere, and proves the necessity

<sup>21</sup> J Halberstram’s chapter “Queer Voices and Musical Genders” from 2007 collection *Oh Boy! Masculinities and Popular Music* is an interesting examples of the ways in which this trans erasure and biological essentialism can be found even in works on transgressively gendered musicians, by an author who would later come out as trans. Halberstram situates Sylvester’s use of the high voice within a cis, sex-gender binary: “deliberately marks him as having and indeed cultivating the voice of a woman.” (p. 192)

<sup>22</sup> This erasure of (some) trans voices can be found even within trans-authored works. Constans’ 2013 article “The Female-to-Male (FTM) Singing Voice and Its Interaction with Queer Theory: Roles and Interdependency” takes a somewhat narrow position on what constitutes trans male/trans masculine vocality, defining this vocality as being limited to trans people assigned female at birth who are on testosterone therapy. This definition leaves out the trans men, trans masculine people, and other FTM trans people who are not yet on, have ceased taking, or will never be on testosterone therapy.

<sup>23</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 10-11.

of employing critical race theory in a musicological context. Eidsheim's scholarship reveals the ways in which the sound of the "black" singing voice is constructed along racist lines as a social/cultural artefact in the minds of listeners: "we may consider how the sound of a singer's voice is in fact a co-creation to which listeners significantly contribute."<sup>24</sup> Eidsheim explains:

What we refer to as "sound" is in reality a composite of visual, textural, discursive, and other kinds of information. In other words, the multisensory context surrounding a voice forms a filter, a "suggestion" through which we listen. As such, our contexts and our attitudes determine what we hear. While the sound of the voice is indeed experienced and described as objectively meaningful, we cannot but perceive it through filters generated by our own preconceptions, which together constitute a compass that we use to navigate between vocal input and extra-vocal context.<sup>25</sup>

Eidsheim's 2011 article "Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness' in American Opera" charts the ways in which racialised marks of "otherness" are projected onto the voices of black singers by white listeners and, as one of its many aspects, serves as a crucial reminder of the necessity of working from an intersectional perspective in regards to gender as racialised concept. The descriptions given of the voices of black sopranos and mezzos by white critics, conductors, directors, and fellow singers map directly onto existing racist stereotypes of black womanhood; Leontyne Price's voice, for example, is fetishised in hypersexual, hyper "exotic" terms.<sup>26</sup> In charting the ways in which these singers are "heard" as "black," Eidsheim demonstrates the fact that listeners respond to the singing voice not as a solely aural phenomenon, but as an amalgam of visual and situational cultural cues and internal biases and expectations which influence perception of received sound. Eisdheim states: "timbral blackness is not the resonance of a particular type of body; instead *it resonates in the listener's ear.*"<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to Eidsheim's understanding of the voice as socially constructed, I encountered many scholars, even in feminist musicology, who consider the voice an

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<sup>24</sup> Eidsheim, "Voice as Action," 11.

<sup>25</sup> Eidsheim, "Voice as Action," 11.

<sup>26</sup> Eidsheim, "Marian Anderson," 660.

<sup>27</sup> Eidsheim, "Marian Anderson," 646.

essential marker, or “proof,” of cultural categories applied to the sexed body (male or female only, with no allowance for differences of sexual development). In this framing, “biological sex” is maintained as a system unchanged by “social gender,” without any post-Butler examination of sex as a gendered phenomenon (although the term gender is frequently used as a stand-in for sex, and occasionally vice versa). In this framing the voice, especially the singing voice, is understood as an “inescapable” characteristic of biological sex – sometimes even as a “betrayal” of the same.<sup>28</sup>

This belief is frequently taken for granted as an established fact, even in feminist texts such as Judith Pickering’s 1999 essay *“Mulier in ecclesia taceat”*: “Voices do have gender – when it comes to vocal music the instrument is a body and a woman’s voice and a man’s voice do have a different timbre.”<sup>29</sup> Lucy Green’s 1997 use of “betrays” is symptomatic of this position, as is her assertion that even in trying to escape vocal gendering, the singer is more tightly trapped: “Unlike instrumental musical sounds, the voice in practically all cases betrays the sex of its perpetrator. Voice and sex are immediately connected. In those few cases where a listener consciously cannot tell whether the singer is a man, woman, boy or girl, this in itself becomes a matter of a certain interest.”<sup>30</sup>

Cate Poynton outlines this cognitive process, even as she later goes on to raise a number of questions as to additional contributing factors: “Within this discourse of the ‘naturalness’ of the gendered voice, women and men speak differently because of different configurations of the vocal tract: male vocal anatomy differentiates itself at puberty from female vocal anatomy – end of story.”<sup>31</sup> Likewise, while Leslie Dunn and Nancy Jones acknowledge that there are multiple factors at play in constructing

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<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Wood’s chapter “Sapphonics” in the collection *Queering the Pitch* (1994) simultaneously questions and reproduces biologically essentialist interpretations of the singing voice, particularly in relation to trans singers. Wood cites the deeply problematic John Money as an expert on trans voices, who “finds in the fabricated voice a defining characteristic of transsexualism.” (32)

<sup>29</sup> Pickering, *“Mulier in ecclesia taceat,”* 100.

<sup>30</sup> Green, *Music, Gender, Education*, 30.

<sup>31</sup> Poynton, “Talk like a Girl,” 119.

a voice as male or female, they still drive home the inescapable nature of this construction: “Since both language and society are structured by codes of sexual differences, both the body and its voice are inescapably gendered.”<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps Terry Castle’s love letter to mezzo-soprano Brigitte Fassbaender is the clearest example of the application of this position, of particular interest to me as a fellow mezzo/alto, and because of the crossover, all-gender range of the alto register. Even as Castle describes the “strange androgynous timbre”<sup>33</sup> of Fassbaender’s voice, she denies the singer androgyny, placing her firmly within an “inescapable” binary system: “No matter how artfully ‘true to life’ the boyish gestures, Fassbaender-in-drag fools no one: the fact that the body is female, that the voice is a woman’s voice, remains inescapable.”<sup>34</sup> It is not enough to sound androgynous, or to change (theatrical) gender presentation: “The more dashingly Fassbaender pretends, the more completely she fails.”<sup>35</sup> Unintentionally, Castle’s words here illuminate one of the hardest obstacles for the transgender musician: that our honest presentation of our gendered selves will “fool no one” the moment we open our mouths to sing.

Finally, having fallen into a typically feminine form of music making, and having been betrayed as essentially male or female through voice itself, the (female) singer is gendered through the tropes and stereotypes surrounding the historical, cultural figure of the embodied woman singer. These tropes are intimately linked to other cultural ideas of sex, power, excess, and the limits set on women’s behaviour. Suzanne Cusick’s research on the death of Francesca Caccini gives a clear example of the ways in which a woman singer’s voice is fundamentally tied to cultural beliefs about her sexed body, and to the dangers of both/joint vocal and sexual excess. Cusick examines the uncontested claims that Francecca Caccini died of mouth cancer, asking: “Can Ademollo have transcribed the lower annotator’s cause of

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<sup>32</sup> Dunn and Jones, *Embodied voices*, 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> Castle, “In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender,” 220.

<sup>34</sup> Castle, “In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender,” 230.

<sup>35</sup> Castle, “In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender,” 230.

death uncritically because it matched his unspoken assumption that there was something monstrous and unnatural about a woman who was so miraculous in singing?"<sup>36</sup> Caccini, whose life was marked by an excess of voice, an excess of gendered outpouring, is understood, through this reading, to have died from that very same excess.

This kind of gendering of the woman singer and her body is, naturally, presented and analysed all the way through Susan Leonardi and Rebecca Pope's 1996 work *The Diva's Mouth*. It could be argued that the "diva" refers to only one kind of female singer, and yet the concept is so nebulous that any mezzo, contralto, or soprano who sings professionally as a soloist, whether in song or opera, would be hard placed to escape its pull. Leonardi and Pope examine an enormous range of cultural material, historical and fictional, academic and personal, and through it find a commonality of themes: the woman singer as uncontrollable, the woman singer as rapacious, the woman singer as the personification of a quintessentially female devouring sexuality. Above all, the diva is a *sexual* entity, and her voice and the use of it is implicitly and explicitly described in sexual terms. "From antiquity to the scene in *Truth or Dare* in which Warren Beatty wants Madonna's throat examined off camera, the female singer's throat has consistently been linked with her vagina. On the other hand, the diva's throat has also been repeatedly figured in phallic terms."<sup>37</sup> Wayne Koestenbaum's 1993 work *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* explores this phallic potential in depth, while Bonnie Gordon charts the genuine beliefs about the link between female vocalising and female genitals prevalent during Strozzi's era. Gordon writes: "The body parts that make speaking and singing possible affected those that make sex and reproduction possible. Articulated in the throat, gorgia induced the rapid closing and opening of the glottis, an action that paralleled the opening of the uterus imagined to accompany orgasm. The clitoris meanwhile was known as a little tongue."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cusick, "'Thinking from Women's Lives,'" 223.

<sup>37</sup> Leonardi and Pope, *The Diva's Mouth*, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Gordon, *Monteverdi's Unruly Women*, 31.

Returning to Terry Castle: through this sex-based lens, the woman singer appears not such as a musician than as a siren. Castle writes: “The great diva’s appeal is intrinsically erotic in nature, Brophy argues; through prodigies of breath control and muscular exertion – virtuoso feats easily reinterpreted as ‘metaphors of virtuoso performance in bed’ – she stimulates repressed sexual memories in her listeners.”<sup>39</sup> It is not at all clear whether or not the diva is always a willing co-creator of this reading.

Clearly, the *obviously* embodied nature of the vocal instrument (though nearly all instruments are reliant on bodies) has much to do with this framing. Dunn and Jones explain: “The anchoring of the female voice in the female body confers upon it all the conventional associations of femininity with nature and matter, with emotion and irrationality. More concretely, it leads to associations of the female voice with bodily fluids (milk, menstrual blood) and the consequent devaluation of feminine utterance as formless and free-flowing babble, a sign of uncontrolled female generativity.”<sup>40</sup> This association not only radically impacts the ways in which Strozzi’s music may be (mis)understood through performance, but also, and personally, how I – as musician and gendered subject both – might be.

If, in this framing, the voice is understood as representative of the reproductive/genital system, then it makes sense that qualities of the vocal sound – timbre, vibrato, flexibility – are also understood as facets of, or judgements on, the gendered and sexual body. Judith Pickering examines some of these assumptions through the particular lens of early music vocal production, and the fad for “pure” and “sexless” sounds. It is fascinating to see the ways in which these sounds are understood neither in instrumental terms, nor with an allowance for androgyny or gender similarities and shared spaces, but rather along a binary gendered line of being boy-like or anti-women: “Some question the inherent denial of female sexuality in the preference for the boy-like, vibratoless, thin, bodiless, non-

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<sup>39</sup> Castle, “In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender,” 201.

<sup>40</sup> Dunn and Jones, *Embodied voices*, 3.

expressive, clear and emotionally restrained sound of female interpreters of early music.”<sup>41</sup> Melanie Marshall, writing in 2015, further develops an understanding of this particular sound as being linked to racialised concepts of gender, with the obsession with “purity” in Early Music vocal sound found in some quarters revealing a link with the overwhelming whiteness and racial exclusion of British early music industry/culture.<sup>42</sup> Engaging with this research left me wondering if both the presence or absence of vibrato would mark my voice as inherently female and inherently sexual, inevitably reproducing harmful racialised framings and modes of erasure?

All of the answers I found to this first research question ended up producing more questions in turn. The works I consulted suggested that making music is an inescapably gendered practice for singers. Do these framings, then, hold true only for the singer, or do they then transfer onto the composer of vocal music? Does it depend on the gender of the composer? And what about the singer-composer – does the singer overshadow the composer, the composition further removed from the concept of “pure” music by the material intrusion of the singing body?

Specifically, I had more questions than ever about what this meant for me as a transgender singer, and as a singer of a singing woman’s vocal compositions. Am I expected to be and considered a woman already by the simple fact that I sing? With whose voice am I singing? The musician I am, the person who retrained as a singer so as to be able to express myself musically after physical impairment ended my chances of a career as a pianist, wants to answer: I sing with *my* voice. It serves *my* needs and advances *my* ambitions. And yet the lack of any awareness of trans singers and the binary division of male and female voices suggests that no matter how I sing, my voice is not heard as my own. By expressing a core, and personal, element of myself, am I only enacting my own misgendering and sexualisation in a

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<sup>41</sup> Pickering, “*Mulier in ecclesia taceat*,” 100-101.

<sup>42</sup> Marshall, “*Voce Bianca*,” 36-44.

manner profoundly at odds with my own understanding of my (modified, contested, alienated, and yet loved and re-created) body?

Am I even understood to be singing Strozzi's music, as interpreter to composer? Or is her music heard only as voluptuousness, a biologically essentialist gushing out of female sexuality, and my performance of her music as the same? Given the ways in which Strozzi is popularly represented and understood, does performing her music colour my voice with a greater degree of embodied femininity than performing the works of, say, Schoenberg? So much of what is written about (female) singing seems to be less to do with the music, and more to do with a mating call – it could be birdsong. Through that reading, is Strozzi's music even understandable as music? And what does that mean for me?

While I was frustrated by a lack of concrete answers, I was satisfied that exploring this research question had given me more to work with when it came to my personal writing: points to reflect on, bounds to work within, and further triggers for reflection and analysis. And so, alongside the notes on materials, and on the other parts of my projects, I began to write for and about myself.

### **Section Three: Identification and Over-Identification**

The deeper I went into my research on Strozzi (and the learning, rehearsing and performing of her music), the more I began to doubt that it was possible to separate out my feelings about the gendered nature of how she was and is received, and my feelings on the gendered nature of how I have been and continue to be received. And so I began to write: without a filter, without a proposed reader. I didn't pretend to be detached or impartial, and I let myself write without thought to style, grammar, or spelling. In this section, I would like to highlight some of these moments of stream of consciousness, and investigate how they can add to and enhance my research.

The first highlight I come to is from September 2017. A colleague had told me that the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition on opera containing the Bernardo Strozzi *Suonatrice* had described Barbara Strozzi as “probably” a courtesan. I was overwhelmed with emotion, writing:

Feeling rage – really angry and frustrated and a bit...that horrible feeling when other people are being wrong. Why so frustrated? Why so angry? After all, it was a line I believed during my masters, when I had just read the Rosand.

Why: because they ought to know better. Because it's lazy. Because it feels like a diminution of someone, a “sex sells” ways of reducing her legacy. Because there is no evidence to say that she was a sex worker. And IF SHE WAS – it feels like this framing distorts even that. Because it doesn't tell us anything of what her life was actually like – it just fits into a general scandalous/romantic myth of what a courtesan was. And that takes attention away from her achievements without giving us any insight in return. If she WAS a courtesan also, that wasn't what she chose to tell the world about. WHAT SHE LEFT TO US WAS HER MUSIC. It was her music that she made into her legacy – that she obviously must have worked very hard not just to create but to get published, to get patronage. So to keep bringing the focus back onto “did she do sex work” which – even if she did – she's still a fucking composer! – It feels like it's erasing who she was and what she left

Why does it hurt so much? Is it because I have so much experience of being misinterpreted by and misrepresented to others? Is this one of the things that draws me to Strozzi? Her unknowability – and the fact that it's her work that speaks most, not biographical detail – that with so few facts about her life, it's easy to concentrate on her musical voice as her speaking directly to us, as the real source of who she is.

And again, coming back to it – if that's what calls me to her so much, feels like a slap in the face to have IMPORTANT, INFLUENTIAL bodies/musicians/orgs erase her voice in favour of a rumour.

The next highlight came after reading Sara Pecknold's dissertation in February 2018 – another instance of overwhelming emotion, and a clear pattern emerging around and beneath these incidences:

“Immoral.” Almost certainly a courtesan. I'm so full of fury right now – and not just fury – hurt. That sense of injustice. And what does it matter to Strozzi? She's not here any longer. And you could argue that “immoral” is a description of how she might be perceived, not a judgment on her actual character. But I can feel the rage – the rage against something unjust – coursing through my arms, like I want to hit something, I want to break something. Is Strozzi becoming a stand in for other injustices in my life? Have I put my feelings of being misinterpreted onto her? What is justifiable anger at what feels like an ongoing sophistry – or, at least, a lack of allowance for nuance and multiplicity of meaning – and what is a banked up store of pain?

Writing down these feelings, and then re-examining them, brought to mind other memories that I had not so much suppressed as glossed over as par for the course. It was clear that my experiment in autoethnography could not be limited to ideas of the gendered voice and musical barriers, but must include the broader and more invasive matter of gendered reception as a whole.

How could I write about the various gendered interpretations made of Strozzi's life and music without acknowledging the weight of experience I bring to that analysis? I do not mean to imply that any person is free of gendered interpretation, but to acknowledge that in the very specific public rewriting of a life to suit a stranger's viewpoint, I feel as though I – a transgender person in the public eye – have a level of experience that isn't entirely common. It would be both dishonest to ignore the impact of this on my underlying biases, and foolish to disregard any potential for useful insight.

"Lester enacts genderqueer identity in various ways. One is in a preference for the pronoun *they* instead of *he* or *she* to refer to themselves. Another is in their ambiguous performance of gender. Lester has had top surgery to remove their breasts and wears their hair short in the back and sides in a typical male style but with a big shock of hair in the front, closer to a conventional women's style."<sup>43</sup> So write American academics Sonja Foss, Karen Foss and Mary Domenico in their 2013 book *Gender Stories*. If they had asked for my input they would hopefully have written differently. It is a profoundly dislocating sensation, to learn that complete strangers have written publicly about private and intimate aspects of your body through their own gendered language and in service of their own gendered meanings. It is genuinely funny to read such an incorrect analysis of one's own behaviour, and a cautionary insight into the errors of interpretation that can occur without possession of all the facts. The haircut of mine they are describing was, at that point, highly popular with hipster men in London; maintaining it was not part of an "ambiguous performance of gender" but a location-specific sign of masculinity. Even with the

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<sup>43</sup> Foss, Domenico, Foss, *Gender Stories*, 135.

benefit of living at the same time, the differences in our locations, communities, and personal experiences mean that the ways in which the authors described my body, my selfhood, and my motives did not match up to the lived reality of the same.

The misinterpretation of who I am found in *Gender Stories* is one of the mildest available in the public domain. Others, published in both more traditional media outlets such as *The Federalist* and *New Statesman*, and in online blogs and social media platforms and aggregates, are erroneous enough, and/or cruel enough, that I choose not to read them wherever possible. Despite that, I am highly aware of the ways in which these interpretations have shaped my life: they have impacted my career, my public profile, and my relationships with friends and colleagues. These moments of gendered evaluation and rewriting, and the concurrent blow to my ability to be believed and consulted as the final authority on my own experiences, have taught me a great deal about the capacity for misinformation to be believed as fact when it fits into pre-existing cultural gender narratives.

What can these experiences add to my analysis of Strozzi and her various receptions? Hopefully, a practical lesson in how far the gap can be between written record and lived reality, and a constant reminder that not one of us is writing from an unbiased position. Sometimes, in fact, the promulgation of the bias can be the point of writing, and it is not necessary to tell the truth (or the whole truth) in order to be published, let alone to send a letter to an employer or record a rumour. I cannot read anonymous “jokes” written against Strozzi and not ask why they were written, who they were written by, what prompted their writing, and how the narrative they conjure up relates to the events as they happened, through the multiple experiences of those present. I cannot give more weight to a brief, private aside describing Strozzi’s figure in intimate terms than to her own dedications. In the light of my experiences, the popular feminist injunction to #BelieveWomen, and my very real affection for Strozzi, I am far more inclined to trust her accusations of slander than the misogynistic insults thrown at her. This is not to say that these accounts – the *Satire* or the letter to Carlo II – are not useful. But it does prompt me, as a researcher, to work harder to understand the *total* meanings contained within

each text – and, as a fellow feeling human being, to remain open to the possibility that there is often smoke without a fire.

As to the gendered implications of the voice, in particular its supposedly inescapable link to the sexed body: what is described in academic and impersonal terms in the material I consulted is something I have lived with on a mundane basis for some time. One example in particular comes to mind, a rehearsal for a new contemporary opera in 2015, in which I was performing a male role. That rehearsal was our (the company's) first meeting with the director, an older man with a great deal of theatrical experience. To give a background to the work in question, he began to talk to us about masculinity, youth, and the ideal of young male beauty, and pointed me out as an example of the last (much to my delight). On hearing me sing, however, he changed his mind: “oh, it’s a woman.” Some level of confusion followed before an understanding was reached. Experiences such as that have often left me despondent about my instrument, about the bind of having my only means of musical self-expression simultaneously acting as the undoing of my gendered self-expression. Under and through the belief, expressed by so many, that vocal biology is gendered destiny, there seems no way of escaping the various (frequently oppressive) gendered meanings layered onto the use of the voice.

And yet I have experienced quite the opposite in other performance spaces, and wonder what that means, not just for transgender singers, but for broader questions of vocal meaning. I, myself, after many years in more radical gender spaces, do *not* hear voices in a strictly gendered manner. I know that the same is true for many people in trans and queer musical spaces – indeed, not only trans and queer, but in more experimental musical spaces in general. It is not only, in these audiences and with these musicians, that voices no longer fall automatically into a male/female binary, but that they do not signify many of the ideas connected with voice and vocal composition that I have found in musicological texts, and in the more general classical music industry. When I approach my performance and understanding of Strozzi from this *other* mindset, I truly believe that we are not inevitably stuck in older patterns of hearing and receiving the music and meaning of song. It makes me

wonder as to how we could understand and present these works in new ways, and excited to begin experimenting.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, it makes me wonder about presenting the music in *old* ways; whether there's something in the modes of gender fluidity and vocal sound found in Strozzi's culture, and in her compositions, that link our two ages and experiences. The specific songs written by Strozzi for the castrato Adamo Franchi do not, on the page, present differently from the music (presumably) written for her own voice. There is no gender explicitly inscribed or even subtly implied in their setting. There is a slippage not only of gender but of desire; what would it have meant for Franchi and a (male) bass to have sung "for with you the sweet kiss of love is united" to each other in "Morso, e bacio dati in un tempo"? Or for Strozzi and a castrato, or Strozzi and a woman singer, to have sung together any of the SS or SA love duets? In many ways the gendered performance culture of Strozzi's Italian world feels far closer to our own than that of the *bel canto* opera composers, or of the authors of late nineteenth-century lieder. Bonnie Gordon examines this gender/sexual fluidity from the starting point of the woman singer vocalizing from an anti-woman male perspective, a familiar feature of Strozzi's work most obviously demonstrated in the parodic "La sol, fa, mi, re, do". Gordon writes:

Ventriloquizing male complaints against women, they at once taunted their listeners and exceeded the words they sang. Allowing this possibility reminds us that the gender of the poetic speaking voice, in this case male, does not necessarily correlate with the body that animated it. Again, one thinks of the countless Petrarchan odes to unrequiting ladies sung by women of the *concerto delle donne*, not to mention the frequency with which castrati performed female roles. That female members of the *commedia dell'arte* performed as men, and men in Rome routinely played

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<sup>44</sup> The recording from *Ursula's Arrow* that forms part of the aural component of this thesis is taken from one such experiment. Rather than trying to recreate an Accademia gathering in an anachronistic way, we decided to take core ingredients of a Unisoni meeting – music, debate, public use of rhetoric, and intellectual and artistic curiosity and display – and use them as a foundation for a contemporary social gathering. Meeting in 2019 in Shoreditch, hosted by a tech start-up, *Ursula's Arrow* used Strozzi's music, and discussions of her life and legacy, as the focus for an evening of discussion on the topics of gender, marginalisation, and future creative and social developments in the arts. We were joined by audience of fellow contributors: creators working in visual arts, theatre, performance art, dance, many different genres of music, and gaming and technological creation, in both highly professional and amateur capacities.

female roles brings to the fore the very fluid attitude toward the envoicing of masculinity and femininity that pervaded a variety of performance traditions in early modern Italy.<sup>45</sup>

Returning to my diary, and from feelings of empowerment to those of disempowerment; the next extract I wish to present highlights the ways in which I was affected by an immersion in materials pertaining to cultural misogyny, exclusion, and the question of musical “worth” explored in Chapters One and Three. To work through the many representations and critiques of Strozzi’s worth, both moral and musical, and the broader arguments around gender stereotypes and the distribution of talent and compositional aptitude, resonated deeply with me in terms of my own experiences of being marginalised and made to feel unworthy of being a classical musician. The experience brought back old anxieties: was I worthy of performing the canon? Had I been attracted to a non-canonical composer because I had internalised the belief that I was not good enough for the Great Men of Music? McClary, reflecting on early feminist music projects and the efforts made to study and include women in compositional history, described the ways in which these projects were seen as “special pleading”<sup>46</sup> – I wondered if this project of mine might be seen in that light. One of the truisms I had been taught, from a young age, was that music was a meritocracy, and that the answer to marginalisation lay in becoming so brilliant that even those who hated you couldn’t deny your talent. If music was the end goal, then music could also act as the method of redress. I worried that, in focusing on Strozzi rather than, say Beethoven, on chamber vocal music rather than symphonies, on singing rather than conducting or composing, I was “proving” that I wasn’t good enough for the acceptance of the musical establishment, that I was no longer working hard enough to reach the top (whatever that might be). A highlight from my diary, May 2019:

a fear that this work doesn’t “count” – it’s not “hard” enough for “real musicology,” it doesn’t have enough of the analytic, of the “pure music” – too much body, not enough mind, too much that is nebulous, not enough that is clear and clean. The gender divisions there – between clarity and murkiness, pure intellect and muddled feelings. My fears that it will be judged as such, my internalized judgments of the same, and perhaps the fear that I am misgendering myself to the world – that I could have proved my

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<sup>45</sup> Gordon, *Monteverdi’s Unruly Women*, 16.

<sup>46</sup> McClary, “Why Gender Still Matters,” 50.

masculinity, but instead chose an “easier” option – failure of masculinity? Essential femininity?”

I am thankful, now, for these anxieties, because they forced me to consider why it was that I *had* chosen Strozzi – what had I found in her music, and what could that tell me both about Strozzi’s legacy and about the relationship, both imaginary and real, between researcher and subject, performer and composer.

An experience of misinterpretation and injustice was part of it. A sense of being denied was part of it. But the more I worked through those feelings, the more I had access to other memories, other emotions. In February 2018 I wrote about Strozzi, agency, and power:

Excitement at finding a woman composer, finally. Excitement at looking at the pieces on the page, the challenge of them. Seeing that there were so many duets, one of my favourite ways of performing. But, probably also, that first performance of “Sul Rodano severo” – it was so HARD. And it felt so incredible as I sang – such a challenge – but one that felt like it had little – not cheat codes – but written in a way that there ARE places to breathe, there ARE emotional reasons to do outlandish things and, therefore, a gut push that carries you through the virtuosity. From when I played the piano seriously, like finding a composer who just sits perfectly under your hands – however hard it is, it’s still suited to the physical instrument, like a beautifully made glove. It’s good to listen to – but PERFORMING IT – that’s a joy completely beyond that, because of the physical sensation of incredible challenge and also soaring freedom when that challenge is met.

Through this writing, I remembered the first time I had sung Strozzi’s “Sul Rodano severo,” and what it had meant – the turning point between loving her works and wanting to delve deeper, know more, and master her music. It had been for a concert with early music ensemble *Poeticall Musicke* in 2011, alongside a performance of Monteverdi’s “Lamento d’Arianna.” As the only performer on stage who hadn’t gone to a conservatoire, who was so visibly different, I was fighting with my own sense of not-belonging, not being good enough. And then I sang the Strozzi (May 2019 diary):

But the feeling it gave to me – that it was fucking hard music, really really virtuoso stuff, and I could DO IT, and it felt like I was soaring. I felt like I was proving something, to myself, but also to the audience, that a less traditional singer/from a less traditional background could do something hard, and do it well. And I love how

difficult she is, and how rewarding – that sense of taking on a challenge – but not a dry challenge – more like a gamble, a bet. It feels brave – and unapologetic.

And I love that.

From this place, and with these feelings, it does *not* feel like special pleading to want to study, perform, and promote such a composer. Nor does it feel like an argument to say that any musician can succeed “despite” their gender, “despite” their experiences of marginalisation. Instead, it feels like a proof that there is not one sole story of what musical success means, and that it is not only possible but exhilarating and rewarding to create a space for music and musicians who are both insiders and outsiders, successes and failures, known and unknown:<sup>47</sup> an argument for creating a more holistic, and innovative, toolbox for multiple new approaches.

#### **Section Four: What was learnt?**

As I came to collate my research and my writing, I discovered that I wanted to collect my final responses – not so much as a fixed conclusion, but to make clear to myself the value of what I had done, and to spur myself on to further exploration and action. Crucially, these findings have already enriched and expanded my performance of Strozzi’s music, and those experiences, in turn, are feeding back into the written components of my musical self: an interdisciplinary personal practice in the process of becoming.

So, what did I learn? Five things, the first of which is that there is untapped potential in examining why we are drawn to different composers, different music, regardless of whether these composers are within or without the standard repertoire. Working with Strozzi, and asking myself why, has forced me to consider the relationships I

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<sup>47</sup> One of the most important ways in which I have done this within my own artistic practice is in the creation and development of the *Transpose* trans arts event, begun in 2011, and (as of 2020) entering its fourth year at the Barbican. More than just a way to platform and promote trans artists, *Transpose* is a creative space in which performers and audience alike are invited to leave their assumptions – about gender, sexuality, disability, race, class, religion, and the false binary between subject and spectator – at the door.

have built with other composers. This has not simply provided me with an interesting personal insight, but has forced me to consider which composers I teach, how I teach them, which ones I write about and how, which ones I programme, and how I perform their works. It has made me consider the ways in which my students speak to me about Beethoven, and how they have been taught to do so by my (not-so-secretly hero-worshipping) attitude towards him, itself a product of my own teachers' presentation of his works and received personality. It has made me think differently about how I perform Mozart: I can understand how my "fear of getting it wrong" with his works is due to his place in the musical hierarchy, and how that fear has impeded my ability to sing his music to the full extent of my talents.

I very much doubt that I am alone in these feelings, and I am excited to think of what a greater openness around this process of self-analysis could do for our musical cultures. It would, I believe, lead to greater innovation around the concept and practice of canons and canonicity, and would hopefully allow us to take greater risks with new works and new composers, and old composers and old works in new ways.

I echo Tony Adams and Stacy Holman Jones, who write:

My experience – our experience – could be and could reframe your experience. My experience – our experience – could politicize your experience and could motivate and mobilize you, and us, to action. My experience – our experience – could inspire you to return to your own stories, asking again and again what they tell and what they leave out.<sup>48</sup>

The second insight I finish with is the fact that I have no interest in remaining quiet about my desire for true equity in musical organisations and cultures. It is a driving motivation behind this work, and I believe that it is an asset, not a liability. I want to be art of a musical culture which is fundamentally honest, and that involves an honesty about what it is that we do and why – our goals, and why others should care. At the end of my diary writing experiment, I wrote:

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<sup>48</sup> Adams and Holman Jones, "Telling Stories," 110.

I can't pretend to be disinterested, some kind of dispassionate outside observer. I don't just want to observe these elements of musical life, analyse them, learn more about them and disseminate this knowledge. I want to CHANGE things.

- I want to see Strozzi regularly performed – not as a one off for a season of women's music, or always on International Women's Day, but as a regular feature of professional, student, and amateur music making.
- I have problems with the idea of canon – and yet I still want to see Strozzi included in music syllabuses, exam syllabuses, in schools and universities.
- And then it's not just Strozzi – that's a focus of my desires, but hardly the whole desire. I want true gender equity in this field that I love. I want a gender equity that understands that gender is raced, gender is an economic category, gender is about more than cis men and cis women. Because I believe that we are capable of being better than we are. Because there needs to be a space for me in my chosen field.
- How am I meant to separate out the research I am doing with the reason why I am researching? Am I meant to be dishonest and pretend that I have different motives?
- Can't research without owning your biases. Can't perform without bringing the whole self to the task. So I'm doing both here.

The third thing that this autoethnography has taught me is that there are others in music who feel similarly, and that I would like to work on the ongoing project of building links between us, of fashioning and maintaining community. Reading Sam de Boise's 2018 paper "Gender Inequalities and Higher Music Education" has been a special experience for me, and not only because it shows that other musicians care, that other people are working so hard to make things better. It is special because it takes the kinds of conversations I am used to having in private, and makes them not only public, but public in the academic context of the Cambridge University Press. de Boise's paper is the first musicological paper I have read that acknowledges the existence of trans musicians, and works from a position of intersectionality. Writing like this makes me feel as though I too can speak out:

Vitally, intersectionality means both recognising intersectional representation in existing selection procedures and questioning how aesthetic traditions are represented *in* HME and *within* subjects. An "additive" approach to intersectional representation...alone, does not disrupt the classed, gendered and ethnic hierarchies on which institutional aesthetic priorities are based.<sup>49</sup>

Conversely, it saddens me deeply to read feminist musicologists lament a demise of feminism in music. This demise is certainly not something I have experienced, but it

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<sup>49</sup> de Boise, "Gender Inequalities," 34.

makes me wonder how much our message is getting through, how much material change is taking place – and both of those queries underscores a need for community, and for shared struggle. Ellen Koskoff, writing in 2014, asks:

What had happened to real women and men in real-life gendered musical contexts? Why had the revolutionary attempts at feminist post-structuralists to dismantle the rigidity of the self-other binary not yet completely revolutionized our ways of thinking and talking about women, men, and musics?<sup>50</sup>

Later in the same work she writes: “Today, when many young people do not know (or care much) about feminism, or see it as some historical relic, it is sometimes difficult to believe that this wonderfully energetic movement still exists. Perhaps it no longer does, at least under the name *feminism*.<sup>51</sup> Even as I feel left by her binary division of gender, I absolutely feel like part of a feminist musicology, a community of feminist academics who are part of a long tradition. And the best way of honouring that tradition seems to be to work to create long-lasting change.

Fourthly, the process of self-reflection involved in creating an autoethnography – particularly as to the ways in which I have been excluded from musical spaces – forced me to acknowledge that I am not without power and status. It has made me consider the ways in which I am unfairly privileged by society – through being white, and through being middle class. Melanie Marshall writes: “most early music performers in Britain are white or can be read as white. The predominant racial makeup of British early music ensembles is an outcome of exclusionary policies or practices at different levels.”<sup>52</sup> The ongoing problem of whiteness in classical and/or academic music spaces and organisations is one in desperate need of dismantling. It would be easy, without true self-analysis, to dwell on my own marginalisation and forget the ways in which prejudice and exclusion play out on many fronts, against a great many people. But as I wrote to myself:

One of the ways in which I inhabit a position of power is in taking up the voice of the scholar – the academic. Even holding the precarious position of many PhD researchers/early career academics, important to note that there is still power.

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<sup>50</sup> Koskoff, *A Feminist Ethnomusicology*, 157.

<sup>51</sup> Koskoff, *A Feminist Ethnomusicology*, 180.

<sup>52</sup> Marshall, “Voce Bianca,” 37-8.

Particularly something powerful about the academic writing voice – inhabiting that supposedly not only neutral and objective place, but a place apart, from which you can look at the world and analyse and comment. That's a place of power, deliberately and un-deliberately constructed. And I need to reflect on that, even as I find myself historically and sometimes even now disempowered within this framework.

Having realised and owned that fact, I now feel in a position to begin using it to create positive change, not just for myself or people immediately like me, but for broader campaigns of social justice and equity in music.

Fifth and finally, what I have taken away from this experiment is a personal clarification of both the benefits and limits of an academic musical inquiry, the insights available from and the boundaries to this project. This cannot be a definitive study of Barbara Strozzi: the living person, the music that has remained, and the hundreds of interpretations that have been created, have faded, which continue to spring into existence. The very multiplicity of meaning encountered throughout this work, in the contrasting reflections and recreations of this one person, forces the researcher into the knowledge of multiple sites of knowledge and modes of meaning *in total*. None of which takes away from, but only enhances, the potential of the material legacy left to us: Strozzi's written music.

One of the meanings that I take from my study of Strozzi is that it is possible – preferable even – to defy convention for the sake of artistic and intellectual expression. I can imagine her, speaking her own truth from the past, and feel inspired to speak my own. Kitrina Douglas and David Carless write:

*the history of anything does not exist – it is instead an illusion, a fiction, or a fallacy because there can be no one definitive telling of any story, history or otherwise. History, like any other story, is subject to amendment, development, alteration, expansion and change – forever re-written as new insights, stories, perspectives, contexts or understandings are uncovered. And history, like any other story, depends on who is doing the telling.*<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Kitrina & Carless, "A History of Autoethnographic Inquiry," 84.

When it comes to Barbara Strozzi, right here and right now, I am the one doing the telling. Through my performances of her works I am telling my own experiences, and the legacy of her experiences as I understand them. I am taking the self-knowledge gained through interacting with her works, and feeding it back into the performance of said works in a celebration of the inter-dependent collaboration between composer and performer. I am using what I know of myself through her to increase others' understanding of her through me.

It is because of Barbara Strozzi, and the work of hundreds of other musicians and scholars inspired and confounded by her, that I am able to take ownership of that knowledge, and all of the possibilities it contains.

## Conclusions

As an interdisciplinary study of both Barbara Strozzi's life and music, and the multiple gendered interpretations and meanings attached to and implied by various representations of the same, this work has approached the research subject and the researcher in an holistic manner. Rather than isolating Strozzi as exceptional woman or titillating oddity, I have placed her life and works in historical context, just as I have centred my own work in the context of the feminist musicological tradition and the broad field of musical performance. This thesis has addressed the most pressing gaps in current Strozzi scholarship; it has also argued for a new approach in presenting Barbara Strozzi.

The conclusions of this work are fivefold. First: that the majority of representations of Strozzi perpetuate gendered tropes of musicking women. The most common of these framings – of the exceptional woman, the embodied woman/siren, the virgin/whore, and the repeated asking of the “courtesan question” – do not adequately address or allow for the full breadth and depth of early modern Italian women’s experiences, but instead sustain misogynistic sophistries. I believe that I have demonstrated the fruitlessness of these framings, and propose they be abandoned in favour of more informative and factually grounded representations.

My second conclusion is that it is essential, when seeking to increase the reach of music by women composers, to address methods of representation. Increasing the representation of Barbara Strozzi and her fellow women composers without examining the ways in which they are represented is not, in and of itself, a guarantee against cultural and structural misogyny. In fact, depending on the method of framing, these unconsidered representations could further serve to strengthen those selfsame bigotries.

My third conclusion emerges from the first and second, from the general to the specific: that many, if not most, of the ways in which Strozzi is popularly presented

actively or passively “unlearn” what is actually known of her life and culture (to use Tuana’s phrase). To more accurately understand the realities of Strozzi’s life and self-presentation, it is necessary to fully incorporate both the currently available primary sources (including the full *Satire* and Strozzi’s letters, dedications, and song texts) and wide-ranging resources, primary and secondary, speaking to the true complexity of seicento Venetian women’s lives. Based on the data currently available, I recommend a reading of Strozzi’s family life through the widespread Venetian practice of concubinage.

Fourth: I conclude that it is not only necessary but broadly beneficial to focus attention on Strozzi’s compositions in context with her musical and literary peers. Doing so allows for a greater understanding of her contributions to the Western Art Music tradition, particularly her developments to the seventeenth-century vocal style. Ideally, this attention should come from increases in both performance and analysis; as the music of a singer-composer, Strozzi’s works return enlightening insights through their performance.

Finally, this thesis shows that the processes by which a researcher can face the specific challenges of studying a more marginalised composer have broader applications for the general study of music. Based on my experiences throughout this study, I believe that autoethnography is an invaluable tool for analysing bias in musical cultures and musical research, helpful both for the individual researcher and for their potential colleagues/readers/audiences. More than that, autoethnography allows for a new understanding of the performer-composer relationship, suggesting new and more deeply informed ways of performing.

Throughout this thesis, I have worked from the foundational premise that the music of traditionally sidelined composers is not, and should not be treated as, an “add-on” to the main matter of the classical music canon. With this time spent in consideration of, and communicating with the music of Barbara Strozzi, I believe I have justified the benefits of this approach.

## **Appendix One: A new translation of the *Satire contro gli Unisoni* by Gregorio Bevilacqua**

### **Notes by Gregorio Bevilacqua**

#### **Satires against the Unisoni<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Satires and other [things] gathered at the Accademia degl'Unisoni in the house of Giulio Strozzi**

Playful sentiments had in Parnassus at the Accademia degl'Unisoni. Characters: Apollo, Aristotle, Plato, Plutarch, Guicciardini, Seneca, Bernia, Verieno, Momo and many other virtuous men.

His Majesty Apollo, on the morning of Monday the 9<sup>th</sup>, the day that was intended for the amusements, after sending many orders of biscuits for the Italian poets,<sup>2</sup> and surrounded by the intellectuals that came to serve him on that morning, began to speak as follows:

Apollo. How was the Academia degl'Unisoni that was expected to gather yesterday evening at the court of the Most Serene Republic of Venice?

Seneca. I did not want any intercession, as I understood that the author's state was less than ordinary, so that I, not expecting anything worth of consideration, avoided to waste time, which is the most precious capital a virtuous man can possess.

Guicciardini. The author of the Accademia is not so detestable, excluding the fact that the dissoluteness of his life and the injustices of the fate have forced him into a state where he provokes laughter in all manners; he is a very good poet, and deserved the title of unordinary man from many.

Verieno. It would be expected of us that, since he is a Florentine, however broken, we would be willing to defend him.

Diogenes. Even dogs want to join one another with their voices, as long as they hear the whining of another dog. In truth, I, who have not much consideration for people and, unlike Seneca, do not long for dealing always with princes, would have gone there more than willingly, especially as I understood that, among the Accademici,

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<sup>1</sup> The Accademia degli Unisoni can be translated as the Academy of the Like-Minded; it is also a clear pun on the word 'unisono', which indicates the unison (musical interval). I do not translate the name of the Academy in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Absolutely guessing here. But it might be correct.

Bolani, who, with his Pindaric Odes, made Your Majesty laugh so much the other day, was supposed to be there.

Bernia. I swear to the heavens that I pity this poor gentleman. He wants to be a poet in spite of the Muses and all those who laugh at his madness. I am sorry that he is a Venetian.

Apollo. This is of little concern, since all lights have shadows, and my own poetry<sup>3</sup> was not received as spotless. But let us Diogenes explain why he did not want any intercession.

Diogenes. I intended to enter, but since I understood that chairs and money were needed, both things that I could not help myself with, because of both my poverty and my intellect, I decided not to take the risk of a refusal.

Plato. What? Do the Accademici have to pay, then?

Socrates. If they pay, you ask, eh? They are robbed.<sup>4</sup> Actually, they use the allure of pleasure and the enchantments of beauty in order to plunder wallets. For this reason, I do not find appropriate that business of theirs with the two violas used to explain the aim of the Academia: something made of silver and gold would have impressed the gentleman more.

Verieno. It seems to me that it could not be more appropriate: their name is Unisoni, which means a single sound, that is that of monies, despite they deal with scholastic discussions and musical silences.<sup>5</sup>

Apollo. Is it possible that none can inform me of what happened?

Socrates. I believe that it is difficult to find any virtuous man who wanted to enter [the Academia].

Bernia. Do you maybe think that virtuous men would be afraid of being in the house of a Florentine?

Verieno. Say also that he is a poet too, that would not be forgiven to whatever beautiful beard.<sup>6</sup>

Bernia. Do not speak ill of poets, as you would speak ill of yourself.

<sup>3</sup> Hard to tell if this is the word.

<sup>4</sup> The actual word is “scorticati”, literally “skinned”, but I am not sure this would have worked in English.

<sup>5</sup> I wonder what it is meant by “silenzio musicale”: perhaps a break with a musical performance?

<sup>6</sup> This must be a figure of speech, but I fail to get its meaning.

Verieno. I know that I am not speaking ill when I am speaking the truth. But here comes Momo, all smiling, and may he can give Your Majesty a [full] account about the Accademia.

Apollo. Gossiper?<sup>7</sup> Where does your laughing comes from?

Momo. I am laughing about a letter that Bolani showed me and which he wants to send to Achillini. In it he makes use of a thousand gallantries and concludes with this words: ‘and I even bow to that hand which invented such beautiful notions’.

Verieno. Who knows, maybe Bolani, who has his brain in his feet, believes that Achillini has his soul in his hands.

Apollo. We are waiting for some news from the Unsioni. Momo, where you yesterday evening at the Accademia?

Momo. Of course I have been there, and I have almost lost myself to get in.<sup>8</sup>

Apollo. And they say that gossip can enter easily anywhere!

Momo. Actually, if I was not introduced by a very important person, who was moved by my prayers, it would have been doubtlessly better for me to leave.

Apollo. And who was he who was so charitable with you?

Momo. I do not know his name, but from what one can see of him, he looks quite the gullible.<sup>9</sup>

Guicciardini. You should have entered on a gondola, as you were admitted without any difficulty, according to what I heard yesterday.

Momo. As a beast? Trust me, they would not find me spending five ducats for a key that does not even cost ten soldi. Listen! I was introduced and forced to find the stairs groping around, while the lights were not lit,<sup>10</sup> and the risk of breaking my neck several times was evident.

Seneca. It would not have been a great loss for the world.

<sup>7</sup> Don't know how else I could translate “buona lingua” = good tongue (Apollo is obviously being sarcastic in using the adjective “buona”).

<sup>8</sup> The original Italian is quite different, but makes little sense if taken literally. I believe this is more or less what the sentence means, anyway.

<sup>9</sup> Literally “he has a big prospective of beak”, which means absolutely nothing. ‘Becco’ however translates as gullible (and I believe in Florence they would still use this word in that sense). I tried to render what I believe Momo means in this passage.

<sup>10</sup> Guessing the meaning of “mentre i lumi v'era impotenza.”

Momo. I arrived to the hall just at the time when the music was finished, therefore I cannot provide my opinion of it; it is however true that I can only speak ill of it.

Plutarch. You would not be Momo [if you did not].

Momo. While I was observing the audience, which was tense and tired, that is badly satisfied, I waited with curiosity for the problem, which was this: 'Jupiter command to provide clothes for Cupid'.

Plato. The problem is indeed curious, but I like it, especially since it reminds me of the best years of my youth, and it seems to me that I dealt with it since I was in school.

Diogenes. Despite this problem was discussed a thousand times, at the present time is not appropriate, since the duty of an engaged Accademia is to remember charity first, while proposing to the gentlemen Accademici to dress Cupid.

Bernia. In truth, as far as I can see, in this Accademia all things seems to be interesting, while even in the discussions they cannot speak of anything but dresses and gifts.

Verieno. I, however, can only praise the invention of this problem, because after they dressed Cupid with words they proposed to dress Venus with facts.

Plato. And who is this Venus?

Verieno. With no doubts, Ms Barbara, who is supervisor and final/aim[??] of the Accademia.

Plato. And how would one call this third Venus, since she is by no means celestial nor vulgar?

Bernia. There were no names. One could call her, to distinguish her from the vulgar one, plural Venus, or, if it seems better, neutral Venus.

Apollo. Were there many Accademici who were discussing?

Momo. Few.

Apollo. Why?

Momo. Maybe because in a mercenary Accademia, where even the chairs are for sale, the Accademici do not want to discuss unless they are paid.

Plato. So, those who have spoken have been rewarded?

Momo. No, but they saved the two sequins [they would have to pay] if the wanted to be Accademici without having to speak.

Plutarch. Long live the archbishop Guerini, a prelate who is most perfect in all sciences, but who has no equals in all academic matters.

Momo. Did not he refuse to intervene because he was not made a prince?

Seneca. Is it possible for a man of letters to be so ambitious?

Momo. Are you pretending you do not know him? Don't you know that since he was afraid that Loredano would not grant him the title of "most illustrious", he wanted to rework the satires and sonnets?

Verien. Oh, by the way, Loredano: was he there?

Momo. He was, but for his usual ambition, he wanted to be among those who paid.

Bernia. Frangipane was certainly present, was he?

Momo. Far less.

Bernia. Why? He would have himself sent to India for a flask of wine.

Momo. This Accademia receives gifts, but does not give any.

Verieno. Maybe he was convinced by Loredano not to come there, so that he could play the buffoon in no other Accademia than his own.

Bernia. Businello was with no doubt there.

Momo. Neither him wanted to be there, since he has aspires to more than what he is.

Apollo. Who were the Accademici, then?

Momo. If you have patience, I can name them one by one and tell you all their discussions, upon which these most virtuous men can take their feelings.<sup>11</sup>

Apollo. Come on, what are we waiting for?

Momo. The first to discuss upon the problem was Strozzi, founder of the Accademia. He spoke so: 'Gentlemen, it will be like this, as for the principle of the Accademia: Cupid must be dressed in order to indicate that all the things we do here must be full of honesty'.

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<sup>11</sup> I suppose this means "they can express their opinions on the discussions."

Seneca. With such rules, it must be that he feared some vituperation.

Momo. Only his conscience know that, maybe. The he continued: ‘As for me, I am old and barely able to dress myself, let alone Cupid. It is however true that, since Cupid must be dressed on Jupiter’s commandment, I would do this according to my power, and which would be [dressing him with] *perpetuano*.<sup>12</sup> Cupid is an eternal god, thus his clothes have to be perpetual’, and this he concluded.

Guicciardini. And so, he cannot deny he is a merchant, as he cannot dress Cupid if not as a merchant.

Aristotle. If *perpetuano* was as perpetual in its essence as in its name, or if clothes were made only of names, this invention would have been indeed faint but not too inappropriate.

Bernia. This does not matter, as long as he made his conclusion understood, [that is] that he was making the perpetuity of the Accademia, so that those gentlemen would not be tired of contributing with a sequin a month.

Aristotle. It is true, but for a conclusion to be appropriate it is necessary that the means and preconditions are appropriate too.

Momo. You lose your minds over these logical terms; maybe the five ducats paid by those who want to be Accademici do not seem to you an appropriate precondition to such deduction. But let us talk about the second Accademico, who was a statue maker. And in truth, in speaking he wished for the quality of his statues, and while he was taken by fear and was shaking with both his tongue and intellect, he said that, if he could have had his strength marching his desire, he would have dressed Cupid with Spanish doubloons.

Bernia. If he found [Cupid] dressed like that, he would have rather stripped him.

Momo. I believe so. Then he went on saying that since he was poor, he would have dressed Cupid with a blacksmith smoked shirt, which would be appropriate for [Cupid] who is the son of a blacksmith.

Plato. This poor virtuous man, remembering that Cupid was the son of Vulcan, forgot his mother, the goddess of beauty and cleanness. But tell me, pray, in order to have this shirt matching the subject, would it not be necessary to paint his face and hands the way all blacksmiths normally look like?

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<sup>12</sup> I cannot find a translation for that; it would appear this might be a type of fabric, but it is hard to tell. From what they say afterwards, it seems it’s not a particularly fancy fabric, though.

Diogenes. This would not mean dressing him, but rather dressing him up. What gentle lady would then want to embrace him, in such bad state, in her bosom? It was proposed to dress Cupid in order to appease the ladies, not to make them abhor him.

Bernia. It must be that this big character [that he is] is in love with some gypsy woman or another person of low conditions, and thus he want to dress Cupid with clothes that are commensurate to the quality of his lady.

Plato. If that is the case, then he is forgivable, and he was not far from the truth, as he is of vulgar condition and mercenary profession.

Momo. Then you blame at least those who introduced such low-state artisan people to the Accademia. But let's talk about the third Accademico, who was Father Pallavicino.

Seneca. If he is the author of the *Taliclea* and the *Susanna* he has a good mind; he must have been more successful than the others.

Momo. He is indeed.

Apollo. What did he say?

Momo. That ladies would not dislike to see Cupid's naked pudendum, and that they would rather like [the idea].

Putarch. Maybe this one was closer to the truth than anyone else.

Plato. Certainly, he would have deserved the applauded even more, if such notions were appropriate to his profession.

Diogenes. He is forgivable, because, knowing that he was coming to the house of Ms Barbara, he must have left his decency in the convent.

Momo. And then they accuse me of being a gossip?

Diogenes. I am not speaking ill [of her], I rather want to imply that in the house of Ms Barbara there is so much decency that anyone who goes there can leave its own at their house without any danger.

Apollo. But what was his conclusion?

Momo. He showed, with beautiful erudition, that he would have taken the blindfold from Cupid's eyes and used it to cover the parts that were undressed.

Bernia. In sum, nowadays religious people tar everything with the same brush.

Plato. This seems to me a sacrilege, to touch that blindfold that the gods themselves wanted to put on [Cupid's] eyes for providence.

Momo. I am not surprised, as this is a holy person, and it is in their nature to disrobe even the altars.

Apollo. But who was the fourth Accademico? Are we going to finish by the end of the day?

Momo. It was Paolo Vendramino.

Verieno. Did he speak?

Momo. Why shouldn't he have spoken?

Verieno. Because in the Accademia of Loredano he always abided by [the rule of] silence [when discussing] problems; actually, he was such a strict observer [of this rule], that on two occasions when he had to give a lecture he delivered the same speech in praise of silence.

Bernia. This is not very surprising, since I know that Francesco Grimani, in the same Accademia, every single year delivered the same [speech] in praise of whores.

Plutarch. I cannot blame this gentleman for celebrating their<sup>13</sup> anniversary; neither is improper for anyone to keep praising his own mother.

Momo. Here there are far worse Momos<sup>14</sup> than myself, despite they are not considered as such. Enough! Vendramino wanted to discuss without fearing anything, because he had little to say and much time to get prepared.

Apollo. But what was the content of his speech?

Momo. He dressed Cupid with Ms Barbara's music sheets, as a means to praise her. And that dress could not really be made of anything else than paper, as he first put [his speech written down] on paper and then committed it to memory.

Bernia. What an invention! Did he think he was dressing caviar or tuna?<sup>15</sup>

Momo. This Vendramino is such a hateful and evil character that I believe he wanted to dress Cupid with paper so that he could then set him on fire.

Verieno. In the poems that he wrote, he is only able to steal [from other poets], thus, even in public, he could not help stealing Ms Barbara's music sheets to dress Cupid.

<sup>13</sup> I.e. the whores'.

<sup>14</sup> I guess he means that they are even worse than himself with gossiping.

<sup>15</sup> Not entirely sure here, but cannot really think of anything else that would make some kind of sense.

Socrates. However, I do not dislike this invention at all: maybe he wanted to let one think that, by dressing Cupid with music sheets, he did not think about the matter of the problem at all, but he made use of what chance made available to him.

Momo. You are mistaken, as in delivering his opinion the words came out elegant, and there was no sentence that did not feel enlighten [by reason]. It is actually true that this poor gentleman encountered a bad luck, since he was convinced that, by praising Ms Barbara, he deserved to receive the prize from her for having spoken best, but the whole thing went differently, because a woman is a beast that cannot be captures with praises.<sup>16</sup>

Apollo. Enough. And who was the following [speaker] among the Accademici?

Momo. Grimani, whom Bernia named earlier.

Seneca. Did he by any chance spoke better than anyone else?

Momo. I do not know, but I know that he made [everyone] laugh more than anyone else.

Aristotle. This is a task for a fool, not an Accademico, and I am more astounded by this gentleman as I always understood that he is more of a satirist rather than a comedian, and that he had more brain for tearing apart rather than amusing.

Diogenes. Perhaps he ceased to be one of my disciples, as he saw that Scapino, by making [people] laugh in the theatres, earned more than I could make by biting my barrel.<sup>17</sup>

Apollo. But what was his speech?

Momo. He opened with an abysmal sentence.

Plutarch. The writings of Merlin are works of great intelligence, but he who wastes time I studying them has little wisdom.

Momo. He said that it was madness to dress Cupid, who undresses everyone.

Verieno. He is right in telling this, as he was indeed disrobed of his beard and hair.

Bernia. Grimani, who had robbed maybe more than a hundred whores, will call 'effect of Love' that which is a defect of his predatory nature.

<sup>16</sup> Wow, that's awful!

<sup>17</sup> One of the anecdotes about Diogenes was that he used to live in a barrel (I cannot say whether wine was included, though).

Apollo. In the end how did he conclude?

Momo. He dressed Cupid with rags.

Plutarch. Indeed, he could not make his poverty of intellect more obvious than by dressing Cupid with rags.

Momo. Let me speak. He dressed Cupid as a tramp so that a man and a woman, by being together, would mend his clothes.

Aristotle. I cannot understand this. Does he who dresses as a tramp need to be mended? Cupid had to wear it, and not man and woman. Thus the conclusion about mending fails with Cupid, but maybe he remembered that he is a male.

Momo. He blushed, and with this I believe that his reasoning could not receive any opposition.

Bernia. Those who know Grimani know that he did not see his mistake, as he never makes a distinction between males and females.

Aristotle. How did the audience find such disproportionate conclusion satisfactory?

Momo. I did not notice anyone who was displeased with it, while the end of his speech was accompanied by a cheerful applause, as it is common use in comedies.

Apollo. Who spoke afterwards?

Momo. A certain nobleman of the Moro house.

Socrates. In truth he is a good character, and I understood his speeches are [accompanied] often with great applauses. I am very surprised that he lowered himself to such an assembly.

Seneca. He must have been harassed by Ms Barbara's prayers, as he has a natural predisposition to serve and please all sorts of women.

Apollo. But how did he perform?

Momo. Very differently from the usual.

Verieno. Perhaps to show that he did not want to compete with those who are lower than himself.

Momo. He, being the most generous, gave three dresses to Cupid: one made of leather of his lady, who must have been one of those that can be skinned, the other

of base metal<sup>18</sup>, and the third one of wax; all of the three are quite cheap. I know he would have dressed him with gold, but his mother, who is not pleased by the excesses of his generosity, only grants him air.

Verieno. Momo, contain your mendacity, and have more discernment with your tongue, so that the others can have it in their hands.

Momo. In sum, you do not want these Venetian gentlemen of yours to be touched by anyone, but they are not without defects.

Apollo. Let's move further. Who started to speak afterwards?

Momo. Moro was the last one.

Diogenes. Didn't Bozzani speak?

Momo. He was not even in the Accademia.

Diogenes. Why?

Momo. I, in truth, do not know the reason, but it might be that, having heard of a chain that was behind the door and fearing that it was destined to him, he wanted to avoid this danger.

Apollo. Who, among these, had the prize, then?

Momo. Grimani, and it was given to him by Ms Barbara, who was singing gently.

Bernia. Grimani? It is clear that women always go after the worst.

Momo. Who knows? Maybe, as a woman who is used to handle a needle, she understood the speech about mending and patching better [than the others].

Verieno. I do not wish that these double entendres would damage the honesty of Ms Barbara, who proclaims to be a virgin.

Bernia. To claim and to be are different terms, however she seems most chaste to me: whereas she, being a woman and being used to being free, could spend time with some lovers, she nevertheless addresses all her affections to a castrato.

Momo. Actually, she is so honest that she can unleash her lusts with castratos.

Apollo. But what was the prize?

<sup>18</sup> I am guessing, because the original has “Alega” (or so it seems to be), which might be an archaic form for “lega.”

Momo. A very beautiful satin and golden flower.

Verieno. I admire, in this, the genius of Ms Barbara: she wanted to give a satin and golden flower to Grimani in order to warn him that, if he wanted to dress Cupid with rags, she, however, wants clothes made of gold and satin, thus, for the future, he shall moderate the poor quality of his thoughts.

Apollo. What happened next?

Momo. Ms Barbara instructed that Grimani would have proposed a problem for the new session. He, after seeking advice from Moro and Vendramino for a long time, proposed: for what reason there are two Cupids/Loves?

Plato. This is my *Therote et Antherote*.<sup>19</sup>

Momo. He, however, was not able to express himself like that, but said: why does Cupid/Love disguise himself as double?

Bernia. I am not surprised that Moro suggested this problem to him, as his loves were always double; I am surprised by Vendramino, who, in order to prove himself faithful to his Angioletta and declare that he only has one love, wounded himself and almost got himself hanged several times.

Momo. I do not know so many things. I know quite well that no other problem could have come out of Grimani's mouth, while he used to types of Cupids/Loves as a prompter.<sup>20</sup>

These intellectuals continued [to talk] further, but the announcement of the Spanish loss of Bredà interrupted their discussion. Hence, Apollo left in haste dismissing the meeting, in order to bring comfort to the Spanish monarchy, who, after these announcements and with little decorum, was making a thousand improper follies.

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<sup>19</sup> ???

<sup>20</sup> I could not find anything on “inderario” (and I think the reading is correct), except the Latin verb “indor, -ere,” which can mean “to suggest” – hence my translation “prompter.”

**To Giulio Strozzi**  
**[from] the Nameless Accademico**

He who does not have restraint in throwing insults, should at least have the patience to suffer the [consequent] resentments. Because, if you do the opposite, the pen will turn into a club, thus deserving the insolence of he who, having made satires of others, has no [will] to suffer reading any on himself. Be aware that, on his own advice, this Momo who [likes to] joke, has more insolence than tongue. Thus, make sure that you enjoy in peace the outrages made to you by those who want to pay the Devil's tithe with their skills.<sup>21</sup>

Parnassus, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1637.

Playful sentiments had in Parnassus at the Accademia degl'Unisoni. Second part.  
 Characters: Apollo, Aristotle, Plato, Seneca, Plutarch, Guicciardini, Socrate, Avicenna, Bernia, Verieno, Momo and other virtuous men.

His Majesty Apollo had favoured the Spanish monarchy with his assistance for several days. This poor lady<sup>22</sup> was afflicted by the Gallic disease, which, excessively tormenting her with the loss of Bredà, could not find any relief except with some golden *pirole*<sup>23</sup> from Genoese gentlemen mixed with some pearls from the East. Thus, His Majesty, in order to lighten up the sadness of her hearth, which was until then afflicted by the disease, on Monday morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> [of the current month?], had the intellectuals [...] as customary, and spoke to them as follows:

Apollo. Gentlemen, a bow that is always stretched will break; it is necessary for those who do not wish the death of their hearth to lighten up their hearth. Thus, today, which is the day destined to the amusements, I expect the ordinary entertainments from our discussions.

Seneca. I praise His Majesty's idea, and I always professed amusement in my books. It is however true that it would be appropriate not to mention any further word about the Accademia degl'Unisoni, because, since the things we have been discussing here have already been reported elsewhere, and this caused great commotion in the souls of those who cannot see beyond their own noses. Those who have taken offence are of the first nobility, and I know, at the cost of my own blood, how dangerous it is to provoke the scorn of those who can do what they want.

Verieno. You do not know the Venetian temperaments.

Guicciardini. I know that some are just like that fish that has a sword on his forehead and then they do not have a hearth in their chest.

<sup>21</sup> ... whatever that means!

<sup>22</sup> I.e. the Spanish monarchy ("monarchia" being feminine in Italian).

<sup>23</sup> Sorry, I am not even sure that's what is written in the original, but could not work something out ...

Verieno. Why don't you say that they are Jupiters that have lightning to scare rather than punish?

Bernia. Indeed, the comparison fits well, as it is evident that they love catamites very much.

Apollo. But who are those who feel offended, except those [who were] involved?

Seneca. They are so many that I do not know the number; they want to split, cut, flay, break down, and a thousand other things that not even a Spanish Captain would say in a Comedy.

Apollo. Why [do they want to do] so such things, if they are not named?

Plutarch. They are the Suitors of this new Penelope, who differs from the old one only in this [feature]: while the latter had few lovers whom she did not gratify, the former, on the contrary, has many of them, and makes sure that they are all satisfied.

Seneca. In other words, since it is customary for Momo to speak ill only of the great, these, who are not of any great condition, are not used to suffer the criticism of the good intellects.

Apollo. What did those involved say, then?

Seneca. Strozzi is about to become insane.

Bernia. He will not have to struggle much. He should not make such a fuss, however, as Momo has finally given him a great respect, being able to say about him much more than he actually said.

Apollo. What could he say worse [than what he said]?

Bernia. He could have said that in Rome he served *per fas et nefas*<sup>24</sup>; that he was a deconsecrate priest; that, being a clumsy poet and unable to enter Parnassus, he wanted to have a workshop in the public square with the mount Parnassus on its sign; that after stealing much money from his heroic friends he wanted to murder Trevisano; that in the [business of] making the decorations for St John and St Paul, he stole a large number of *scudi* from the Florentine nation with a thousand excuses; that for many years he held in his house, under the name of Music, a profitable trade, being not ashamed to act as a procurer for his daughter and a thousand other women, whom I am not mentioning, as I do not want to take Momo's job and offend Your Majesty's ears.

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<sup>24</sup> "Through right and wrong."

Verieno. I remember a madrigal published shortly after his *Venetia edificata*,<sup>25</sup> which he should have more rightfully named ‘destroyed’ or ‘impudent’.

Apollo. Let us hear it.

Verieno. Here it is:

*To say how founded was  
Beautiful Venice,  
It requires more than a bad Tuscan language.  
It was founded by Him who has the dominion of the Heavens;  
Thus it has to be praised with high and divine style,  
And not by that madman and blockhead Strozzi,  
Born a bastard, son of a bastard.*

Apollo. And the other who were named, what do they say?

Seneca. Guerini, Loredano, Moro, Bollani, and Pallavicino do not take into account Momo’s gossips, they despise them and laugh about them.

Apollo. I am impressed by Bollani, and indeed this action makes him worthy of all praises; thus, in future, and despite his Pindaric Odes, I forbid anyone to call him crazy. But what did Francesco Grimani say?

Seneca. He is doing quite well, comforting himself at the idea that sons are not accountable for their mother’s debauchery.

Apollo. How did Vendramino feel [about this]?

Seneca. Despite him having learned the sycophant’s art in Rome, he practices it very badly, as he is not capable of dissimulating at all. He makes a lot of threats; woe to the world, if vain [words] could have teeth!

Plutarch. It is typical of those dogs that cannot bite to be ever barking. He, among others, has little strength and even less judgment, and it is typical of empty drums to make much noise when they are beaten.

Apollo. What did the statue maker talk about?

Seneca. That poor man cannot neither speak nor keep quiet, he would rather stay off this meeting, and he would doubtlessly leave, if he could have back the money that Strozzi owes him.

Apollo. But whom do they blame for having lowered the past entertainments of the Parnassus?

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<sup>25</sup> A work by Giulio Strozzi, literally “Venice built.”

Seneca. Many have been named. Some claimed that it was Lanzoni, but it is known that he is not that ingenious. Others thought it could have been Businello, but since they could not see in him pearl water and diamond mills grinding stars and suns to produce divinity, they withdrew. There were those who blamed father Pallavicino, but they immediately took their opinion back, as he was not aware of so many details because he is a foreigner. Many suspected Giovanni Battista Tonetti, but he was able to defend himself so well that he routed this suspect. Everyone, though, agreed that the author was Loredano, as he cannot tolerate any other Accademia in Venice that is not his.

Verieno. And yet, he allowed Contarini destroyed it in his face.

Apollo. What could he say at the meeting?

Seneca. He claims to know not a thing, and presents great sympathies to his friends and the people involved. Hence, despite he could well be considered guilty, they pretend to believe that he is not.

Apollo. But what is the meaning of Momo's silence?

Momo. I keep quiet, because this meeting does not need Momo, given that everyone makes my job so well. Moreover, I do not want to talk further about the Unisoni, because they mistreat and also mock me, they threaten me too, and I had difficulties in leaving [the Accademia] freely; if I did not disguise as a musician, I would have been in trouble. It is true, however, that I do not fear their opinions and threats.

Socrates. You are right, since your divine nature is as far from their offences as they are from divine nature.

Apollo. Yet you are not afraid to be in Parnassus, where they will never happen to set foot. Come on now, speak about them this time only, and not anymore.

Momo. What would you want me to say?

Apollo. Something about the music.

Momo. I do not want to say anything about it, because it seemed [to be performed by] a choir of *berettini della Maria*<sup>26</sup> swans.

Apollo. Speak of those who discussed, then.

Momo. The first who spoke about the problem of the double Cupid/Love was Strozzi. He spoke while standing, maybe for the lack of chairs, which were all rented.

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<sup>26</sup> No idea what that means!

Avicenna. Quite the opposite. He wanted to stand so that his bile would stay down instead of suffocating him, as he spoke with too much anger.

Apollo. Have you also been at the Accademia?

Avicenna. Almost the entire Parnassus was there.

Apollo. Yet, the other day Socrates was saying that only few virtuous men would go there.

Plato. Actually, I wanted to be there only once, following the example of Your Majesty, who does not avoid, while crossing the heavens, to enter in the [constellations of] Cancer, Scorpio, and Capricorn. Moreover, I see that Your Majesty talks about it with great delight, despite being such a deplorable matter.

Apollo. Let Momo speak, and if he has forgotten anything you can take part and [mention] all the details.

Momo. Ms. Barbara offered a vase with water to the one who would have spoken best.

Diogenes. What a change. She gets drunk with wine then she presents the Accademici with water.

Avicenna. Ms Barbara did this with great cunning. Wine would have very much offended the hearts of the Accademici, which were already filled with anger against poor Momo. Hence, knowing the sickness that made them upset, she wanted to alleviate [their anger] by offering them water.

Bernia. If she added a piece of biscuit, then she would have treated them according to their merits.<sup>27</sup>

Plato. All of them are not poets.

Momo. And Strozzi was well aware of that, hence he said he was moved by the desire of that water.

Diogenes. If it is not something drinkable then it does not confer to Strozzi's stomach.

Momo. No, he was speaking only to serve those gentlemen.

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<sup>27</sup> That is, as criminals, who are allegedly fed with water and hard bread in prisons: I suppose what is intended here as “biscotto” is not really a biscuit, but rather some sort of cracker/hardtack.

Diogenes. He is right to serve those who pay his expenses.

Momo. He then said that Cupid/Love pretends to be double, because nowadays friends are double, as those who entered the Accademia as his friends, then sent him the satire as his enemies.

Seneca. He should also remember those to whom the entrance has been denied. Offenses are sculpted in marble.

Socrates. Actually, these have been sincere friends, because, leaving all duplicities, they freely told him the truth.

Momo. Then Strozzi complained about father Pallavicino, because, during the previous session, he had the occasion to see (he said) "your flaws, for which, with a quill torn from his wings, he would write our vituperations".

Plutarch. I heard him confessing the truth at least once.

Socrates. I do not know how the Accademici might like that "say your vituperations", as if he wanted to put those of his own together with those of others.

Momo. He did not speak for them, but he used that plural term in order to imitate great men, as he wanted to brag about him being a Prince of vituperations. However, I tend to praise Strozzi's ignorance, since he attributed the satire, which all hold against me, to Cupid/Love.

Guicciardini. Do not accuse him of being ignorant, as he spoke according to his conscience, and I think that you cannot speak ill of him, being more evil than truthful.

Bernia. Or maybe he knows of being such, as with speaking about him he attributes Momo's jobs even to Cupid/Love.

Momo. Listen to his conclusions: turning to the statue maker, who was next to him, begged him that, when he had a statue of Cupid/Love in front of him, he should have killed him with a hammer blow on its head.

Plutarch. He must think that Cupid/Love is a veal or an ox.

Momo. Actually, he must really think that, since he dealt with Venuses who are nothing but sluts, he has reasons to believe that Cupid/Love, their son, could be a veal or an ox.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Italian word that I translated as "sluts" is "vacche," which means "cows" but can also be used to mean "whores."

Bernia. What does it mean to be a mercenary? Because he is in charge of doing *beccari*,<sup>29</sup> even publicly.

Apollo. What did the statue maker say?

Momo. With his typical fear, he did not know what he was saying. Actually, rather than giving the reason why Cupid/Love is double, he just confirmed that Cupid/Love is double.

Bernia. This is a subject who has always put his affections into people who are his equals. Hence, it is not surprising that he was not capable of providing the reasons why Cupid/Love is double, as he always loved without any reason.

Apollo. Yet, what did he say?

Momo. Among a ridiculous amount of excessive concepts, I only remember that he concluded comparing Cupid/Love to Janus Bifrons in order to proof that Cupid/Love, with a face at the front and another at the back, is double.

Bernia. Maybe with his loves this gentleman has kissed both the front and the rear indifferently, thus, in order to make his kisses honest, he wanted to make [Cupid/Love] with two faces.

Apollo. Who spoke after?

Momo. A certain Dominican friar who goes by the name of Toretti, I suppose as an antonomasia.

Verieno. This Accademia seems to me to be similar to a ship from Padua, since one can find all sorts of people in it.

Bernia. Aren't there some Jews too?

Verieno. Isn't Strozzi perhaps one of them?

Apollo. What did this Toretti say?

Momo. With an awkward weaving of words and an insolent pretension [he spoke as if] he was declaiming or singing a long discourse, so that he confused my memory and I only remember that he praised Strozzi, Ms Barbara, and Grimani.

Bernia. He would not be a friar if he wasn't able to flatter.

Momo. He did this out of necessity, not for flattering, as he was fearing the lash that was waiting for him, because he is the author of the satire.

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<sup>29</sup> Sorry, I have no idea of what that might mean.

Guicciardini. It is true that being a friar he had enough malice to compose [the satire], but he has not enough ingenuity.

Apollo. Yet, what did he say about the problem?

Momo. I think he concluded that Cupid/Love is double because women, when they sell their love, they want *doppie*.<sup>30</sup>

Bernia. He cannot deny to be a friar, since he can only speak about money.

Aristotle. I, in truth, cannot find, among my own sophisms, a way to infer such conclusion, as being double is a different matter than needing *doppie* for the sake of Love. Moreover, women would take *cecchini* or *ducatoni*,<sup>31</sup> thus his Love would not be double.

Plutarch. Perhaps he only loved women who did not ask for more than *doppie* as their payment.

Momo. I think he is such a gentleman that he would remove the *doppie* if he, as a Florentine, would by mistake find himself in the house of some woman.<sup>32</sup>

Apollo. And who was the fourth Accademico?

Momo. Father Pallavicino, who seems to be without soul and without life when he talks.

Plutarch. He was instructed to speak modestly. Hence, it is not surprising if, talking against his own ingenuity, he spoke without life.

Momo. You did not understand him well, even though you say the truth. He seemed lifeless because he realised that he was lesser than Toretti, who was honoured by public applauses. Hence, jealousy and ambition humiliated him. It seems like you don't know [how] friars [are].

Apollo. But still, he must have said something good.

Momo. He claimed to be aspiring to the gossip, since he was subject to my criticism, and I am used to criticise the actions of the Gods only.

<sup>30</sup> This pun can't work in translation. A *doppia* (lit. "double") is a coin with the value of two *scudi* (hence the double-ness).

<sup>31</sup> Other types of currency. The *ducatone* (lit. "big ducato") is a large silver coin. The *cecchino* (a different spelling of *zecchino*) is a golden coin. Both, I suppose, are worth way more than a *doppia*.

<sup>32</sup> This is a literal translation; I do not really understand what he means, but most likely is some sort of pun.

Bernia. It seems as if he assumed to have arrived in the College of the Gods. In summary, friars, who are used to steal anything that is sacred, now want to steal deity.

Momo. Despite he is as arrogant as to assume that he is among the first intellectuals, I doubt that he would stay with the Gods for long, because he would surely remain with them for a short while, whereas he would impatiently run after Venus, unless he would first try to take Ganymede away from Jupiter.

Plutarch. I do not wish to get into further depths, I only know that aspiring to condemnations is a sign of begging for honour. But perhaps he, who is governed by his own desires, should only aspire to what suits his merit.

Momo. Do not mention his honour, because in his discussion he made a profusion of grandeur, being proud of being of noble birth, in order to reject every calumny against his reputation.

Verieno. Sure, his family is more than illustrious, but it is not enough to infer the nobility of his birth, because Grimani too has an illustrious surname, but his birth conditions are known.

Seneca. I have written in my books that he who, with words, claims to be noble, is usually known not to be such in his ways.

Apollo. But what did he say about the problem?

Momo. He said that Cupid/Love fakes ambiguity in order to mirror the ambiguity of the fabrication that is typical of love.

Guicciardini. This morning he did not speak if not well, because as far as ambiguity is concerned it would have been sufficient that he reflected on his own condition as a friar.

Momo. It is not my task to speak well. I know that he left me with much to think about, while in his conclusion he said that, in order to provide a more concise reason of why Cupid/Love is double, such reason is the necessity to distinguish a Roman [Love] from a Venetian [one].

Bernia. Don't you understand the meaning of these words? He must well know what sort of loves are practised in the Court of Rome.

Verieno. I believe that by Venetian Love he meant that of Ms Barbara, and by Roman Love that of Turchetto.

Momo. Then Grimani spoke, and he inferred that the multiplicity of Loves [comes from] the multiplicity of Venuses.

Plato. This was the necessity for every Venus to be fertile.

Momo. He made one out of his own caprice, called Testicular, from whom he claims satire was born.

Bernia. Indeed, that testicular head<sup>33</sup> of Grimani could not produce anything else than a Venus equal to himself.

Momo. Then he said that as the hare is double, since it can both impregnate and be pregnant by nature, thus for the same reason Cupid/Love is double.

Bernia. What an extraordinary state of mind this man has. In the past session he wanted to dress Love with rags, now he wants Him to be impregnated and play the part of both man and woman.

Momo. Who knows, maybe he was thinking about his mother or himself as a young man.

Seneca. How are these obscene words tolerated in the presence of Ms Barbara?

Momo. She does not fear words in public, since in private she does not fear facts [that are] compliant [with such words].

Verieno. One should not speak thus, as she was never been impregnated.

Momo. Let her thank the trend rather than the infertility of castratos.

Plutarch. I am surprised that they make so many condemnations against father Pallavicino, who spoke much more modestly the other time, whereas in the mouth of this person [i.e. Grimani] such dishonest concepts are celebrated.

Momo. They do not want him to avoid Ms Barbara's appetite, as he might satisfy her.

Bernia. Pallavicino would not be good enough? I believe he would not forget this to those [women] of Ca' Rampani;<sup>34</sup> moreover, I have been told that he is fiercely in love with her.

Momo. As if it isn't already enough, Ms Barbara would become a matter of friars, of priests, as long they have a [nobility] title.

Apollo. Did Vendramino speak?

<sup>33</sup> The original has a funny alliterative *testa testicolare* (it sounds a lot like [excuse the language] "dickhead").

<sup>34</sup> In Venice, this seems to have been the location of a brothel where older (and not particularly attractive) prostitutes used to work (hence, a *carampana* in Italian indicates a woman who is physically and morally repulsive).

Momo. I am not sure whether he spoke or just wanted to speak.

Apollo. What is the reason?

Momo. Since he did not have much time to think about the problem, as in the previous session his memory betrayed him. Thus, after a long mishmash of nonsenses he concluded in a way that none understood what he meant to say.

Plutarch. The poor gentleman can be excused, because his resentment for Momo must have blurred all the strengths of his soul.

Bernia. In the Accademia it is much better to lose oneself than to talk, while Momo does not know what to say about them.

Seneca. Perhaps Momo keeps quiet because he fear the confrontation, having heard Vendramino's rodomontade.<sup>35</sup>

Plutarch. Vendramino is well right to threat Momo, while fearing that if Momo keeps talking about him, then he could say worse things.

Momo. Actually, last time I gave him my respect and I did not want to discuss about his birth conditions or his habits—yet, there would be much to say about these.

Apollo. Let us move forward [with the story].

Momo. Vendramino was the last.

Apollo. Moro was not there?

Momo. He did not have time to participate as that evening he was busy with bringing the news to his ladies that he obtained an honourable office.

Verieno. In truth, he received it with [good] reason. Because he never needed honour more than now, when he finds himself in such assembly.

Apollo. Who obtained the prize, then?

Momo. Vendramino.

Apollo. How is this possible?

Seneca. If [the prize] was perfumed water, it should have been given to the statue maker, so that one would not smell the bad odour while he sweats [...] with the hammer and chisel in his hands.

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<sup>35</sup> Inflated/boastful talk.

Bernia. It should have been meant for Pallavicino, since he seemed that, while he was talking, he was short of his spirits and was going to faint.

Momo. It should have been meant for Grimani, so that, by washing his hands with it, he would have covered his thief's stench.

Verieno. In summary, Ms Barbara has a great ingenuity, since, having noticed that poor Vendramino was drained [of ideas], she wanted to assist him with water.

Apollo. Did Vendramino say anything when he received the gift?

Momo. He drew a [...] against me, saying: 'If I believed to be able to find Momo here, disregarding the value of this water, I would break this vase and drown him.'

Seneca. A trial worth of a Hercules.

Bernia. If one could be drowned in so little water, Ms Barbara would have already pissed on his head.<sup>36</sup>

Momo. Later they introduced the music, which was a harmonious bewilderment<sup>37</sup> indeed, so that everyone [...], and it as moreover accompanied by a number of dissonances; Turchetto concluded with a line worth of his mouth saying: 'My butt relishes about satires'.

Bernia. You are wrong in blaming Turchetto: he did not say anything without reason. He had just heard from Francesco Grimani that this satire was born from testicular foams, like Venus. Hence, it is not surprising that he, who is always so inured [to this sort of things??], had thought it was appropriate to his butt everything that comes from that area.<sup>38</sup>

In that moment, Galen arrived all panting, al informed His Majesty that the monarchy of Spain, who did not get from the Genovese Pills and Eastern Pearl nothing but a rising of fluids, was dying in the arms of the Count of Olivares and a Capuchin, who, instead of recommending Her soul, was confusing Her mind with hopes and purchases. Apollo, having dismissed the meeting without delay, run away with a multitude of physicians to bring all possible remedies to the salvation of such Princess.

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<sup>36</sup> While the vulgarity of the sentence is rather clear, I am not sure who is supposed to urinate on whom ...

<sup>37</sup> The actual word is "sconcerto", which twists the concept of "armonioso concerto."

<sup>38</sup> Clearly, this must be a joke, and a rather gross one, but the wording is hard to understand

### Vendramino's thefts punished by the Muses

Characters: Melpomene, Calliope, Terpsichore, Thalia, Urania, Clio, Euterpe, Erato, Polyhymnia, Cino de Parsi, Paolo Marini, Vendramino

Melpomene. Calliope, it is typical of the human intellect to err, this is one of the greatest extremes in the difference between us and humans.

Calliope. You speak the truth, because in addition to the facts that we, daughters of Jupiter and eternal with the infinite, are not forbidden to fly over the spheres and the Olympus, and can look into the two faces of Janus at our will, we are [...] the ideas of all sciences, while he [i.e. man], because of his broken wings, fell from the sky to this abyss [...] of a grave myth, so that he won't rise again. As a light substance, he comes to forget the things he saw and knew, thus, wandering most of the time in the labyrinth of ignorance, he is not able to discern truth from falsehood.

Melpomene. It is thus indeed, therefore it is not surprising that, as I was telling you, some were convinced that—apart from you, me, and Thalia, that is Comedy, Tragedy, and Epic—there were no other types of good poetry to be found.

Terpsichore. Every mortal has his opinion, like every body has its shadow. Nature has provided everyone with the curiosity of speaking, and everyone speaks according to his intellect. It is indeed true that many are mistaken and few have the eyes of an eagle to stare into the splendours of the truth.

Thalia. I enjoy greatly when I enter the mind of [...] those who write and had written. O how many extravagances I discern, o how many vanities are claimed as truthful and good with philosophical and glass<sup>39</sup> reasons.

Calliope. End such, indeed, are the [reasons?] of those who say that the aim of poetry is pleasure or convenience only by [...] convenience before pleasure.

Urania. These are trifles, o sisters, in comparison with the different opinions of great men about celestial fields.

Calliope. It is a presumption of human ambition, which does not know how to focus on the knowledge of domestic things, presumes to put [...] in the Heavens and provide explanation of things that do not belong to its ability. Hence it is not surprising that in attempting to elevate his [i.e. man's] weak understanding he gropes the luck of low-lives and [...].

Erato. Actually, I consider such exercise in speculating on the substance, quantity, and motion of the spheres is typical of man, because, since he was created by Jupiter, and having for centuries the citizen of the Empyrean observed at his own will

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<sup>39</sup> Meaning fragile, I suppose

the marvels that appear in those theatres,<sup>40</sup> [he] can more easily, with reminiscence, judge those things that he admired for many years rather than [...] to him as an unknown foreigner.

Euterpe. I am on your side, Erato: [...]<sup>41</sup> only to contemplate those ancient shores of his where he was born.

Urania. The soul, which is a light spirit and by nature aspires to elevate itself with the desire to be reunited to its origins, elevates matter, which towards the centre because of its weight. This is the cause that lifts man up, and not the providence of our Father, so that he can contemplate the heaven.

Terpsichore. Hush, I heard a noise coming from the Lanni [??] wood, and it seems like I can hear Polyhymnia's voice.

Calliope. Alas, [...] there is something new to me.

Urania. And what could ever be? Is a resuscitated Perseus[?] or are the proud daughters of Euipe[?], now re-humanised, running after her or mistreating her?

Melpomene. Don't joke; even deities like ourselves run into unpleasant accidents, despite having wings to escape them and power to hurt those who molest us.

Calliope. You throw your words to the wind, while she is calling for us to go to the woods.

Urania. Stop. Here she is.

Clio. Who is coming with her?

Thalia. If I am not mistaken, it's Cino de Parsi.

Terpsichore. It's him.

Melpomene. I did not see him in a long time, his coming here is dear to me, and perhaps Polyhymnia, who knows the affection I have for him, was calling my attention from afar.

Polyhymnia. Sisters, I have some big news: even in this place deceit is exercised, and the Helicon has become a haven for assassins. Either we cleanse it with the blood of those who contaminate it, or we go live somewhere else.

<sup>40</sup> This is extremely confusing, sorry. It does not make much sense to me in the original either

<sup>41</sup> The whole passage makes absolutely no sense to me, sorry

Terpsichore. What? Since when did this mount become a vessel of betrayals and robberies? Isn't the nest of virtue safe from the raids of thieves?

Polyhymnia. Listen: I was at the foot of the mountain, where the waves of Hippomenes, falling from above, are gathered in that deep riverbed all around the surrounding and imitated by the babbling of the quick river and the music of some swans who accompanied the sweet sound of the water with the harmony of their singing, when, from the right side, loud shouts resonated in my ears, as if a person was afflicted and was begging for help in those solitary lands. But the voices are close and they never get tired of explaining the passions of the heart, so that I can hear the words clearly and I understand the sense of the complaints.

Urania. Why was this person complaining?

Polyhymnia. [He lamented] having taken advantage inconsiderately and without choice, having then thrown the advantage away, and having been betrayed by the debtor. He was cursing all the Gods and most of all us, the tutelary [deities] of this place.

Clio. Dogs take the bread that they have been given to the mouth of their despised master, and if thrown into the Tiber it is held up by them, so that he does not sink; lions are grateful to [...]; dragons to Tohante[?]; eagles to maidens; and man, who has in himself part of the divinity of that who made him, changes the benefit into poison to murder his benefactor. Great infamy for the living came with this.

Polyhymnia. Curious to learn about the condition of the afflicted man and the details of the story of his events, I walked into some myrtle bushes and I see, tied between one tree and another, Paoli. I cannot express the pain that I felt when I saw him in that state and this sacred land being contaminated by the hand of a betrayer. I untied him and asked him about this new event, and he, after he gave a thousand sighs from his chest, spoke to me thus: 'He who trusts malice should not hope for anything but injuries, but who can penetrate treachery in the abyss of a hearth? Because I have been generous with my affections and liberal with the sweats [of my brow], I deserved to be betrayed.' While he was saying these things, from afar arrived Cino de Parsi, Marini, and a young man with his hands tied behind his back. At their sight, Paoli shouted: 'See, o sacred Penide[??], the thief! He who is brought here as a guilty man is the betrayer, the ingrate!'

Clio. Who was this rogue?

Polyhymnia. A certain Paolo Vendramino, from the Venetian nation, according to what Paoli himself told me. He walked with his head bowed, his eyes staring the ground, and with a face so pale that he looked like a criminal lead to the gallows. And Marini, beating him with a laurel branch, added the pains of the body to those of the soul, and he wold have certainly martyred him [i.e. Vendramino] if Cino, commiserating the unfortunate state of that rapacious man, did not stop him with his pleas.

Terpsichore. Mercy is indicative of a noble soul, but exercising it in spite of ingratitude becomes a deplorable action, not worth of a knight. He should have let him being beaten, he would not have died, after all.

Cino. [Hearing] the laments of that miserable man, the cruelty toward his back would have become merciful; that does not mean that my generous spirit is not offended. And Marini was ruthlessly offending him, because, taken by the first impulses of anger (a forgivable action), claimed to be avenging a theft made by [Vendramino].

Clio. What did he say when he saw Paoli?

Polyhymnia. Nothing, because while the worm of his conscience was eroding his guts, the abuses of the one he betrayed were keeping his tongue in chains.

Erato. How did he betray him? What did he steal from Marini? And how did he get in this place?

Polyhymnia. I do not know, since I flew here with Cino (I left him [i.e. Vendramino] in the hands of Marini and Paoli and commanded them to take him here) and I wanted to find you, because I wished to let you know these events, without having heard about his faults in detail.

Melpomene. Punishment follows a bad action, and the lightings of punishment have always incinerated the wicked. This man must have found the downfall in the excess of his errors.

Polyhymnia. You, Cino, while we wait for the guilty to arrive, tell us briefly your story, which you must know very well.

Cino. It is indeed very well known to me. But having followed your pace, I can barely breathe with my chest and stand on my feet.

Melpomene. Sit and restore with quietude the weakness of your limbs, like this. O how many times did Apollo sit on that very trunk.

Ciro. Thus it is not appropriate that I contaminate it with the dirt of my touch. It is a sacred seat, and as such I should kiss it with reverence rather than shamelessly obstruct it. Melpomene, you are making me commit and impiety, despite ignorance of facts proves my innocence.

Melpomene. I did not think you were so religious, otherwise I would have hushed so that I would not have disturbed your rest. Come back to your seat, because reverence for the Gods is a virtue, but superstition is a defect.

Ciro. Nonetheless, I will lean against this tree, so that I will satisfy my devotion and at the same time will send my weariness away. Now listen: while I sat on the ground, tired after having escalated half of the mount and because of the travel I undertook in order to see you again and stay with you for a while, I saw Pegasus being chased by a man. It was not running as fast as it could, but [his pace] was moderate, between fast and slow, so that the man following it was always at its tail. The horse, annoyed by the long chase of that irritating man, who did not cease to go after it, stopped and kicked him in the chest, throwing him on the ground, and spread its wings to the sky. I, moved to pity that miserable man and thinking that he was dead or nearly dead because of the violent blow, run to help him, if he was to be in a state that required help. I found him weary, yes, but not dead. I helped him to get up and then I saw that he was Paolo Vendramino. Surprised to see him in these lands, I was about to ask him how he managed to cross the river, when the shouts of Marini shut my tongue which was just about to speak. ‘Ciro’, he was shouting, ‘do not let leave or defend that wicked man; do not put his acquaintance before my friendship, because his demerits are not trivial but rather unworthy of a knight’s support.’ These words afflicted the wits of that poor assassin and made him feverish. He trembled like a leaf, a yearning to speak was rising in him, but the ice of his guilt were suffocating the heath of his desire.

Thalia. Effect of a guilty man when he hears the reproaches of his wrongdoings.

Ciro. True. In the meanwhile Marini arrived, and started to treat him like a donkey with a knobby rod that he carried with him. He tied his hands behind his back and took several writings out of his pockets. [Marini], after looking [at the writings] and observing them several times, chose some of them and addressed me saying: ‘Gentleman, these are the fruits of my work and sweat. This man, while I was sleeping in the shade of a laurel tree, stole them from me, and, so that the world would have seen them as the result of his sterile intellect, he dismembered them and ruined them in such a way that I can barely recognise them as mine. I want to take him to be judged by the Muses, where I know that he will be punished for his crimes. If you want to accompany me, I will add this to the bond of my duties, *se non et Dio*.<sup>42</sup>’ He stayed quiet and I accepted the invitation, because I wanted to both serve my friend and be a spectator of the chastisement due to the guilty. But now that I finished my account, here he appears from the woods between Marini and Paoli.

Urania. See, how even in chains he shows a proud nature in both his aspects and strides.

Erato. Proud is blameworthy in virtue and greatness; consider that of this man, which must be in ignorance and vulgar condition.

Paoli. Daughters of Memory, I presume that Ciro and Polyhymnia, whom I see among you here, informed you in part of the wrongdoings of this perfidious and deceptive

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<sup>42</sup> ??? must be some sort of swearing formula

young man. I beg you to suspend the punishment that you have pondered to give to his guilt, and hear first the account of what he did at my own detriment in exchange for the benefits he obtained from myself.

Thalia. Tell us briefly what offenses you received, because the sun is falling into the West and hints at the unfriendly night, and the desire to punish with [...] hand this assassin is losing its patience.

Paoli. This man, motivated by a reckless ambition to cross the river swimming, threw himself into the waters, but he was going to sink, taken by one of those gatherings that current forms, and was in danger of drowning, if I, who knew him, did not throw myself into the waves and take him to the side of the mountain, in order to save him from the mouth of death.

Erato. Where did you know him from?

Paoli. In Rome, when he came with the Venetian ambassador [...] of the secretary.

Terpsichore. Did he live in Rome? It is not of great surprise that he is used to assault/assassinate those who believe in him.

Melpomene. Actually, he should have learned the terms of freedom and courtesy from that Court.

Terpsichore. Why?

Melpomene. Because it is so liberal and courteous that it gives wings for flying to the heaven even to those who do not want them.

Polyhymnia. Yes, but one has to buy the feathers with cash.

Marini. [It is a] greedy and rapacious nature of man that, in order to impregnate with mistakes the poverty of his birth or the miserable condition of his bastards, celebrates the ceremonies of Holy Friday daily.

Thalia. Let Paoli speak: you interrupt his account with this jabbers and do not notice that half of the solar beams has escaped over the altitude of the mountains.

Paoli. I could not tell how many thanks he gave me, when he was out of the water, because of the rescue, and how many offers he made to me. He called me father, saviour, tutelary angel of his life. I dressed him as best as I could with half of my own clothes, as you can see, because his own were on the river bank, and the rigours of the season, together with the humidity of the water, were freezing the blood in his veins.

Ciro. Perhaps <sup>43</sup>that boor at that time wished that indeed in Rome, in the middle of the street, one of his creditors was going to take away [his clothes], if Mario Valentini, moved by his begging and promises to return the money soon, did not satisfy him. The money was never returned, though.

Paoli. He<sup>44</sup> should have presented himself to Contarini before he [i.e. Vendrmaino?] left and denounce his [Vendramino's] promise that he would have returned he due money as he did with many others, and I see that the gentleman has payed [for Vendrmaino] more than 600 *scudi*.

Marini. What did he make of his [...]?

Paoli. Initially he gambled with them, then he gave them to the ambassador as long as he could be replenished from the disbursement he made to us.<sup>45</sup> Once he was dressed I invited him to [respect] the austerity of these lands and I promised him to show him the admirable things that are here. The origins of Hippomenes, the remains of a Castle[?], yourselves [i.e. the Muses] and the horse Pegasus, which, born not from the blood of Medusa but of both Medusa and Neptune, lives among the pleasures of this mount and not, as some say, attached to the chariot of the Aurora running from the darkness or shining in the firmament with twenty stars contemplating the Arctic Pole motionless. Thus, walking up the mountain we turned right and arrived at that field which, surrounded by very tall plants, forms a theatre at the entrance of which this rouge man, who was behind me, put a lace around my neck.

Polyhymnia. What made him act so badly?

Paoli. The greedy idea of stealing some of my compositions [i.e. poems] that I read to him along the walk. And I swear [...], if he asked me to donate them to him, for the love I have for him, he would have had them, as he had with many others when he was in Rome.

Terpsichore. So you were generous to him even with your own works?

Paoli. Yes, and with countless of them. Because for me, who am already eternalised in my writings, it was not much to donate four strikes of a pen to a begging friend, I gave him, among others, those sonnets about the clock that he had published by his father, before he arrived in Venice.

Ciro. I remember that he read them in the Accademia degli Incogniti in that very city, one year and a half after they were generated by the print. And I believe, when I first arrived to that honourable congress as an astonishment for his intellect. Everyone was however sick of the last [works], and realised that [the previous ones] were not

<sup>43</sup> The wording is extremely weird, but the sense should still remain more or less understandable.

<sup>44</sup> Not clear whom he is talking about

<sup>45</sup> All very confusing. All words are there, but it's hard to tell what they mean

his, because in so much time he was not able to create anything better, despite practising an art enriches the artist with perfection.

Melpomene. How did you react when he put the rope around your neck?

Paoli. As a marble [statue]. Horror was freezing my blood and the pain of being betrayed by someone dear and whom I rescued half-alive from the waves, assaulted my heart with terrible impetus that he would have certainly killed me, if he had death with him as much as he [once brought?] happiness. In summary, after he almost strangled me and put me in distress, he took away from me those papers that caused in him such barbaric thoughts and transformed him into a Busiris. He tied me to a tree, as Polyhymnia found me, and left. This, o divine pimplere[????], is the pathetic story of the misfortunes occurred to me, and the truthful account of the grossness of this wild beast, whom I dragged to the throne of your justice, so that it would not wander in future unavenged, claiming to have invented his fangs in innocence.

Clio. Speak, o young man, who, being born form the waves, are held by a genius that imitates their instable, rapacious, and cruel nature: what was the purpose to which your robberies were aiming?

Vendramino. [I wanted] to come to ...

Paoli. Expose yourself. Does your arrogance blind you to the point that you do not look at whom you talk to? Do you believe you are speaking to someone who is a peer of your birth status?

Ciro. Hold on, do not beat him. Perhaps, in reasoning with the Great [i.e. the Muses], he want to observe the habit of his crowd.

Vendramino. [I wanted] to come to your presence and present to you those writings as my own, in order to receive laurels.

Euterpe. Who did drive you to throw yourself into the river?

Vendramino. A desire to cross it.

Melpomene. With what intention?

Vendramino. To assassinate the poets.<sup>46</sup>

Melpomene. Did you thus plan your thefts?

<sup>46</sup> The satire uses the verb “assassinate” quite a lot, but I suppose not necessarily with the meaning of actually killing someone. It seems like it has a more general meaning of “committing a crime at the expenses of someone.”

Vendramino. Indeed. Damn my disposition to be a poet, despite my little knowledge and the roughness of my style, which brought me to this end.

Melpomene. Why were you running after Pegasus?

Vendramino. In order to capture him, ride him and fly to the top of the mountain, since I imagined that escalating it on foot would have been difficult, especially without escort, through the labyrinths of the paths and the cliffs of the rocks, and also to arrive to you before those whom I betrayed revealed my thefts and ruined my plans.

Ciro. Indeed, he arouses pity in my heart and moves my guts. Despite his actions are detestable, the purpose they were aimed at has however something glorious. As far as I am concerned, I would let the reminiscence of his crimes be his punishment and penitence.

Terpsichore. You are mistaken, Ciro. Terrible means never changes its nature, however laudable the ends to which it aims might be. Or rather, to put it in a better way, every end is wicked when the means is unjust. Evil is always evil and worth of punishment, at least to frighten villains and curb their dissoluteness.

Melpomene. Let us end this. Terpsichore, announce the sentence to the guilty.

Terpsichore. Let Thalia or Calliope announce it.

Clio. One of you.

Thalia. Come on, Calliope.

Calliope. He deserves to be hanged to a tree for having attempted to elevate himself to glory by means of the wings of fraud, cruelty, and ingratitude. But I do not want his corpse to infect the purity of this air. Let him live, and let the regrets of his conscience and disdains that he will receive from men, who will be aware of his actions, be his inseparable torments, eternal to his sinful soul. Let him be flogged with a bundle of nettles and expelled from these lands of virtue, which has been contaminated by his rapacious hands. The entrance to this mount will be forever prohibited to him, and if he were to be found this side of the river again he will be hanged on the other bank. You, gentlemen, take your writings and keep them safer for the future.

Erato. I like this judgement, but who will be the flogger?

Marini. I, as being my rage still excited, I will serve him as a friend.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Obviously, this is sarcastic.

Calliope. Take away his coat, then, and you, Paoli, pick those nettles that you can see there, next to the bush. Euterpe, you will go with them and when you will be about to cross the ford, blindfold the sentenced man so that he won't learn where [the ford] is.

Marini. Here he is, half naked. Look elsewhere, Liberie[?], if you do not want to be burned by the fire that hides and dies beneath the snows of his skin.

Ciro. While joking you touched the mystery of his follies. Thus is indeed his intention, that is to drown miserable women in the milk of his flesh; for this reason, in summer, he leaves his coat untied and his chest uncovered.

Paoli. Take the nettles.

Marini. [Come] to us, Euterpe.

Vendramino. Alas, alas, alas!

Terpsichore. He is fast at running.

Ciro. From what I heard, he is used to run, as he was expelled while being beaten harder than with those plants.

Paoli. The torment brings commiseration. Even though he offended me so gravely, by looking at his misfortunes I feel my heart going soft.

Melpomene. He who is prone to act makes himself unworthy that a single word of mercy will shine on his crosses.<sup>48</sup> The laurels that he wished to obtain from his crimes, in order to crown his fame, now became cypresses to celebrate the funerals of his reputation. Did he want to be a poet at the expenses of others' works?

Paoli. You can well say orator.

Polyhymnia. Orator?

Paoli. Yes, Polyhymnia. In the Accademia degli Unisioni, in the third session, he gave a speech in condemnation of gossip, but it was so lacking in elocution that everyone, for this reason, understood the poverty of his intellect. The rhetorical components, of which he has no knowledge, were confused in such a manner that the introduction was the proposition, and the proof proposition and epilogue. In addition, having he stolen from the Poliantea and scatterd his thefts on the paper with the quill of confusion, in declaring his *auctoritas*, one could notice in him an extraordinary aversion for the Latin language. Yet, with such monstrous mixture, he expected the applauses of the audience, turning his eyes toward he attendees at the end of every exorbitant period.

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<sup>48</sup> This is essentially literal. I fail to understand the meaning, though

Terpsichore. Were you at the Unisoni on the past session?

Paoli. I was there with Marini.

Terpsichore. How were their actions?

Paoli. Awful, the singing as well as the discussions.

Erato. What was the problem?

Paoli. Each accademico was obliged to say what future they could predict, in matters of love, from the symbol of a flower, which Ms Barbara gave them at the previous session of the Accademia.

Ciro. What a nice thing to give flowers after its fruits have already been dispensed.

Clio. Who made the discussion?

Paoli. A Dominican friar, Toretti, indeed a very learned man, [spoke] about a dream in which he depicted the greed of women and demonstrated to the poor people in love that the sweetesses of Venus can only be bought with gold and silver.

Polyhymnia. This friar understood [the problem?] with venal words in a venal place.

Ciro. Ms Barbara must have certainly told him the theme.

Calliope. Who was the first one to speak?

Paoli. The statue maker, but the distance did not let the sound of his voice reach my ears. He must have spitted ramblings, however, because I could see many attendants who accompanied his speech with their laughers. The second one was Vendramino, and he sat near the sculptor, in order to denote how his rough intellect requires the chisel.

Melpomene. What did he say?

Paoli. You mean, what did he read? He brought his opinion written down on a cedar flower.

Urania. He deserved some boos.<sup>49</sup>

Paoli. Everybody pitied his weakness. This petty man, in order to avoid drowning in the sea of fear (which absorbs the braves and noblest eloquences, as well as the vile

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<sup>49</sup> The actual word would be “whistles”, but the purpose of an audience whistling is booing the performer(s).

and plebeian ones), wanted to have the support of paper, just like those children who, yearning to be good swimmers but not wanting to be swallowed by the waves, use a board or [...].

Ciro. Yet, the other times he discussed without paper.

Paoli. Yes, but almost abandoned by his memory he run to help [himself?] from shipwreck.

Polyhymnia. Who spoke after him?

Paoli. Loredano; he was following some peripatetic philosopher, but the [...] who could not hear him because of the distance, interrupted his learned reasoning by hammering their feet on the wooden floor. The [...], however, despite those noises, wanted to have his say, but in the end he was forced to hush: these noises made the music start again and neglect the discussions of father Pallavicino and Grimani.

Polyhymnia. Did similar inconveniences occurred in other accademie?

Paoli. No, for the reason why everyone could hear was that the stage was not at the very end of the room, but in its centre and detached from the wall.

Clio. Why did they change its location?

Paoli. Because Strozzi's hope to make a profit advised him to make a display of his wealth to everyone.

Terpsichore. It seems to me that we should terminate these discussions, and start making our way to a shelter, as the hour is late.

Erato. Let us wait for Euterpe and Marini, they should not be too far.

Melpomene. It would be impolite to do otherwise.

Urania. What are you looking in the sky, Ciro?

Ciro. I look at those shining bodies of the stars, and I intently observe the contrary motions of their orbits.

Paoli. Please, tell me, Urania: do the skies turn with such speed that, if they were closer to the Earth, they would capture it? Do these quick motion produce any sound?

Urania. They do. And actually a pleasing, harmonious one, as Pythagoras stated. So it happens that the soul, united to a well-organised body, by forming some music is rejoiced down here, since it received the greatest delight from that [i.e. music] which is superior and perfect.

Paoli. But if we can hear the sounds of much lesser bodies that move slower, why cannot we hear that [of the heavens], which must be enormous because of the immense machine [i.e. celestial body moving?] that turns in a circle?

Urania. Things are understood through their opposite, such as through light one knows darkness; through good [one knows] evil, through noise, silence. It follows that a sound or noise cannot be perceived by the hearing if it does not stop (nor get quieter) some times. Thus, since the sound of the heavens never ceases, because of their perpetual motion, it is imperceptible and mute to us. So the Catapadi[??] do not hear the very noisy fall of the Nile from its very tall mountains, because of their continuous inurement.

Euterpe. We are here, all hungry.

Clio. Euterpe? We were so taken by Urania's speech that you startled us.

Marini. I believe that Vendramino, during his trip, made a vow to not steal anymore: the fruits he picked from his robberies were too bitter.

Calliope. He who has an evil mind can hardly act good.

Terpsichore. Did he complain for the flogging?

Euterpe. He did not say a word. He only vented his inner afflictions with sensible sighs.

Paoli. He would pay Poetry [??], so that Ms Barbara would not be informed of his infamies.

Marini. For what reason?

Paoli. Because he loves her, as much as Turchetto does.

Ciro. Everyone has an appetite for his similar. Thus, it's no surprise that two Thracians are rivals over one Barbara.

Marini. I do not understand your way of speaking. You speak like a sphynx.

Thalia. He names him as a Thracian either for his treacherous and evil nature (as he was able to betray a friend and benefactor) or because, in the sea of this life, he [sails] as a pirate, stealing goods from those poor poets who [happen to] pass by.

Ciro. He names him Thracian because he descends from Thracians and because he keeps together his inherited name of Vendramino with that of Turchetto.

Calliope. How did his relatives/parents come to live in Venice?

Paoli. I will tell you. A certain Vendramino was sent to Byzantium by the Venetian senate as an ambassador. This gentleman bought a Turkish boy and brought him to his homeland where, once he was reborn with the water [i.e. baptised], he adopted him as his son, since he had no children and loved [the boy] dearly. From this [boy] the father of Paolo was born.

Marini. Such an honourable genealogy.

Euterpe. It will be good to go back to our houses, in order to escape the offenses of the night air. I do not say this for ourselves, but for our guests.

Polyhymnia. Let us leave, as the splendours of Cineia [??], which starts to appear from the mountains to infest her brother's enemies, will serve us during the short walk [...].

**Copy of a letter written by the most illustrious Crassus as a report of the latest Accademia of Strozzi**

To Your Lordship, who required some account from the latest Accademia of Strozzi. I am satisfying [your request] with these few [written] lines, because I am in debt with you for more important things rather than because any other cause, since in that Accademia nothing happened but turmoil and universal discord of all the Accademici, part of whom spoke, and part of whom, prompted by the example of the others who had obtained the prize, shushed the noise. Hence Ms Barbara, who was being annoyed by that dissonant gathering, was about to be canonised as martyr by the priest Urbano. It can't be denied, however, that in giving away the gift of her flowers, one could notice her rancour and the bad talent with which she was making the present. Father Tonetti was the first [to speak] and vomited, on the parchment with [...] cooing voice, a prologue that has been heard more than once being delivered by the Doctor on the stages, and despite being boring it was pleasant, as it was funny and quite commensurate to the dissolute spirits of the young, and because the concepts were at odds with when, in the end, he wanted to apply [them?] to his own flower; and only the father [i.e. Tonelli] understood such application, since there is no other mind apart from his that is capable of this sort of reasoning. He was given a cherry flower with the fruit on it, but the father, who was all bursting with the fervours of love, did not realise that the gift was a fraud, because, being cherry a very sour fruit, in this way Ms Barbara was trying nothing else than humiliate the sense of the blessed father, so that he became more modest in the discussions about love. Neither was less deceiving the jasmine flower she gave to Cocio [??], because she – who knows very well that it is a plant that lives with hot and dry air and who was handing out nothing but cold and humidity – aimed at having the flower die between his fingers. To this she added a narcissus to D. Antonio Rocco, since she knew well that it would not last in his hands, because the narcissus opens up at dawn but languishes in the evening. But a sharper man understood that she well thought about this gift, knowing that the philosophy of Rocco does not lack in Narcissi. She gave a violet to Moro, and this was understood as a gift made out of interest, because women, when they want to present a sweet consummation, are commonly used to brag about sending that guy or that other to violets' water.<sup>50</sup> [...] because if that was a sham, Moro certainly became a Violone.<sup>51</sup> Let's move to father Pallavicion's lesser intellect; he was offended more than others, since that singing woman gave him a moschetta, for no other reason than that she learned in Mestre that this flower is purgative, hence he had in mind that his pens and inks should [...] to the Muses [...] mount Parnassus, but good for him that Molli had a daisy, which, once reduced to powder, is very astringent. As for Speranzi, he had the gift of the [...] symbol, a Barbara<sup>52</sup> presented him with a tulip, which is a Thracian flower and in order to open up [necessitates?<sup>53</sup>] of some blood drops, as if she wanted to elevate him to the same level of the most noble marquises of the Red Sea. Among so beautiful flowers she went through [??] the Rose Loredano; and

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<sup>50</sup> No idea how to render this, but I guess the sense is clear

<sup>51</sup> Some pun (viola = violet)

<sup>52</sup> I believe this is a pun: "una Barbara" can translate as "a barbaric woman"

<sup>53</sup> The passage is confusing and I am almost entirely guessing here

because it is very thorny it was declared that he [or she?] did not deserve that the sun would quince its thirst not even for a moment, but that rather the French sickness [i.e. syphilis] should have eroded him/her bit by bit. She gave anyway the gift, which indicates she understand the nature of him who received the gift, because of the rough nature that a rose carries in the middle of its seed, and which the peasant call Buttsratcher. Grimani was the wisest of all, since he did not want to accept any flower, as he understood the dishonesty of the one who was giving the gifts. But in order to satisfy his spirit completely, he gave to her flower of all months [i.e. calendula], for no other reason than because the leaves of this flower, touching the stems of the others, would have dried all of them. Only one was the favourite, Mr Paolo Vendramino to whom it was given a cedar flower [...].<sup>54</sup> And this what I needed to report to Your Lordship in order to satisfy your curiosity about the past evening; I hope to be serving you in a more important matter, if you deemed to command me as such. I kiss your hands.

Venice, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1637

The Incognito

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<sup>54</sup> Sorry, here I can't really make sense of the text

**Playful sentiments had in Parnassus at the Accademia degl'Unisoni. Characters: Apollo, Aristotle, Plato, Sen[ec]a, Plutarch, Guicciardini, Socrates, Avicenna, Bernia, Verieno, Momo, and other virtuous men.**

Having little hope for the health of the Spanish monarchy, because of the sickness that keeps her constantly vexed, his majesty Apollo leaves to assist her with the whole assembly of doctors. Once he went home to ponder the pertinacity of the French illness of that Lady with his men of letters, he let many child's tears<sup>55</sup> fall from his eyes, and they were more than tearful. Those virtuous men, seeing him in such state, distracted him in this manner, saying:

Aristotle. Why does Your Majesty always feel sad, rather than not being ... cheerful. Your Majesty should look at Momo, who, not long ago, was sad because he feared mistreatment from the Unisoni, and now he comes along laughing.

Momo. Ha Ho Ho.

Apollo. What's the origin of your laughter?

Momo. I just came back from the Accademia degl'Unisoni, and I laugh because of what happened there.

Plutarch. How did it turn to be a peculiar day, this time?

Momo. It happened yesterday, on the fifth of the current [month], for the convenience of that nobility which is occupied in its meetings.<sup>56</sup>

Verieno. They want the convenience of those noblemen because they want to defend them from slanders.

Bernia. They will defend them if they cannot defend themselves on their own, as Bembo was wounded while protecting the door from the mob.

Seneca. He suffered little harm but great fear.

Apollo. Come on, Momo, what happened then?

Momo. They played a beautiful music.

Bernia. It wasn't like the other times, then?

Momo. It was actually very similar, and it was moreover so long that it tired ears, senses, and even bums.

<sup>55</sup> The text says "natali", that is "of birth." I guess the sense is "he was crying like a baby."

<sup>56</sup> Not very clear

Apollo. Why?

Momo. Because they didn't do anything but singing.

Plato. Thus, they did not talk.

Momo. They did not talk otherwise, because it was the Eve of the Epiphany ha ha ha.

Apollo. Why is this important?

Momo. It is so important that it made me laugh, because they say that during that night all animals can talk, and they have therefore kept their mouths shut.

Aristotle. Many people want others to believe they are not animals.

Bernia. And didn't the musicians sing?

Momo. Yes. But what does it matter if they are singing swans *della marca che sgruidano*,<sup>57</sup> despite it is not May? And moreover they were well payed.

Verieno. The music must have been beautiful indeed.

Momo. I ... myself not to talk about it last time, but still it is necessary that I say that ...,<sup>58</sup> because I have overabundant soul, as it was awkward and all affected from beginning to end.

Apollo. And who sang?

Momo. Ms Barbara had some stanzas sung by Turchetto, in praise of herself.

Bernia. Was she pleased?

Momo. With such inappropriate acts that it was sickening.

Plutarch. Praise makes infamy blush, usually.

Aristotle. Yes, as long as the praises are true and appropriate to the one praised.

Bernia. She does not blush at vituperations, and you would expect her to blush at praises?

Verieno. Why, then, are praises not appropriate to Ms Barbara?

<sup>57</sup> ???

<sup>58</sup> These bits make no sense to me in Italian and I would not know how to translate them

Momo. Yes, well. Not those that praise her for being beautiful, despite you see them even in printed sonnets that celebrate her as such.

Plato. Your Majesty should banish from Parnassus such compositions, which have been published in the past days.

Seneca. In Parnassus, such things were not done, if not with caviar or pickled tuna.

Bernia. It has been thoroughly investigated that, not even in this occasion, things that are very prejudicial to good custom may happen.

Apollo. Go on, Momo.

Momo. After the praises, true, false, and deceitful, Ms Barbara invited all the Accedmici to discuss about their loves, happy, unhappy, or sad, according to their experiences.

Verieno. And yet they were not allowed to speak.

Momo. Not in the name of the Devil. If you have patience, I will tell you all. On that night, only animals should have spoken, but Turchetto and Ms Barbara never ceased to parrot the animals. However, I forgot that a certain man from Bologna read a discourse which was very long and ended causing sleep and indignation, and to me laughter.

Apollo. Let us know some details about this.

Momo. It was by intermission of the music.

Bernia. Maybe so that Turchetto could catch his breath, and Ms Barbara too.

Verieno. You don't know her, she doesn't get tired for so little.

Momo. Well guessed, because after the reading, they could not cease, and the discourse wasn't understood neither by the one who read it nor by those who listened to it.

Aristotle. Was it because it was involved and deepened into the profound meanings and depths of philosophy?

Momo. I don't believe so. It was like that he wouldn't even be able to read it. It was similar to those discourse by Businello or to that fruit that looks very beautiful from the outside, all coloured like copper, but then once squeezed it does not have neither juice nor any ....

Plato. Are Businello's discourses not rich in science and drama, maybe?

Bernia. You mean [rich in] pearls, diamonds, golds, gems, and jewels of all sorts.

Momo. It was indeed like that, or at least similar, because he also [depicted] alps in marine waves and fluctuating bell towers made of water when he wanted to describe a weaving sea with similar bad hyperboles.

Apollo. What was the conclusion, in the end?

Momo. I don't think he knew that either. Except for a certain contrived comparison in the discourse between Love and the sea, which said that they were the same thing or similar.

Plutarch. This gentleman must have always experienced bitter love.

Momo. I don't know many things, but I know that he risked to drown love, himself, and all the Accademici in his sea.

Bernia. Even the listeners were going [to drown], and unintentionally, because you said they were sleeping.

Aristotle. I would have been sorry for Momo [if he had] some sinister encounter.

Momo. I wouldn't have been taken by surprise, at least, because I was laughing at that childish discourse and everything ended in a joke or truth.<sup>59</sup>

Verieno. Yet there was danger for you too, without which one would not be well.<sup>60</sup> But the listeners were doubting about this.

Momo. I, for my part, believe that everyone wanted to make sure to leave at least with their chairs and hearts.

Bernia. Yes, because they paid for it and everyone could do with it as they pleased. But [they wanted to leave?] Ms Barbara, who was turning black.<sup>61</sup>

Plato. Turchetto would have helped her.

Verieno. She should have fastened herself to the spinet, which she was so happily playing.

Momo. It would have been appropriate. But many women fear the water mostly because they are afraid that their breasts would keep them afloat; apart from some who think they are far from this danger because of their occupation.

<sup>59</sup> That's what I read and how it translates, but doesn't make much sense

<sup>60</sup> Again, quite confusing in the original too

<sup>61</sup> I guess, meaning that she was getting angry/annoyed

Bernia. What are you saying, that Ms Barbara is of such nature, and that her breasts are becoming so small that they would not keep her afloat?

Apollo. Come on, enough!

Momo. This virtuous man then [concluded?] his dangerous and rough discourse with no further bad encounters, except that he heard fewer applauses than what I thought, maybe because many were sleeping or because I did not pay attention to those vanities. However, they were awaken by a new music, despite it was even older than itself, [to the point that?] there were not the same notes with which it was sung.<sup>62</sup>

Verieno. What was it?

Momo. A dialogue of the fable of Jason and Medea going to Colero[??] in search of the Golden Fleece with the Argonauts' ship.

Verieno. Mr Strozzi would have gone on board willingly.

Momo. No, since it was something that has been sung many times, and it's now many years after the wedding of the Highness of Parma. They played their parts well and sang confidently.

Bernia. Yet, it wasn't good.

Aristotle. It wasn't because it was such an old thing. Human genius appreciates new things in all times.

Guicciardini. People from Venice in particular [like new things], as they are very delicate in all things.

Verieno. Strozzi too likes this new form of Accademia of this age, since the Accademici are paid with a Sequin.

Apollo. Go on, Momo.

Momo. When in the end the whole audience was well tired, they finished to croak (not sing). Strozzi even declared that the finale of the dialogue was truncated, in order to be brief.

Bernia. Woe to you, Momo, if they sang it all.

<sup>62</sup> Not very clear ... I think he's trying to describe the music as very old with some weird hyperbole ...

Momo. I, for my part, believe that they sang even too much. I did not listen to it well, but you say so. In order to proceed with whom was nearby, Toretti was begged by him [Strozzi?] to speak that evening, and he declined without even saying a word.<sup>63</sup>

Plutarch. How did he make himself understood?

Momo. With actions and showing that the others were suffering an injustice.

Diogenes. Why didn't he speak?

Bernia. What [happened?] that evening?

Momo. Pallavicino could not contain himself, and said that everyone should have been quiet, because whoever spoke at that time and that evening would have been considered an animal ... ha ha ha.

Plato. And yet, he spoke. You have all reasons to laugh, Momo.

Bernia. Chance made these few words flow from his mouth, so that all could see what he is, despite he wanted to remain disguised.

Guicciardini. Don't make accusations, otherwise he will immediately proclaim to be noble, from an ancient family, and to have pure blood.

Verieno. He is indeed such from birth, but he is an utter boor in terms of habits. And he does not seem to be of [good] race, not at all Catalino,<sup>64</sup> not at all.

Momo. It would be much better for him to wear a different suit, and his little cap would much fixing to make him similar to *macini* [????] since he spoke that evening, when they could not stay quiet.<sup>65</sup>

Diogenes. This is not important, because you can't judge a book by its cover. He is more similar to [...]<sup>66</sup>

Apollo. Did anything else happen, Momo?

Momo. Once he left, some authoritative [men] and Turchetto made Ms Barbara sing again, with her usual carelessness. But she treated them in an old-fashioned manner, since she sang very old things which were sickening.

Guicciardini. There were not supposed to be new things.

<sup>63</sup> More freely translated than elsewhere, as at times does not make much sense

<sup>64</sup> No idea what that is. It sounds like a proper name, but I wouldn't know to what/whom it refers to.

<sup>65</sup> Very confusing. This is all I could gather from the original.

<sup>66</sup> Can't make sense of what comes after!

Verieno. Indeed, since Strozzi was busy throughout all these days [with her] singing [for him] *la terza mesata* with the good hand or the cover of Ms Barbara [??????], in the occasion of New Year's Day, and he could not compose.

Bernia. Why, doesn't he want anything else than his compositions to be sung?

Momo. They sing other things, as I said, but he enjoys having [singers] being exhausted in practising the music compositions with *continuo* by Monteverdi, whom I feel sorry for, since he often does not know where to bang his head, with those bizarre and visionary poems of his.

Apollo. Even Monteverdi happens to be in that place?

Momo. They bring him there, I do not know why. And may be God's will that he won't arrive also at one of those scenes, where everyone one else are about to end up one of these evenings, with a comical musical representation.

Aristotle. If he will not be there physically, he will be there potentially, because he may have advised [to make] the whole thing.

At this moment, when Momo wanted to answer and had already opened his mouth laughing, the gathering was interrupted by the sound of the cabman and the trot of horses who [...] brought to His Majesty, in words and authenticated script, the grave indisposition of the Duchess of Savoy, who was reduced to the end of her days, perhaps because of poisons. Thus Apollo, one he dismissed the meeting, had the council of physicians gathered again, with the most effective antidotes of Teriaca and Pontano, and run to the [...] of this Princess.

**To the Illustrious gentleman, as a brother, Mr Giulio Strozzi  
Venice**

Illustrious gentleman,

It is not customary that he who is in the wrong would try to denigrate the fame of his friend, who does not remain free from his mother must relate – not invite – him/her who nourishes the rare defect, is absolved from the punishment.<sup>67</sup> He who lives as [an] evil [individual], can well be astute, but won't be satisfied. Human evils are considered as beneficial to oneself when they happen to those who try the paths of glory. But he who tries to tear [someone] down with an offence, carries with him [...] for such reason, as he will never be happy. Men's minds were not born secret, since God dislikes a tongue which defames when it ascertains the opposite.<sup>68</sup> He who unites [this tongue?] is devoured by the words, and despite such mind is a barren ground, it is nevertheless very fertile with slanders, and it sprouts immediately, producing perfection.

My quill does not want to defend you anymore, Strozzi; my intellect, despite its inclination, cannot anymore raise you to praises from those miseries that you inadvertently prepared for your glory. You, with little knowledge, made your own funeral pyre by yourself, and there you now live with burnt honours, there you submit, miserable, to passions, and you are truly a toy in others' intrigues. You [tried?], by informing your friends, to climb the peak of miseries. You barked but didn't bite. With your words you awoke those sleepy tongues to your own detriment: they were only interested in resting. You exacerbated against you only the Casi[...?]. I tried to give you relief, Giulio, I procured your safety even from biting tongues. But the aims are now finished,<sup>69</sup> and you, being depressed, let your senses overflow from what is right. And those [tongues] went flying against you in order to [annihilate?] you. On one minor point you agreed with me, but did not correct your habit [accordingly<sup>70</sup>]. I lived with affection for the beauties of you Venus, and as an idolater I was enraptured by the virtue of that beauty, which did not seem foolish to me. Because the shiny gold that stands out in honour must be on display, it must endure the hammer, it must not [blacken?] into the flames, it should be purified instead and renew itself, like a phoenix through torments. But you have to get used to such blows, telling yourself that, as someone who knows a few things about life, acknowledging your own faults will teach you to endure the blows of the quill, and that he who is plotting to harm the others deserves to be harmed himself. And a public guilt is also worthy of a secret punishment, since it is good in this case the manner of punishing wrongdoings by deprecating them [...] and wait for a time and place to revenge, as indeed have done those who wrote things against you. They waited for the time when it was profitable for them and got their revenge, with good reason. It is not difficult to find something to say about others' writings, but on the

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<sup>67</sup> None of this makes sense, but that's what I read in the original. It is possibly a very contorted consideration about defamation and getting away with it ...?

<sup>68</sup> Sadly, that's what I read, but it makes no sense

<sup>69</sup> Or "provided." Neither make sense, though

<sup>70</sup> Quite distant from the original, but that's the only sense I can find for it ...

contrary it is much harder to write better things. Thus, in this case I find myself considerably [concerned?] by two thoughts: one is that, these people, with their satiric writings about you, managed to gather other people [...]<sup>71</sup>. Hence, if they were unsatisfied and unhappy about you only, then why did they need to include others, who did not take any part in the fault, and did not fail in the work? The other thought is that your satires are not being seen, while theirs get awards and triumphs in every place and by every hand, by shaming you.

You will gladly receive, in this situation, better information and safer instruction in order to satisfy my senses. Because he who does not listen to both parties cannot have good judgement in serious cases; but rather, it is necessary to consider and reconsider, and to investigate with caution very little detail in order not to be fooled. Did you understand? If you somehow want to raise from your depressions, write, reclaim; because if you remain silent I [would think?] that you are guilty of what everyone is talking about. Take care.

Accademico Spenserato.

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<sup>71</sup> The rest of the sentence is extremely confusing and I cannot get any sense out of it

**Condolences given to His Majesty Apollo by Mr Giulio Strozzi, regarding a satire about him issued in the year 1637.**

Most illustrious Prince, most virtuous [...?]. If a man in need had nothing to resort to, most importantly for [matters] of honour, he, if his soul would submit, may certainly take his own life, in order to avoid seeing his own miseries and injuries. But since God established the rule of the great man for the relief of the miserable ones, he will have to shy away from those [great men?] [...] for help and justice, in some occasions. It is already known to your illustriousness how I, poor Giulio Strozzi, both for my own pleasure and to direct Venice nobility towards the virtues, created a virtuous Accademia, a congress of [...] senators. In this Accademia, with both debates and songs, I managed to delight those who could [...] (they say) to the street of the Collegio. It is true that I have under my care and custody a woman called Ms Barbara who, despite not being handsome, has nonetheless a very beautiful soul and mind. And there is nothing else in her that is 'barbarian', except for a heart safeguarded by the vetoes of love, entirely adverse to the luxuries of the senses, and thus worthy of the highest praises. Nonetheless, some evil tongue, exercising its own habit, has, with prejudice of the honour [???] of that [...] with a satire [of] many characters, who, in addition to speak ill of many virtuous gentlemen, made particular invective against her and me, calling me failed poet, merchant, almost procurer, and her implicitly whore. They have, with those tongues worthy of fire rather than praise, implied that the Accademia is [made for economic] advantage, that the manner with which we virtuously discuss is formal merchandise, which I'd invented it by means of a singer who is a sorceress of hearts and lures affections. And there are plenty of names in this playful satires, both of living and dead men. And as a seal of their most malicious malice, they pretend that the person of Your Majesty is one of these characters, actually the leader, and that [...?], and they pretend that he asks questions, makes inquiries, and acts like a notary and explain the part. These people are not only worthy of reprimand but also of punishment; a punishment [that has to be] notorious, clear, and rigorous. Poor Fathers, when can they ever be safe from slanders, and when can those who watch over the living day and night be protected from the chicanery of gossipmongers? Poor Strozzi, who, by [supporting?] others' honours, is taken down; he also, [despite being] willing to benefit, only received stings and sorrows. He does not wish to be an oracle of the times, [or] the inventor of beautiful literatures, [he does not wish] to be known for the good of a supernatural luminary, nor [for?] the experiences made [...?], nor the appearance of an Angel, nor the tire [...] those people, making fun of this and that, are only pleased by things that stings, penetrates, pierces soul and guts, and is only worth of reproach. If I am considered a poet by them, I do not believe that the exercise [of poetry?] is mean but rather full of efforts of the mind; if I am a merchant, this isn't a dishonourable activity either. Maybe there are no better [poets?] of my status, who exercise the same profession, so why am I vilified while others are celebrated? The claim that I was not able to do any action except for dressing Love/Cupid with *perpetuano*, and they do not notice that Love/Cupid runs away between their heels, leaving them to be good only for the bonfire. They say that all behave like buffoons.

[...]<sup>72</sup> They put virtue made silent of names, poor buffoons,<sup>73</sup> which it did not write, hence it did not receive [...], taking the profession out of its hand.<sup>74</sup> Simple Accademie, virtuous bandits, undermined merchants, beautiful letters to God, are more bold provocations than [acts of] courage. They even put in this theatre an Archbishop, as if this wasn't the ideation of virtue and qualified in the highest ranks. This [...] Archbishop Guerini, since has his jurisdiction on the Turkish, and was [in Turkey] once at his own danger, lives now in Venice, his homeland, happier for the virtues that he possesses than for the position he holds. They say that clergymen rob altars, as that is their profession, [...] they won't even forgive those Prelates of such worth conditions. They try, by speaking ill [of the Archbishop?], to hide themselves in the shadows of their infected wills, and in describing him they stain him with arrogance; they were almost going to say even worse things of him. They speak of Loredano with jealousy, they mock Bolani (despite he has the habits of a saint), they disregard Moro because he has no money, about Buccinello, despite knowing how worthy he is, they could not say anything but stating that he claims to be of a higher status than what he is, as if it wasn't natural to enjoy [the fruits] of one's own labour and make one's own talent known. Every man yearns for less or more. I, in this respect, would like to be poorer than what I am and [rather] have a third of his virtue, as the whole world knows him as a man with no equals. They list, among these Accademici, a statue maker (which means a mechanic) and do are not aware that they become [mechanics themselves] in doing so. So, among such worthy noblemen there is an artisan. So, Venetian noblemen bring so much beauty in their homeland, but they trick themselves. They would rather infer that Paolo was little fit for discussions, as none is born a master, and because of his incompetence they make him similar to a statue; but if he was indeed the way they depict him, why do they make him tremble and stammer? From this, you must realise that there is nothing but mere malice, and that they even have a desire for revenge. And they also say that among these there is a friar, the author of the *Tariclea*: Pallavicino, a virtuous man [...] and they label him as a thief and insolent, as if he were one of them. They talked, lastly, of Vendramino and Grimano, and they even dig out the late and poor Scarpino. You can see, Your Lordship, how these people are worthy of unprecedented [punishment?], what sort of men of faith are these, who, in order to please their own consciences, don't leave their names, but they rather call themselves with the more appropriate name of New Aretini.<sup>75</sup> I thus, bowed an humiliated, beg Your Majesty to pity my state, find a remedy to my miseries, and, by extending the hand of your compassion towards me, keep me from the occurrences of this bad fortune, as I am afraid that words will be followed by facts. As [these people], being impatient in remaining without an answer, may do worse than just writing, without taking honour into consideration, as they don't have any. I commit myself to your prudence, I beg for mercy, I yearn, at this grave age of mine, to have some rest, and lastly I recommend myself to your good and gracious protection.

Gratiano et al.

#### **Defence of Ms Barbara Strozzi for the fifth satire made about the Unisoni.**

<sup>72</sup> The next sentence as a whole is quite confusing, and I wouldn't know how to translate it ...

<sup>73</sup> ... Whatever that means ...

<sup>74</sup> No sense at all

<sup>75</sup> I.e. People from Arezzo.

Cruel, unholy enemy, what wrongdoing have I ever done to you that you so unjustly offended me, so unfairly teared me down, so ruthlessly you unleashed your tongue to my damage and shame? Maybe my virtues are [...] the [...] of your wickedness. Maybe, since you are devoid of mercy, a monster of infamy, and the portrait of dishonour, you wanted to vent your feelings on me, hoping to find peace for your heart, which makes everything bitter, being filled with bile. And you are not aware that [by acting this way] you increase others' glory, sow your vanities, and pour a deluge of slanders. Despite you think to submerge innocence, you have done little [...], because all the spite of your infamous tongue cannot bury the honourable actions of a good man, least of all of a woman with no stain, who, because of her weaker sex, is worthy of more respect. Isn't it an accused infamy, an insane action, a dishonourable activity, a detestable habit, to go against a woman, a defenceless woman who is only armed with the affection of honest, virtuous and worthy men? My breasts, which you mock as swollen blisters, are however ornate remains of chaste thoughts, appreciated minds of prudish wills, and if they would serve me to stay afloat on [the sea of] dishonour, they are my guide to venture into eminent actions which are worthy only of praises. Now, yours is a minor fault to be sickened by my wellbeing (despite you claim to have good taste) and give birth to my harm with your condemnation: but there is no target for your tongue that wasn't first sheltered by commendation. My innocence does not require much evidence, your vituperative nature can only rejoice in the wind of loathing, but the integrity of my conscience and a more firm temper, which I have among the weapons used to bear the blows of my enemies, you, for being so unhuman, try to compare to your own defects. You even write things that were never ever in my thoughts. I always feared the ire of the heavens, knowing that where the fear of God is missing it is necessary to destroy even [those things] worthy of honour. Thus, the waters of the Flood and the sulphurs of Pentapolis have been always considered light punishment for the faults of wrongdoers. And you, in your cowardly heart pretend than I do not fear even the prospect of dying with the remorse of sin, and it is clear that you write to tear apart rather than say the truth. But he who does not have defects does not fear punishment; rather, it is by living confident and according to the use of nature that he who is innocent spends his hours, years, and life. Nonetheless, in your satires [...] you accuse me of being daring, courageous, drunk [...] of undeserved honours. And the more I try to live without defects, the more you lie [...] you don't like the music, you don't enjoy the dissonances, and everyone is immoral in regards to your frauds. Only in carrying on the progresses of your demerits you put [*fussi???*] and pincers forward, the former to prevent you from falling forward, the latter to offer yourself the tribute that it is owed to your many excesses. The words of your suffering ascend so high that the beginning would be for that of little [...] to such merit.<sup>76</sup> I am a woman, indeed weak in the flesh, but I must account for my worldly actions to God only, and I am sure that I do not bear those attributions with which you ornate me. Let the [...] serve to my defence, because if I were quiet I would let [others] believe that I am even worse than what your voice is singing. But I, light-heartedly, console myself and rejoice more in having good acquaintances among pestering than having

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<sup>76</sup> ?????

it bad among delights, because he who makes evil [things] cannot hope to stay hidden, and even if he could from others, he could not fool God, to whom everything appears clearly. Indeed, you don't know anything about me, you are a defamer, an assassin, and you should well know, while you write so much, that calumny is a secret jealousy, which, with false accusations, condemns the virtuous actions of others, and aims at depressing others in order to elevate itself [...]. But this, without evidence, becomes a stain to those who fabricated it and a crown to those who [...?]. The [*cornutelle?????*] of your soul were poured throught the veins of sloth, your heart if made of stone by cruelties, you can't expect anything but becoming soft and unpetrified only in your won calamities or the lowing of your own blood. Remember that you are mortal, think about life [lasting the time of] a lightning; you will have to account also for these writings of yours, and I will estimate the effect [...] so that I can follow that adage, "everyone who had no feet to step on thorns on the Earth, won't have hands to collect roses in Heaven". However, I am not surprised at all by your writings, because I am familiar with the malice of some men, who are pleased more by hurting others than receiving [something] good for themselves. And you, being one of them, should expect my vengeance from the Almighty, as everything is in His hands, and you shall take good advice from this.

Barbara Strozzi.

## **Appendix Two: Interviews**

### **Interview with Jule Rubi, Victoria & Albert Museum, 14 May 2018.**

#### **Which materials did you use for information on Barbara Strozzi?**

We came across her portrait while researching the painter Bernardo Strozzi, who was of particular interest to us for the exhibition as he painted several portraits of Claudio Monteverdi and genre scenes featuring various musicians. The Viola de Gamba player came to our attention thus, and we looked into research by Ellen Rosand and Beth Glixon to find more about the character of Barbara Strozzi.

#### **How did you decide what to include/what not to include?**

The narrative thread of the exhibition was Opera and City, and how these two elements interact at the time of creation of the pieces we feature. This was the main guiding line when deciding what to include or not. The depiction of the Viola de Gamba player, which we display alongside material relating to the singer Anna Renzi, allowed us to explore the role of women in music making in seventeenth century Venice; a theme that we felt was important to bring to the exhibition.

#### **How was the decision made to describe the portrait as definitely of her, rather than possibly or likely to be of her?**

Following Ellen Rosand's identification, and in the context described above, it made more sense in the context of the exhibition to explore the portrait as being of Strozzi, with her specific place in the music industry as composer, singer, and alleged courtesan. The parallel with Anna Renzi was interesting to us too, as they are both women who have not been married at a time where it was difficult for a single woman to make a living for herself.

#### **Are you aware of Robert Kendrick's work on Strozzi and his specific analysis of what the portrait might mean?**

We weren't aware of Robert Kendrick's research at the time of researching the portrait and exhibition; thank you very much for pointing us in this direction.

#### **Why the portrait and not a manuscript?**

What was of interest to us in the depiction of Strozzi is her role as a woman in Venice, which comes out more strikingly in the portrait. It is also helpful in an exhibition context to humanize the story with characters. The famous question of whether or not she was a courtesan also allowed us to reinforce how Venice was a thriving city for entertainment and to show how courtesans were integral to Venetian life in the seventeenth century. In the context and limited space of the exhibition, we focused only on the manuscripts of the featured operas. In this specific section, we displayed Cavalli's copy of Monteverdi's *Poppea*. Bringing in manuscripts of different works would have taken us away from our main narrative thread and our aim to encourage new and less specialist audiences to opera as a subject.

**Looking at the exhibition as a whole: no operas by women composers are included as the main, featured operas. Was that a deliberate decision? What was the rationale behind this?**

The final section features L'Amour de loin by Kaija Saariaho, premiered in 2000. We are very conscious that the exhibition concept meant we had to leave out very many strands of operatic history, one of them being women composers in the historical sections of the exhibition. If you look at the traditional "pantheon" of composers throughout opera's history, this omission is perpetuated regularly by many academics. However, we also thought it was very important to show that often behind every great man there are great women behind the scenes making things happen, and made sure that the women in the composer's life or the opera's world were prominently featured: Anna Renzi in Venice, the Countess Thun und Hohenstein in Vienna, Giuseppina Strepponi and Carla Maffei in Verdi's life, Salome and Lady Macbeth as characters in the latter sections. We are very excited by research projects and initiatives that re-address this vast imbalance in our knowledge about women composers, compared to men, and are interested to hear about future opportunities.

**Final question: are you aware that Strozzi's Opus 7 was described at several points in the historical record as having been performed as an opera? Would this knowledge have changed your framing of her?**

Within the exhibition narrative we focused on Strozzi's chamber works and her role as a musician. It would have been great to add text information on Opus 7 with her portrait, although we probably would not have included the music as we were conscious not to overload visitors with too many excerpts and recordings. However, as you have shown there is so much fascinating material about Barbara Strozzi, she would make a wonderful exhibition subject in her own right; and featuring her operatic work would surely be one of the highlights of such a project.

#### **Interview with Hannah Ely, Fieri Consort, 29 May 2018.**

**What was your source for "she was also said to have acted as courtesan at musical and intellectual meetings where "clothes were optional"?**

- Frustratingly I can't find my source at the moment for this - there definitely was one - would have been secondary. I thought it was something translated from the satire (which I think you have?) is there something which could have been translated similarly in there? Likely to be from Rosand.

**You refer to "the scandal surrounding her" in your facebook marketing details - could you expand on what that scandal was? Did you use primary or secondary sources, or both?**

- referring to the satire publication, several secondary sources - would love to see the primary! The scandal was that she was so bold in the company of men - distributing the flowers when she has 'already yielded the fruit' etc.

**Are you aware of/did you use the research of Robert Kendrick, Claire Fontijn and Wendy Heller (both her recent research and her older research)?**

Kendrick and Heller yes, don't think I came across Fontijn.

**Given the lack of evidence that Strozzi worked as a courtesan, how did you come to the decision to name the concert "The Courtesan's Gaze"?**

We wanted to suggest through the concert that this was an incorrect theory about her - modern audiences that know of Strozzi (as you know) tend to put her in that category, since the Rosands identified the portrait. So we start from the portrait, referring to her eye contact and connecting that to the duet "Begl'occhi" and translate that into "The Courtesan's Gaze" to draw it all together. We actually began this concert project before I had done as much research as I have done now and in hindsight I feel uncomfortable with this title as it actually possibly strengthens the view that she was a Courtesan - especially for those audience members who do not attend our concert to hear us explain all that but do see the marketing. But by the time we realised that, it was too late as concerts have to be planned and marketed so far in advance. I will be changing the title after our next performance at Handel House.

**How do you situate your framing of Strozzi in the wider discussion of the presentation and reception of marginalised composers and creators?**

Not really sure about this question. Could you rephrase? Sorry!

**What pieces are you presenting, and what guided your choice?**

"Begl'occhi," "I baci," "Amor dormiglione," "L'eraclito amorooso," "Sospira respira" - Chosen by singing through the facsimiles I could get my hands on and choosing our favourites based on their ranges for our soprano voices and with the audience in mind, plus content being flirtacious to demonstrate the style of text etc.

We also perform "Godere in Gioventu" in another programme.

**What guided your decision to present Caccini (father or daughter or both?) as Strozzi's contemporary?**

I know Francesca is a little older than Barbara but they did overlap and Francesca was a particularly successful female composer who came before her - Barbara I expect would have known of her work and success. I didn't want to present Barbara on her own suggesting she was the only female composer of her time to have such success - so many other women were composing but may not have had the same access or impetus to publish in such volumes as Barbara. Our programme is a developing one - would love to incorporate other women such as Antonia Bembo and Madalena Casulana too.

Insert: Facebook event page details for *The Courtesan's Gaze* concert programme

## Details

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Sopranos Hannah Ely and Lucinda Cox with instrumentalists Aileen Henry and Toby Carr present a concert of music exploring the life and work of Barbara Strozzi.

Barbara Strozzi lived a life of high musical achievement and scandal in the Venice of the seventeenth century. A prolific and successful published composer in her own time, she was said to have acted as courtesan at musical and intellectual meetings where "clothes were optional". This concert of solos, duets, and instrumental works composed by Strozzi and her contemporaries, including Monteverdi and Caccini, will explore her reception and whether the scandal surrounding her was justified.

Classical music Singing

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### **Appendix Three: track listings and translations**

**Recording One: Live recording of Ursula's Arrow Ensemble, 7 October 2019.**

**Soprano: Sarah Dacey**

**Mezzo: CN Lester**

**Harp: Aileen Henry**

**Theorbo: Toby Carr**

**Translations by Richard Kolb from the *Cor Donato* editions, with amendments by CN Lester.**

1. “Sonetto proemio dell'opera”
2. “La sol, fà, mi, rè, dò”
3. “Erat Petrus”
4. “In medio maris”
5. “Dialogo in partenza”
6. “Basta così v'ho inteso”
7. “La riamata da chi amava”

#### **“Sonetto proemio dell'opera”**

Thanks to you, my star of good fortune,  
 I fly from Mount Pindo among the blessed choirs,  
 and crowned with laurels of immortality  
 I will perhaps be considered a new Sappho.  
 Let the difficult and beautiful undertaking  
 be joyful with song and with love,  
 so that our hearts, united through voice,  
 may never be torn apart by conflicting desires.  
 Oh what blithe and sweet harmony  
 two faithful souls in love make,  
 for what one wants the other desires,  
 They rejoice with each other's joy, laugh with each other's laughter,

And never sigh except with the sigh of death  
 that heals and does not kill.

**"La sol, fà, mi, rè, dò"**

My lady, for whom I sing,  
won't say yes or no,  
but always boasts  
with "la sol fa mi re do." (let me do what I want).  
If I ask her if she might  
take pity on my heart one day  
before I perish from torment,  
she answers, give me "a gift" (don fa mi).

She never sings unless I pay,  
or finds her good voice;  
nor is she ready to play her instrument  
unless she hears the sound of gold.  
She always teaches me  
that if I want to sing duets,  
before she arrives at doing (al fà)  
I have to give her a gift ( il dò).

Always richly adorned,  
she likes to see herself looking good,  
and in ornamented song  
always intones "do it for me" (mi fa-re).  
To show how good she is  
she sings passages like this:  
she sustains "console me" (con-do-la)  
and "cover me with gold" (in-do-re-mi).

I thought her singing  
was for me alone (mi sol),  
but she sells it at auction  
to the highest bidder,  
so that we can say between ourselves  
that everyone sings what they know:  
I'm earning the wages of a dupe (mi sol-do),  
while she makes me the king of cuckolds (il re mi fa).

**"Erat Petrus"**

It was Peter for Saint Peter  
 Peter was sleeping,  
 bound in chains, among the soldiers  
 who were before the door.  
 See, a light shone into the hut;  
 an Angel at his side shook and summoned Peter:  
 "Arise, arise quickly,  
 break the chains, gird yourself,  
 put on your shoes and cloak,  
 and follow me."  
 When he knocked at John's door,  
 a girl within came running with joy,  
 but she did not open.  
 Peter continued to knock.  
 They said to the girl,  
 "you are insane, Peter is in prison."  
 Peter kept knocking.  
 But the girl said that Peter was standing before the door.  
 Peter kept knocking.  
 They said "It is an angel."  
 Peter kept knocking.  
 They opened the door, they saw, and were astonished.  
 Peter signed with his hand for them to be quiet,  
 and reported that the Lord had delivered him.  
 O Peter, protector of those who have hope in you, Peter.  
 We implore you, Peter, to wash away our faults,  
 to cleanse our guilt.  
 Behold one, wretched,  
 overcome with sins, trusting in your liberation.  
 We implore you, Peter  
 to wash clean our faults, grant peace to your servants,  
 give us glory in eternity.  
 Alleluia.

### **"In medio maris"**

In the midst of the sea the wind was raging. In the storm, between the flood and the waves, the little boat was tossed.

In the fourth hour of the night they were driven here and there, weeping and groaning.

Then behold! From far off He came walking across the water towards them. They were much distressed by amazement and fear. Terrified, they cried out: "It's a ghost!"

Jesus spoke: "It is I. Will you also come upon the waters, Peter?"

Peter leapt from the boat and walked. Trembling, he prayed, saying:

"In the mighty wind, in the wet waves, alas! My foot sinks! I'm falling, I'm dying! Save me, O Jesus!"

Jesus seized him and reproached him: "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Then all the people cried out: "Alleluia, truly you are the Son of God!"

### **"Dialogo in partenza"**

S: Soul of my heart, you're leaving?

A: I'm leaving.

S: And will you take with you, oh God, tell me, a small remembrance forever of our love?

A: Source of my life, you remain?

S: I remain.

A: And will you ever doubt my constancy, in such harsh separation?

S: No, no, let our jealousy be subdued.

A: Yes, yes, dry those beautiful sad eyes.

S & A: And where could I go (remain) that you would not be with me, since we have exchanged our hearts forever?

A: Although I leave, oh my love,  
my heart remains here.

S: And mine goes with you.

Although I remain, oh my trust,  
yours remains here.

A: And yours comes with me.

**“Basta così v'ho inteso”**

Enough! I understand you!  
 But you don't get it, I don't want to be caught in the trap.  
 Enough! I understand you!  
 I don't want to ruin my freedom,  
 I don't want to beg charity from your beautiful eyes.  
 Since my soul is free, leave me alone for a while.  
 I know what love is: it's beautiful, it's good  
 But it's not for me - I don't want to be stung by its arrows.  
 Enough! I understand you!

**“La riamata da chi amava”**

Slumber, oh my sorrow,  
 go to sleep, oh my suffering,  
 restrain your sighs and tears,  
 come to rest in a serene heart.

Be at peace, hopes,  
 quiet yourselves, desires,  
 distance yourselves, torments,  
 into infinite remoteness.

Blind suffering, you afflict me wrongly,  
 since Love wished to delight me  
 and restore to me my beautiful sun,  
 my life, my comfort.

My soul, return to enjoy  
 the one you desire with such passion,  
 run, my heart, to the beloved heart;  
 return to contentment, return to delight,  
 my soul, return to joy.

**Recording Two: CN Lester piano/voice rehearsal sessions, July 2020**

1. “Giusta negativa”
2. Extract 1 from “L’Astratto”
3. Extract 2 from “L’Astratto”

**Translations by Richard Kolb from the *Cor Donato* editions, with amendments by CN Lester.**

**“Giusta negativa”**

Don’t tell me to sing  
about the power of Cupid,  
because I’ll say that he’s  
the bane of musicians and lovers.  
No, no, no sir, no,  
I won’t open my mouth.  
To whom should I sing  
if my fair idol is far from me?  
Let her come, then I’ll sing for sure.

Don’t tell me to play  
for the glory of heaven.  
I’ll send you to the place where there is no  
shortage of other good musicians besides yourself.  
No, no, no sir, no,  
I won’t touch a note.  
To whom should I play  
if my fair idol is far from me?  
Let her come, then I’ll play for sure.

**“L’Astratto”**

I want, yes, I want to sing: maybe in singing  
I can find relief from my torment;  
music has the power to overcome suffering.  
Yes, yes, wait, I’m thinking,  
Let’s start playing  
and find a song that suits our mood.

"If one day my heart were bound  
by beautiful tresses..."  
I'd rip them off! As soon as I look at a page  
of music I'm reminded of my torment.

"The night fled and the sun spread its light..."  
Oh sure, here we go confusing day and night!

"Fly, o Furies,  
and carry  
this miserable creature  
to the eternal fire."  
But what am I doing in Hell?

"To your heaven, blithe yearning,  
spread your wings and go..."  
Clearly, the person who wrote you  
didn't know much about love.  
A lover's desires don't rise to Heaven.

"I'll rejoice under the moon..."  
This is even worse! He knows what happens to lovers  
and expects good fortune.

O misery! My woes have estranged me  
from myself, and seeking a subject to  
express it I've proposed a hundred.

For one whose hopes are bound  
by beautiful tresses,  
to his cruel bitter ruin,  
not even his thoughts are his own.

One who entrusts his liberty  
to a fair proud beauty,  
in the end is completely enslaved by love,  
and he won't even have his mind.

Thus I, miserable and foolish,  
not wanting to sing have sung much.

## Appendix Four: Translations of Strozzi's dedications

### Translation by Matteo dalle Fratte

#### Dedication Text Opus 1

##### SERENISSIMA

Ho ricevuto in ogni tempo tanti affettuosi aiuti dalla bontà d'uno studioso vasallo dell'Altezza vostra in condurmi all'impiego di questi, e d'altri molti armonici componimenti, che devo di ragione la prima opera, che, come donna, troppo arditamente mando in luce, riverentemente consacrarla all'augustissimo Nome di Vostra Altezza, acciò sotto una Quercia d'oro resti sicura da i fulmini dell'apparecchiata maledicenza.

##### YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS

*I have always received so much kind assistance from one of Your Highness's generous and scholarly subjects, who guided me in the composition of these and many other pieces, that I must reverently dedicate my first work, which as a woman I produced so courageously, to Your Highness's most august name, so that under a gilded Oak it may remain safe from the attacks of those who are always so ready to criticise.*

Aiuterammi alquanto la scelta fatta de' versi lirici, i quali essendo tutti scherzi di colui, che, sin dà fanciulletta, mi hà dato il cognome, e'l buon essere, solleveranno la noia à chiunque non rimanesse interamente sodisfatto delle mal concertate mie cantilene.

*The choice of lyrics will help me very much; they are all written by the one who, since I was a small girl, gave me both my surname and my wellbeing, they will alleviate the boredom of anyone who isn't completely satisfied by my badly composed melodies.*

Ma favoreggiata dall'ambita protezione di V. A. mi dò à credere, che non haverà chi vilipenda questi miei parti, se giungeranno ad esser veduti in quelle regie mani, & à venir tal volta ascoltati da quelle prudentissime orecchie, che non fanno, se non con Eroica benignità accogliere l'altrui devozione, nella quale professo di non esser' ultima d'affetto, come non sono a chi che sia inferiore in riverire il gran merito dell' Altezza vostra.

Onde profondamente inchinandomele, prego alle sublimi prerogative del divino ingegno di V. A. ogni più adeguata felicità.

*However, supported by the coveted protection of Your Highness, I believe that there will be no one who will revile my compositions, if they get to be held in those royal hands and sometimes heard by those most prudent ears. They (hands and ears) will welcome with heroic mercy my devotion which, I vow, will be not lacking in affection and will not be inferior to anyone else in revering the great esteem of Your Highness.*

*Bowing sincerely to you, I pray to the sublime prerogatives of divine intelligence  
(God) for Your Highness's utmost happiness.*

Di Venetia li 12 d'Ottobre 1644.  
*Venice, 12 October 1644*

Di V. A. Serenissima.  
Humilissima, e  
Devotissima Serva.  
Barbara Strozzi  
*Your Highness's most humble and devoted servant,  
Barbara Strozzi*

### Dedication Text Opus 2

SACRA CESAREA MAESTA  
*Your Sacred Majesty*

MIO SIGNOR CLEMENTISSIMO  
*Dear Most Clement Lord*

Un sì debole tributo del mio riverentissimo ossequio non è degno d'esser posto ne gli  
Erarij d'un Cesare.

*Such a small tribute of my most reverent deference does not deserve to be placed in  
the treasury of a king.*

Non può la vile miniera del povero ingegno d'una Donna produrre metallo da  
fabricar ricchissime corone d'oro al merito degli Augusti.

*The unworthy mine of a woman of little intelligence can not produce the metal  
needed to create the rich golden crowns that are fit for the august (i.e., kings).*

Ond'io farò più degna di scherni, che di applausi à comparir nella Reggia di V.M.  
presentando à suoi piedi queste inezzie musicali, ove il rimbombo ogn' hora de più  
scelti maestri si fà sentire.

*I will be more worthy of mockery than applause when I appear in Your Majesty's  
court, presenting at your feet these worthless musical things, where at all times (in  
the court) the echoes of the most select maestros can be heard.*

Mà in tempo di nozze è lecito anco à più comunali, e plebei il mascherarsi da gradi, e  
frammettersi frà i più conspicui Cavalieri, e Dame, à far col numero loro la festa più  
varia, e sollazevole ancora.

*But when there's a wedding even the most common people and plebeians are allowed to masquerade as high society and mingle with the most well known Knights and Dames, making the party even more varied and entertaining.*

Inanimità dà molti Professori de questa bell'arte, e particolarmente dal Sig. Francesco Cavalli, uno de' più celebri di questo secolo, già dalla mia fanciullezza mio cortese precettore, hò pubblicata al mondo questa seconda mia fatica, la quale portando in fronte l'allegrezza spiegata, per le terze felicissime nozze della Maestà V. non deve ricorrere ad altra Deità tutelare, ch'alla Cesarea prottezione di Lei.

*Encouraged by many professors of this beautiful art, and particularly by Mr. Francesco Cavalli, one of the most well known of this century and my tutor since I was a young girl, I have published to the world this second work of mine which, bearing with pride the joy of this happiest third wedding celebration of Your Majesty, needn't resort to any other divine protection than Your royal protection.*

Queste mie noiose Cantilene dalla divina voce del Sig. Adamo Franchi gentilmente portate alle benigne orecchie di V. M. sembreranno molto diverse da quelle, che sono: e quando venghino gradite da lei, mi chiamerò felice, e stimerò di haver conseguito il fine propostomi, ch'è di rassegnarmi solo alla Clementissima Maestà Vostra per  
Venetia il primo di Giugno 1651.

*These boring compositions of mine, kindly brought to Your Majesty's clement ears by the divine voice of Mr. Adamo Franchi, will sound very different to what they really are: and when you enjoy them, I will consider myself happy and that I have achieved the desired outcome, which is to renounce myself only to Your most merciful Highness, for (the premiere in) Venice, 1 June 1651.*

Humilissima, e devotissima serva Barbara Strozzi  
Your most humble and devoted servant,  
Barbara Strozzi

#### **Dedication Text Opus 5 (to Anne of Austria)**

Perche tù ò mio Cuore, che ti portasti ardito alle più grandi Altezze, t'incamini si timido à quella, à cui queste carte già consacrasti?

*Why, oh my heart, you who bravely took yourself to the highest heights (highest levels of royalty), why are moving so shyly towards the one to whom you have dedicated these papers (compositions)?*

T'intendo si' perche essendo tù in me stessa, non puoi haver sensi à mè nascosi:

*I understand you (heart) because being a part of me, you can't have emotions that are hidden from me:*

Fosti altre volte invitato, e quella mano, che ti sù porta al camino, t'assicurò l'ascesa: mà nè men cauto sei di presente, se ben tù miri, che non vacilla quel piede, che per saldi fondamenti si và conducendo.

*You were invited on other occasions, and that hand that leads you up the path steadied your ascent: but you are no less careful this time, if you make sure that those feet don't stray, you'll proceed on a firm footing.*

Là catena del Fato, che partendosi dalle stelle à quelle ritorna, mostra, che quest' ordine delle cose hà la sua uniformita, dalla quale à ben regolarti, non si travia.

*The chain of Fate, that comes from the stars and to the stars returns, shows that this order of things has its own structure, from which, to stay on the right track, one should not deviate.*

Posaron le mie Primitie musicali in uno de gli Asili della virtù, ricevute e gradite dalla Serenis. Di Firenze.

*My first compositions were put under the protection of virtue, being received and appreciated by her Royal Highness of Florence.*

Se nell'altro Serenissimo Asilo tì ricovran le mie sacre Primitie, ch'è la GRAND' ANNA AUSTRIACA D'INSPRUCH a quella Cognata, chi niegherà che con ragionevol uniformità tentino quest'ascesa?

*If my sacred first compositions found favour in the other Royal Court, that of the sister-in-law of Great Anna of Innsbruck, who can deny them a reasonable attempt at this (additional) rise to fame?*

Mà quai rimproveri dà te sento? Non è (tù mi dici) dà ponderar le ragioni, ove una retta via apre libero il sentiero alla virtù: Là virtù d'altrove sbandita corre d'ogni parte per ricovrarsi a questa nuova, e Gran Mecenate, che non grande per l'adherenza d'Augste, ma ella medemma Augusta con Tromba di vera Fama indice più degne ricetto al Parnaso.

*But what worries am I hearing from you (my heart)? There is no need (you tell me) to ponder the reasons, since there is a straight path that freely opens up the way to virtue: virtue is banished elsewhere and runs everywhere to finally find refuge with this new and great patron, who is not great simply for being royal, but because she herself, with the trumpet of true fame, shows the way to the most worthy shelter in happiness.*

Son questi i motivi del cuore: la ricevo timorosa, gli odo confusa, e già che tanto non m'arestan le debolezze di Donna, che più non m'inoltri il compatimento del Sesto, sopra lienissimi fogli volo devota ad'inchinarmi.

*These are my heart's reasons: I welcome them with fear, I hear them with confusion, and now – not so much because I am held back by a woman's weaknesses, but rather that I do not wish to further put upon your Highness's tolerance – before these happy papers I rush to bow with devotion.*

### Dedication Text Opus 6

Illusterrimo et ecclentissimo Signor et Patron mio Col.mo

Non è vulgare la gloria, ch'io mi prometto da questi miei musici componimenti per la superba livrea, che portano d'humilissimo ossequio al Nome glorioso di Vostro Eccellenzissimo di che ella medesima si compiacque investirli quando benignamente ascoltandoli gli degnò del suo magnanimo gradimento, e non isdegnò per renderla più vistosa, vinta la materia dal lavoro, con pretioso vantagio fregiarla d'alcumi suoi poetici contratagli, e ricami, nè quali trattenendosi alle volte per diporto de gl'attributi più ferii fà vedere, ch'il primo fior de gl'anni s'è stagionato in quel frutto di virtù sollecita, che nell'età più tarda anche ben dirado matura.

*Your Excellency*

*It is not a vulgar glory that I promise myself that these compositions of mine (made) by royal mandate, should pay very humble respect to Your Excellency's glorious name, since you so kindly invested in them when you so generously listened to them and gave them your noble seal of approval, and you didn't refuse to make them more visible and successful through hard work, adding the precious advantage of your signature with your poetical additions and ornamentations, which you sometimes spent time on purely for the enjoyment and pride you took in writing, this shows that what you learnt when you were young has ripened into a fruit of diligent virtue, a skill that matures with age even when it is not used all the time.*

Onde può l'Eccellenzissimo Vostro con piétastoso passeggiar le gallerie de gl'avi non men per fama, che per famiglia Heroi, riconoscendoli non come da chi riceva, mà più tosto à chi accresca ornamento e splendore.

*For these reasons Your Excellency can mercifully walk around the galleries of your ancestors, who are heroes not because of their fame, but because they are heroes of your family, paying your respects to them not as someone who has merely received something from them, but rather as someone who adds to their ornament and splendor.*

In tanto riconosca ancora trà il numero de suoi otii virtuosi questi pochi numeri, e note di musica, humanamente l'accogla, generosamente li protegga, mentr'io son sicura, che non faranno un mal sentire sotto gl'ausitii d'un Belvedere, e qui con profonda riverenza me l'inchino.

*For now, please recognise amongst your many virtuous pastimes these little compositions, and please humbly welcome them, generously please protect them, since I am sure that they will be happily listened to in the court of the Prince of Belvedere, and now, I bow to you with profound reverence.*

Di Vostro Eccellentissimo  
Devotissima & obligatissima serva  
Barbara Strozzi

*Your most devoted and indebted servant,  
Barbara Strozzi*

### Dedication Text Opus 7

Consecrata  
All' Illustrissimo et Eccellentissimo Signor Nicolo Sagredo  
cavalier e procurator di San Marco, & Ambasciator  
Estraordinario Alla S. Di N. S. Alessandro VII

In Venetia MDCLVIII

*Dedicated  
To the most Illustrious Excellency Lord Nicolo Sagredo  
Knight and Judge of San Marco and Special Ambassador to Pope Alessandro VII*

Venice 1658

Illustrissimo et eccellentissimo Signor Mio Patron Col..mo

Consacrava il misterioso Egitto al Nume dell' eloquenza le lingue, ed io dedico ad' un Mercurio, che tiene la prudenza delle serpi, non già alla mano mà nel capo, queste harmoniche note, che son lingue dell'Anima, ed istromenti del core;

*Your Excellency*

*The mysterious Egypt devoted languages to the God of eloquence, and I dedicate to a Mercury, who has the prudence of snakes not only with his moves but also with his*

*mind, these compositions of mine, that are languages of the soul and instruments of the heart.*

dissi ad un Mercurio? e ben per tale fù riconosciuta V.E: più d'una fiata dal Germanico Giove, all'hor che per affissarsi nel suo gran merito l'Aquila Austriaca hebbé d'huopo di doppia fronte: onde à ragione l'E.V: dopo la Legatione di Alemagne passò con titolo d'oratore estraordinario alle Corte di Roma, per far conoscere, ch'un tanto personaggio era sol degno di comparire inanti à i Cesari, e al gl'Alessandri:

*Did I say "to a Mercury"? In fact Your Excellency was so called more than once by the Germanic Jupiter (the Emperor), who to be worthy of the great merit of the Austrian Eagle (symbol of the Austrian Empire) needed a double role: for the same reasons Your Excellency, after the Government of Germany was promoted to the title of special orator at the Court of Rome, to show people that such a man was only worthy of appearing alongside kings (Caesar and Alexander):*

Fù Favola, ch'un Hermete Trimegato inventasse la Musica, è però vero che l'E.S. se non è stata un Trimegisto nell'inventarla, è stato un Hermete nell'aggrandirla, beneficiando con regia munificenza chi la possiede.

*It was a fairytale that Hermete Trimegato invented music, but it is true that even though your servant (myself) wasn't invented by a Trimegisto, she was magnified by a Hermete, having been blessed with the royal generosity of those who possess it (her music).*

Ne fanno fede i miei poveri Lari favoriti e protetti con profuse gracie dall'E.V. Io fanno i Cantori Romani, sommersi à punto come Sirene entro mari di Gratia, perlo che à lei come à mio Dio Tutelare, offro queste canzoni, supplicandola à non isdegnarle, benche sian aire posciache accolte dalla benignità di V.E.

*Bearing witness to this are my poor Lari (simple household gods that protect the home and family), favoured and protected by the generous grace of Your Excellency and the Roman singers, submerged like Sirens on the seas of grace, and so I offer these songs to your Excellency, and to God who protects me, and I beg you not to dislike them, but to welcome them with Your Excellency's kindness.*

Ancorche arie sapranno come nel portico d'Olimpia, che trammandava le voci settuplicate, un giorno à gloria del nome Sagredo farsi centuplicate, e qui resto con tutta humiliatione.

*Because these arias will one day be spread hundredfold in the glorious name of Sagredo, as happened in the arcades of Olympia (ancient Greek city), where voices were multiplied seven times, and here I stop with complete humility.*

Di V.E:  
Humilissima e Devotissima serva  
Barbara Strozzi

*Your most humble and devoted servant,  
Barbara Strozzi*

### **Dedication Text Opus 8**

Consacrato  
 ALL' ALTEZZA SERENISSIMA  
 DI MADAMA SOFIA  
 Duchessa di Bransvich, e Luneburg, nata Principessa  
 Elettorale Palatina.  
 Opera Ottava.

*Dedicated to  
 Her Royal Highness  
 Dame Sofia  
 Duchess of Brunswick and Lüneburg, born Princess  
 Princess Elector  
 Opus Eight*

IN VENETIA MDCLXIII. Apresso Francesco Magni dello Gardano  
 ~ MADAMA SERENISSIMA ~  
 Vola per tutta Europa con tanto applauso sovra l'ali dell'immortalità il nome  
 Serenissimo di V A [Vostra Altezza], che per publicarlo maggiormente non ha più  
 Trombe la Fama, ne più voci la Gloria: onde non più stupore, s'anco un ingegno di  
 Nottola a tanto nome si scuota, già che à V A, che è ammirata per la Pallade  
 dell'Universo, non desdirà, come tale il vederselo à piedi.

*Venice, 1663. Care of Francesco Magni dello Gardano*

*Your Royal Highness*

*Your Royal Highness's name is soaring throughout Europe on the wings of  
 immortality with so much acclaim that fame has no more trumpets and Glory has no  
 more voices to announce it more widely: so it would not be a surprise if even a wise  
 owl were to tremble at such a name, since Your Highness is so admired all around the  
 universe, and you would even allow it to stay at your feet.*

La maraviglia dopo, che ebbe fortuna di conoscere l'A V, più non si partì  
 dall'Augste soglie d'Hanovure, e giurò ch'in una Sola SOFIA stava accolto quanto  
 d'Heroico, di maestoso, e di vago vidde né trascorsi, e né presenti secoli il mondo.

*Since Wonder has had the good fortune to know Your Highness, it has never left the august lands of Hanover, and it has sworn that only in one Sofia has there ever been, in the past or present, so much heroism, majesty and grace.*

Ecco dunque, che tratta dalle singolari Virtù di V A. ardisco di consecrare al suo Regal Genio queste musiche Note, proprie, anzi dovute al Nume del suo gran merito, che dando ricovero ne suoi Regii Alberghi alle muse fà sentire alle Sirene dell'Adria le voci de più esquisiti Cantanti; godendo, che sì come gl'Atavi Suoi Gloriosi hanno sotto il Britannico, e Teutonico Cielo fatte germogliare le palme, e le Corone, così hora si rimirino circondate altre si à V A le choime d'Allori. Aggradisca humilmente la supplico questa humile mia oblatione, degnandola dell'aspetto favorevole della Sua Serenissima gratia, pregando il Cielo à guardare lungamente l'A V per esemplare, e Idea delle Prencipesse, e Regine

*So it is because of Your Highness's singular virtues that I desire to dedicate these compositions of mine to your royal genius, created thanks to the deity of your great merit, that by hosting muses in your royal palaces lets the Sirens of Adria hear the voices of the most delightful singers; enjoying them like your glorious ancestors who planted their palms and crowns to blossom below the skies of Britain and Germany, and as we also now enjoy admiring Your Highness's hair adorned with a crown of bay leaves.*

*I humbly beg you to enjoy this humble offering of mine, and grant them the approval of Your Highness's grace, I pray to the Heavens that Your Highness may long remain an ideal example amongst Princesses and Queens.*

Di V A Serenissima

Humilis, Devot. & osseq. serva  
Barbara Strozzi

*Your most humble, devoted and reverent servant  
Barbara Strozzi*

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