

Burlesque Connotations in the Pictorial Language in Bronzino's Poetry*

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Agnolo di Cosimo, better known as Bronzino, was not only one of the most celebrated painters at the court of Cosimo I in Florence; he was also a dazzling poet, as Vasari reminds us in his Vite. Bronzino was the author of a Petrarchan canzoniere, as well as of burlesque poems. In his sonetti caudati, and in his paradoxical capitoli, burlesque language—characterized by its erotic puns and double meanings—interacts with the pictorial field in a strikingly original way. This interaction hinges on Bronzino's employment of pictorial discourse: from simple, well-known burlesque symbols and metaphors—the paint brush, colours, bells, or the shapes of mosquitoes, carrots, and cheese—to the subtler use of burlesque topoi to face more serious and complex aesthetic issues.

Agnolo di Cosimo Bronzino (1503–72), one of the most celebrated painters at the court of Cosimo I de' Medici in Florence, is nowadays hardly known as a poet, even though, in sixteenth-century Florence, Benedetto Varchi hailed him as “Sì grande Apelle, e non minore Apollo” (So great an Apelles, and no less an Apollo).¹ Bronzino's poetic production comprises a *canzoniere* in Petrarchan style, with over 260 poems,² as well as a large number of burlesque verses that had a more immediate and widespread reception.³

* I wish to thank William Barton and Konrad Eisenbichler for their precious assistance in translating my article, and most of verses here cited, into English. In a very few cases, however, I followed the translation provided by Deborah Parker in *Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). I also maintained Nerida Newbigin's translation of Bronzino's “Del pennello”, online, accessed 10 October 2016, http://www.palazzoostrozzi.org/allegati/PennelloNewbigin_100527090106.pdf.

1. Varchi's praise is found in a sonnet included by Bronzino in his *canzoniere* (BNCF, MS. II IX 10 [formerly Magliabechiano II IX 10], fol. 186^v).

2. See Antonio Geremicca, *Agnolo Bronzino. “La dotta penna al pennel dotto pari”* (Rome: UniversItalia, 2013), 31; Giuliano Tanturli, “Formazione d'un codice e di un canzoniere: *Delle Rime del Bronzino pittore Libro primo*,” *Studi di filologia italiana* 62 (2004): 195–224.

3. Giorgio Vasari writes of Bronzino, “sopra tutto (quanto alla poesia) è maraviglioso nello stile e capitoli bernieschi, intantoché non è oggi chi faccia in questo genere di versi meglio, né cose più bizzarre e capricciose di lui, come un giorno si vedrà, se tutte le sue opere, come si crede e spera, si stamperanno,” in Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, ed.

Bronzino's burlesque verses include the *capitoli ternari*, typical of the playful poetry of the sixteenth century, and a cycle of *sonetti caudati* entitled the *Salterelli dell'Abbrucia sopra i Mattaccini di Ser Fedocco* (1560–61), inspired by the *Mattaccini* of Annibale Caro (1558). The dating of Bronzino's printed burlesque texts is between 1538—the year of publication of the *capitolo* “Del pennello”—and 1567, the year the “Serenata” went to press, published with Francesco Berni's *La Catrina*.⁴ In both his *Capitoli* and his *Salterelli*, the activity of painting constitutes a significant part of Bronzino's composition that should be read at various levels, including the obscene. These poems belong in fact to a burlesque tradition that was very much alive at the time in Florence, where the obscene symbolism of its poetry, mainly inspired by Domenico di Giovanni, better known as Burchiello (1404–49), and Francesco Berni (1497–1535), is universally recognized.

Some of Bronzino's *capitoli* were published both in the *Primo* and in the *Secondo libro dell'opere burlesche*, printed in Florence by Giunti in 1548 and 1555 respectively.⁵ His burlesque poems remained, however, and circulated mostly in manuscript; in the last decades of the century, in the wake of the new cultural climate emanating from the Counter Reformation, and especially after the Dantesque and Petrarchan “turn” of the Accademia Fiorentina, these burlesque works were censured and condemned.⁶ The results of this cultural turn became particularly apparent after 1547, with the expulsion from the Accademia Fiorentina of “non-specialized” intellectuals and of those who did not align themselves to the new directives coming down from higher authorities.

Paola Barocchi and Rosanna Bettarini, 8 vols. (Florence: Sansoni-Studio Per Edizioni Scelte, 1966–1987), 6:237. Translation: “Above all, with regard to poetry, he is marvellous in the style of his *capitoli* after the manner of Berni, insomuch that at the present day there is no one who writes better in that kind of verse, nor things more fanciful and bizarre, as will be seen one day if all his works, as is believed and hoped, come to be printed,” in Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters Sculptors and Architects*, ed. and trans. Gaston du C. De Vere, 10 vols. (London: Macmillan and the Medici Society, 1912–14), 10:11.

4. See Bronzino, *Rime in burla*, ed. Franca Petrucci Nardelli (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1988), 475. All Italian citations of Bronzino's verses will follow this edition by Petrucci Nardelli, except for *Saltarelli dell'Abbruccia*, cited from Bronzino, *Saltarelli dell'Abbruccia*, ed. Carla Rossi Bellotto (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1998).

5. The *Secondo libro dell'opere burlesche* contains Bronzino's “Capitolo primo in lode della galea,” the “Capitolo secondo in lode della medesima,” the “Capitolo de' romori,” the “Capitolo contro a le campane,” and the “Capitolo in lode della zanzara.”

6. Petrucci Nardelli, 495–96

Bronzino himself was among the expelled, as was his friend and founder of the Accademia degli Umidi, Anton Francesco Grazzini, better known as Lasca. They were both readmitted much later, in 1566.⁷ Despite the attempts of the newly formed Accademia della Crusca to “canonize” burlesque literature—by including, for example, Bronzino’s *Salterelli* in its first *Vocabolario*—the entire production of burlesque literature (and not just Bronzino’s poems) failed to enter the Italian literary canon and survived, or circulated, only in a semi-clandestine fashion. Only recently, after the recovery of important eighteenth-century re-editions (beginning with *Il primo, Il secondo, and Il terzo libro dell’opere burlesche*, reprinted with various interpolations, between 1771 and 1773),⁸ have we seen a real scholarly effort to bring this burlesque literature to light once again.

The genre of the *capitolo ternario* was established and codified by Berni as early as the 1520s. It incorporates distinctive erotic allusions alongside the fundamental classical elements of the paradoxical *encomium* (Ovid, the pseudo-Virgilian *Culex*, Seneca, and all the authors to whom Erasmus refers in the dedication of his *Moriae encomium* to Thomas More).⁹ Burlesque allusions are often difficult for us to reconstruct today, but they were easily picked up by contemporary readers, at least by those in Florence and Rome.¹⁰ During the 1980s, the scholar Jean Toscan provided important interpretations that advanced our understanding of the erotic connotations of sixteenth-century burlesque poetry;¹¹ yet, our understanding of obscene references often remains only tentative.¹²

7. See Michel Plaisance, *L'Académie et le Prince. Culture et politique à Florence au temps de Côme Ier et de François de Médicis. / L'Accademia e il suo principe. Politica e cultura a Firenze al tempo di Cosimo I e di Francesco de' Medici* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2004), and Konrad Eisenbichler, ed., *The Cultural Politics of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

8. The rediscovery of burlesque literature started with *Sonetti del Burchiello del Bellincioni e di altri poeti fiorentini alla burchiellesca* (London [but Lucca or Livorno], 1757).

9. See Maria Cristina Figorilli, “Meglio ignorante che dotto”. *L'elogio paradossale in prosa nel Cinquecento* (Naples: Liguori, 2008).

10. See Danilo Romei, *Berni e berneschi del Cinquecento* (Florence: Centro 2 P, 1984), especially 53–54.

11. Jean Toscan, *Le carnaval du langage. Le lexique érotique des poètes de l'équivoque de Burchiello à Marino (XV^e–XVI^e siècle)*, 4 vols. (Lille: Université de Lille III, 1981).

12. See *I sonetti del Burchiello*, ed. Michelangelo Zaccarello (Turin: Einaudi 2004), xxvi; Giuseppe Crimi, *L'oscura lingua e il parlar sottile. Tradizione e fortuna del Burchiello* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2005), iii.

Franca Petrucci Nardelli's edition of Bronzino's *capitoli* was the first to appear after Toscan, but her commentary is only partial.¹³ The same is true for Deborah Parker's approach to Bronzino's poetry in her monograph, commendably the first to examine Bronzino as a poet as well as an artist. In this article, I will expand on Parker's analysis of the artistic themes in Bronzino's burlesque poetry, differing substantially from her approach only with regard to the contrast she detects between serious and burlesque poetry. Indeed, if an erotic—and specifically homoerotic—interpretation takes precedence in the analyses by Petrucci Nardelli and Parker, subsequent studies, in particular those of Rossi Bellotto on the *Salterelli*, have chosen a more cautious approach.¹⁴ This caution has been a trend in the most recent interpretations of other burlesque poetry, such as that of Burchiello: if Antonio Lanza adhered without hesitation to the more obscene line of interpretation, Zaccarello and Crimi have shown themselves to be much more circumspect.¹⁵

In some cases, however, it does seem very difficult to ignore the obscene connotations in burlesque poetry, especially given the number of previous and contemporary comments. These connotations are in line with the initial model for the genre as sketched by Burchiello and Berni, and later adopted by the Florentine poets of the Accademia degli Umidi—soon renamed the Accademia Fiorentina—such as Grazzini/Lasca, who was a close associate of Bronzino. Moreover, the obscene content is derived from the Florentine tradition of *Canti carnascialeschi*,¹⁶ and later, in Rome, by the tradition of *pasquinate*. Indeed, obscene allusions served usually to conceal other, more cryptic and objectionable references: the latest studies in the area reveal that contemporary political and religious issues can be detected under the obscene and playful outward surface of these works.¹⁷ Bronzino himself almost certainly alternates

13. Stefania Pasti also fully endorses the obscene interpretation of Bronzino's burlesque poetry. See "La produzione letteraria," in *Bronzino*, ed. Claudio Strinati (Florence: Viviani, 2010), 201–37.

14. Bronzino, *Salterelli dell'Abbrucia sopra i Mattaccini di Ser Fedocco* (1560–61).

15. See Domenico di Giovanni detto il Burchiello, *Le poesie autentiche*, ed. Antonio Lanza (Rome: Aracne, 2011); Zaccarello, ed.; Crimi.

16. One might also mention the influence of Stefano di Tommaso Finiguerra, known as lo Za, Antonio Cammelli, known as il Pistoia, and Luigi Pulci. On the genre, see Antonio Lanza, *Polemiche e berte letterarie nella Firenze del primo Rinascimento (1375–1449)* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1989).

17. See Plaisance, as well as Ambra Moroncini, "The *Accademia della Virtù* and Religious Dissent," in *The Italian Academies 1525–1700: Networks of Culture, Innovation and Dissent*, ed. Jane Everson, Denis

between these “prohibited” layers of meaning—for example in the *Salterelli*, where at least one internal polemic against the cultural-political management of the Accademia Fiorentina lies hidden¹⁸—and less scandalous levels of interpretation, such as those pertaining to his painting career. Similarly, the close correlation between the shapes of the objects a poem might praise (carrots, paintbrushes, and church bells) and its obscene allusions served to inspire the poet's erotic imagination.

Let us first consider the erotic connotations in Bronzino's burlesque verses on his own trade “del pennello” (of the paintbrush),¹⁹ starting with the *capitolo* of the same name (“Il pennello”). This *capitolo* ends with a “scholarly” dissertation on the merits of the “pennel grosso, il mezzano, il minore” (of big, middle-sized, and tiny brushes), along with the respective merits of those “corti e grossi” (short and thick); of the paintbrush “che serve a quella cosa che s'ha da fare” (appropriate to do the job expected of it); of those which are “lunghe e sottili” (long and fine) and that “si ripiegano in punta (fold back at the tip). Such burlesque ambiguity, on the obscene level of meaning, reaches its climax in the concluding verses:

Né per questo si scema dell'onore
al buon pennello, anzi *s'accresce in grosso*
e se non fosse che 'l lume si muore
io ve'l farei veder, dov'io non posso. (lines 121–24, p. 26)

Reidy, and Lisa Sampson (Oxford: Maney Legenda, 2016), 88–101; see also Antonio Corsaro, “Gli spazi e gli interventi dei letterati fra la Riforma e il Concilio,” in *Il Rinascimento italiano di fronte alla Riforma: Letteratura e Arte. Atti del Colloquio internazionale, London, The Warburg Institute, 30–31 Gennaio 2004*, ed. Chrysa Damianaki, Paolo Procaccioli, and Angelo Romano (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2005), 3–29; James Ward, *Hidden in Plain Sight: Covert Criticism of the Medici in Renaissance Florence*, online, last modified 8 July 2015, <http://berkeley.academia.edu/JamesWard/>.

18. Carla Chiummo, “Bronzino e l'Accademia Fiorentina,” in *The Italian Academies 1525–1700: Networks of Culture, Innovation and Dissent*, 256–73.

19. An interpretation fully supported by Petrucci Nardelli, 402.

(But this cannot detract from the great honour that's due to a good brush: instead, it grows! And were it not that daylight's fading fast I'd show it to you now, except I can't.)²⁰

The *incipit* had already stated, this time without any attempt to veil the obscene frame of reference, that

Io vidi a questi giorni un buon ritratto
d'un uomo e d'una donna: erano ignudi,
dipinti insieme in un piacevol atto. (lines 1–3, p. 23)

(Some days ago I saw an excellent portrait / of a man and a woman: they were naked, / painted together, in an act of pleasure.)

It continues with highly suggestive remarks about those who like to be painted

sul letto o faticose
attitudin fa, ritto o a sedere;
chi tien qualcosa in man, chi l'ha nascose;
chi si vuol esser dipinto innanzi ad uno²¹

(Some like to pose reclining, or else stand or sit in strangely difficult positions, with something in their hands, or else concealed; some choose to stand behind another person.)

On these verses from the *capitolo* “Del pennello”, Talvacchia and Parker have explicitly invoked the model of Giulio Romano's *Modi* and their literary

20. The expression *io ve'l farei veder, dov'io non posso* has a more ambiguous sexual innuendo. This and following translations of Bronzino's verses, and of citations of other primary and secondary sources, are mine unless stated otherwise, and will follow the original in parentheses.

21. Bronzino, *Rime in burla*, lines 19–22, p. 23. With regard to the ambiguous term *pennello*, Toscan also cites Giambullari, a key member of the Accademia Fiorentina, and his “Canzone degli imbiancatori di case” among his examples (Toscan, 1123).

counterpart in the *Sonetti lussuriosi* of Aretino.²² This model, however, changes radically in Bronzino with his ambiguous synthesis of pictorial and literary references, in the form of a more disguised mode of burlesque allusion. This allusive mode is similarly subtle in the long “Capitolo contro a le campane” (composed of 379 verses) containing similar sexual insinuations and in direct dialogue with Firenzuola’s successful “Capitolo in lode delle campane,” which was included in the *Primo libro dell’opere burlesche*. To his more obvious auditory reservations about the sound of the bells and their “percuotere strano” (line 11), Bronzino adds more aesthetic reservations, to which he claims the painter to be particularly sensitive:

Quanto a bellezza, colui che le pose,
fe’ lor un corpo fuor d’ogni misura,
come son tutte le cose ritrose.

Mostran da basso aver tonda figura,
[...]

Non si discerne in lor petto, né schiene;
non son triangolare, ovate o quadre,
ma d’un corpo contrario allo star bene.

[...]

Senza vergogna spenzolate stanno
e non si cuopron mai, passi chi vuole,
a gambe larghe e mostran ciò ch’ell’hanno.²³

(“Capitolo contro a le campane”, lines 25–28, 31–33, and 37–39, p. 34)

(As for beauty, the person who made them gave them a body that’s out of the norm, as are all repulsive things. From below, they seem to have a round shape. [...] One cannot discern a chest on them, or back, they are not triangular, oval, or square, but of a body that’s contrary to what seems good. [...] They shamelessly hang loose and never cover up, no matter who walks by, with legs apart, showing all they’ve got.)²⁴

22. Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in the Renaissance Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 105–06, and Parker, 106.

23. For “ritrose” (line 27), Petrucci Nardelli (403) also considers the meaning of “ripugnanti, spiacevoli” (repulsive and unpleasant).

24. However, the expression “cose ritrose” has a more ambiguous sense: literally, “retracted things.”

All commentators agree on the presence of the sexual references here: the allusion is only to the female reproductive organs,²⁵ but in some places the context favours those of the male, in the references to the “batacchio” (line 44), to their “dondolarsi” (line 62), and to priests and monks who “a quest’ufizio” take in “il paggio del famiglio del castaldo” (lines 73–75, p. 35; for this office take in the page boy of the steward’s attendant).²⁶ Again, however, it should be reiterated that the double obscene meanings never entirely erase the literal meaning, more evident in the second part of the *capitolo* devoted to the disturbance produced by the bells of the Duomo of Florence, near which the painter lived, forced to keep “fasciata / la testa” and “con l’una e l’altra orecchia ristoppata” (lines 295–97, p. 41; his head wrapped up [and] earplugs in both his ears).²⁷ Just as in the *capitolo* “A Messer Benedetto Varchi in lode delle zanzare,” allusions with a double explicit meaning emerge in addition to the literal meaning—even simple linguistic allusions, so to speak. I am thinking here, for example, of the “membri suoi” that the painter refrains from sketching: “Così potrete me’ veder da voi / pigliandon’una—ch’e’ non è fatica—/ senza ch’io vi disegni i membri suoi (lines 43–45, p. 46; So you may better see by yourself by taking one—which is not difficult—without having me sketch its members for you); or in the opposite direction, the pictorial allusions in the *capitolo* “in lode della galea” concerning the discomfort of the painters in the galley (“galea”)—a topical place for sodomy in burlesque poetry²⁸—where “verre’ fatto lor qualche san Biagio, // Lazzerò o Iobbe o altro per costume / graffiato o guasto, perché la man salda / si potre’ mal tenere in mare o in fiume”²⁹ (“you would draw a Saint Blaise, Lazarus, or Job or someone else, all scratched or damaged, because you

25. This is the current interpretation offered by Crimi also in the case of Burchiello’s verse (270, 274), while Zaccarello (11, 42) avoids almost completely any obscene interpretation. See also Petrucci Nardelli, 403.

26. See Crimi, 270, and Lanza, ed., *Le poesie autentiche*, 14, 28.

27. On this *capitolo*, in a letter to Pier Francesco Riccio, attendant to Cosimo I, from Poggio, 9 August 1545: “Circa le Campanie, vi confesso che m’hanno non manco infastidito scrivendone, che costì mi facessino udendole, tanto che non so quel che mi farò di loro, pure me le sono levate dinanzi” (*Carteggio inedito d’artisti dei secoli 14., 15., 16.*, ed. Giovanni Gaye, 3 vols. [Florence: G. Molini, 1839–40], 2:329–30; Speaking of the *Campane*, I confess to you that they have as much annoyed me when writing about them as when I hear them, so that I do not know what I will do with them, after I have got them off my plate).

28. See Toscan, 667, 802; Parker, 24.

29. Bronzino, “In lode della galea. Capitolo primo,” lines 231–34, p. 72.

can hardly keep your hand stable in the sea or in a river"). Yet, Bronzino does not fail to praise "la galea," purely as a painter, because the boat is "proporzionata e bella," and with some obscene implication, comparable to "un uccel":

Che la galea proporzionata e bella
sie di misura, di grazia e disegno
ognun l'approva, quando ne favella.

[...]

Somiglia anche un uccel quando distende
l'ali a la vela, al becco, all'ir veloce.

("In lode della galea. Capitolo secondo," lines 298–300; 307–08, pp. 86–87)

(When speaking about it, everyone agrees that a galley should be beautiful and well-proportioned in its dimensions, grace, and design. [...] With its sails, prow, and speed it looks like a bird with wings extended.)

Aesthetic appraisals are also made of the pan, a topical allusion in burlesque language to the physical places for the practice of sodomy,³⁰ confirmed by the equally equivocal presence of the "manico," the handle:

Quella sua forma bella, circolare,
si potrebb'adornar tutta di stelle
e come dire una grillanda fare
e poi torn'una di quelle più belle
e porla dov' il manico s'appicca

("La padella del Bronzino pittore," lines 265–69, p. 96)

(One could adorn its beautiful and circular form with stars and make a garland out of it and then take one of the most beautiful and put it where the handle fits.)

30. Valter Boggione and Giovanni Casalegno, eds., *Dizionario del lessico erotico* (Torino: UTET, 2004), 197; Toscan, 1415.

Even in the satirical encomium to the onion, plausibly to be interpreted as a phallic symbol,³¹ Bronzino does not neglect aesthetic concerns, focusing on the onion's beauty and "nobility" and boasting of its "royal" colours, especially in the case of red onions:

Quel vestire di scarlatto ha il signorile
che Scipione e Cesare, odo dire,
non lasciavon portare a gente vile.

Di qui si può veramente arguire
che gentilezza e nobiltà gl'abbonda,
poiché di tal color si può vestire.

Anzi fu ella prima e non seconda,
che da natura ebbe il color rosato,
acciò ch'a ogni dubbio si risponda.

E s'Alessandro e Cesare hanno usato
questo colore e gl'altri capitani,
da lei, come inventrice, fu cavato.

("La cipolla del Bronzino pittore", lines 55–66, p. 105)

(That scarlet outfit seems something noble so much so that Scipio and Caesar, as I hear say, did not allow lower-class people to wear it. From this one can clearly understand how she overflows in gentility and nobility, for she can dress herself in such a colour. In fact, she was the first, not the second, who received this reddish colour from nature, so every doubt is resolved. And if Alexander and Caesar and other leaders used this colour, it was taken from her, who invented it.)

31. See Petrucci Nardelli, 409. For other burlesque references to the onion, see Boggione Casalegno, 121, and Zaccarello, ed., 125. On the other hand, the *capitolo* "Del ravanello" presumed to be by Bronzino—and containing even more explicit obscene symbolism—is preserved only in the Venetian codex Marc. Ital IX 5 (5738) from the end of the sixteenth century and not in the main autograph manuscript containing Bronzino's burlesque poetry (BNCF VII 115, formerly Magl. VII 115). The authorship of this *capitolo* should, therefore, be treated as uncertain. See Petrucci Nardelli, 468–69. On the most likely attribution of this *capitolo* to the poets of the Roman circle who were active in the Accademia dei Vignaiuoli and the Accademia della Virtù, see Francesca Latini, "Il ternario di un 'poeta baione': Il capitolo del ravanello," *Per Leggere* 14.1 (2014): 7–61. For the erotic symbolism of certain fruits and vegetables in sixteenth-century Italian burlesque verse, see Laura Giannetti Ruggiero, "Alla mensa dei poeti burleschi: parodia letteraria e interpretazioni di culture," *Acta Histriae* 17 (2009): 141–50.

What is more, in the second *capitolo* in praise of the onion, Bronzino goes on to celebrate even more hyperbolically the “architectural” perfection of the onion, elevating it to nothing less than a model for the entire cosmos—in a sort of burlesque evocation of a quasi-divine Platonic model and of the Neoplatonic correspondence between micro- and macrocosm³²—citing even, in comparison, the formal perfection of public works such as Santa Maria in Fiore, the Colosseum, and Palazzo Pitti:

Voi dovete saper che ben sicuro
 non potrebb'ire un buon architetto,
 anzi darebbe del capo nel muro,
 s'avendo a far Santa Maria del Fiore,
 il Coliseo o de' Pitti il palagio
 o s'è c'è cosa più bella o maggiore,
 e' non facessi in prima a suo bell'agio
 un modello, uno schizzo o un disegno,
 per non parere un Brogiotto o un Biagio³³
 e s'in quello ogni studio e ogni ingegno
 non ponesse di grazia e di misura,
 acciò che l'edifizio fusse degno.
 Così creder si può che la natura,
 avendo a far quest'universo mondo,
 ch'il ciel per tutti i lati abbraccia e tura,
 ne facess'un come l'opera tondo;
 il qual modello è proprio la cipolla,
 maniato³⁴ e schietto da la cima a fondo.

(Bronzino, “Della cipolla. Capitolo secondo,” lines 112–29, pp. 114–15)

32. The burlesque parody of Neoplatonic theory is made even more explicit in the long discourse at lines 139–65 (“Della cipolla. Capitolo secondo,” p. 115), which begins with “Voi torrete un coltel che rada il pelo / e taglierete una per traverso [...] // Quivi si scorge tutto l'universo” (You must take a knife, shave off the fine layers and crosscut one. [...] Here you can see the whole universe).

33. Petrucci Nardelli (410) glosses the two names, explaining “come uno sciocco o un semplicione” (like a fool or a simpleton).

34. Petrucci Nardelli (410) again explains the term as “imitato alla perfezione” (perfectly imitated).

(You must know that a good architect could not proceed with confidence, in fact, he would bang his head against the wall, if, when he had to build Santa Maria del Fiore, the Colosseum, Palazzo Pitti, or anything bigger and more beautiful in the world, he did not at first and at his leisure build a model, or draw a sketch or a design, so as not to appear to be a Brogiotto or a Biagio, or if he did not use all his skills and his knowledge of grace and measure so that it might be a worthy building. In the same way, we can believe that nature, having to make this entire world, that the sky embraces and encloses on all sides, made one that was perfectly round, and its model was, precisely, the onion, plain and perfect from top to bottom.)

The culmination of the paradoxical encomium appears in the third *capitolo* dedicated to the onion, with analogies to the highest philosophy and the highest poetry, because philosophers and poets have learned from the onion “di fare a mezzo de’ vostri segreti” (to share your secrets), by “mezzo scoprirsi e mezzo star nascoste” (half showing, half hiding).³⁵ Above all, poetry has learned from the onion how to develop styles “or alti e degni, or mezzani e or bassi” (sometimes high and noble, and sometimes average or low),³⁶ just like the onion’s layered leaves.

Similarly, in the *capitolo* “Il raviggiuolo” (Raviggiolo cheese), which plays on equivocation with sexual inferences related to this cheese, Bronzino returns to paradoxical aesthetic appreciation, just as he did with the onion: “Quest’è vago alla vista” (line 31; this is pleasing to the eye), and later on he insists:

Non gode tanto l’occhio d’un ch’a romfa [gioco a carte]
 si vede in man tre assi accompagnati,
 che par nel petto una colomba tomfa [grassa],
 come fa l’occhio tuo quando tu guati
 fra quella paglia o fra que’ giunchi ignudi
 que’ banbolin rugiadosi e lattati.³⁷ (lines 118–23, p. 138)

35. Bronzino, “Della cipolla. Capitolo terzo,” lines 36, 38, p. 121.

36. Bronzino, “Della cipolla. Capitolo terzo,” line 146, p. 124.

37. More than a suspicion of obscenity lurks in those “banbolin rugiadosi.” Obscene examples of the “cacio raviggiuolo” already appeared in Burchiello, *I sonetti di Burchiello*, ed. Zaccarello, sonnet 33, line 9; n. 39, line 1; n. 155 (to *Simoncino Salterelli and Stefano Nelli in Mugello*), line 3; n. 197, line 14.

(The eyes of the man playing *romfa* who sees three aces together in his hand, and in his heart feels like a fat pigeon, do not rejoice as much as you when you look upon those dewy and milky babies on the straw or among the naked reeds.)

Still, even more interesting, the poem is addressed directly to the masters of the genre, Berni, Varchi, and Della Casa—the core authors of the *Primo* and *Secondo libro dell'opere burlesche*—thus confirming the sources for this work: “O Berni, o Varchi, o Casa a che ponesti / cardi e ricotte in rima e altre cose / che son quasi una baia a petto a questi?” (lines 82–84, p. 137; Oh Berni, Varchi, Casa, why did you make verses on cardoon and “ricotta” or other things which are almost a joke compared to these?). And, still not satisfied, he insists on the paradoxical glorification of the “beautiful and good” things of the “raviggiuolo,” recalling architectural art, a necessary but not exclusive part of the perfection of this cheese:

Le cose voglion esser belle e buone
a voler ch'elle faccin quell'effetto,
che si ricerca a saziar le persone.

Che mi fa a me ch'un sia buon architetto
e abbi squadra e succhiello e compasso
giusto a misura, schifato e perfetto,
se quando io arò dato un po' di spasso
all'occhio, a discrezion d'arti e misure
lascero il gusto macilento e passo?
(“Il raviggiuolo,” lines 94–102, *Rime in burla*, p. 138)

(Things must be beautiful and good if you want them to have the effect that is necessary in order to satisfy people. What good is it to me if one is a good architect and has a square, a gimlet, and the right size compass, proper and perfect, if, when I will have given my eye a bit of pleasure, I then leave a taste that is thin and withered?)

Burlesque language, however, also enters Bronzino's pictorial references in ways quite apart from obscene innuendo. In fact, even in the third and increasingly hyperbolic *capitolo* on the onion, Bronzino seizes the opportunity

to reel off the classic Horatian analogy between poetry and painting, clearly taking a stand, almost a resentful one—“ma chi non vede / che quanto a poesia di studio e d’arte / si dà, tanto a pittura si concede?” (lines 190–92, p. 126; but who cannot see that what is assigned to study and art for poetry, is just conceded for painting?)—in the dispute on the noblest art prompted by Varchi in the Accademia Fiorentina.³⁸

Son due sorelle e ciascuna si parte
da un padre medesimo e un fine
consequono immitando o in tutt’o im parte.
 (“Della cipolla. Capitolo terzo,” lines 193–95, p. 126)

(They are two sisters and both descend from the same father and have the same aim by completely or partially imitating.)

In the first *capitolo* “Delle scuse,” on the contrary, Bronzino justifies wasting his time in writing verses when he should concentrate on what he does best, namely painting (lines 334–36). This leads to the excuse that insomnia and his physical ailments have prevented him from working, with a *tour de force* of alliteration, internal rhymes and near-rhymes, confirming that these verses belong to the burlesque mode:

Però le scuse a levarmi *d’addosso*
chiamo di quore e, quant’io *posso*, il *peso*
che della schiena mi ripiega *ogn’osso*,
che s’io ho *perso* il tempo in versi *speso*,
sol *perso* ho quel che si sarebbe *perso*,
onde assai men ne debbo esser *ripreso*.
Eccomi tutto, omai, rivolto in verso
di noi che del disegno sian seguaci
tutti, se ben l’oprar nostro è diverso.
 (“Delle scuse I,” lines 355–63, p. 190)

38. In a lecture at the Accademia on “Poets and Painters” (ca. 1546), Varchi added that “i poeti imitano il di dentro” (poets imitate what is inside); painters, “principalmente il di fuori” (mainly what is outside); see Benedetto Varchi, *Opere*, 2 vols. (Trieste: Lloyd Adriatico, 1858), 2:646. See also Geremicca, 170–73.

(Therefore, I heartily ask the excuses to come and liberate me, as far as possible, from the burden on my back that is bending all my bones, because if I have wasted my time with verses, I have wasted that time I would have wasted anyway, so I am much less to be reprimanded for that. Now, here I am, oriented towards us who are all followers of drawing, though our *modus operandi* is different.)

His defence of his activity as a poet is so important that he returns to it again in the second *capitolo* "Delle scuse," stating that it is actually Polyhymnia (the muse of sacred poetry and sacred hymns) who has pushed him to keep writing despite his reluctance, since "non si dee sempre nel sottil guardarla":

Ma Polimnia, che mi frugava, mostri
quante volte io l'ho scritto, con pregarla
ch'ella ci lasci fare i fatti nostri.

Ed ella sempre m'ha risposto: "Parla,
basta che tu sia inteso, in prosa o in rima;
non si dee sempre nel sottil guardarla".
("Il secondo delle scuse," lines 13–18, p. 192)

(But Polyhymnia, who was urging on me, show how many times I wrote to her, begging her to let us mind our business. And she always answered me: "Speak, it's enough that you be understood, in prose or in rhyme, one does not always need to be so scrupulous.")

The same *capitolo* begins with Bronzino, the poet, attempting to appease the sense of guilt Erato, the muse of lyric poetry, feels towards him by reassuring her that with the dawn he will return to his usual work as a painter, leaving aside his nightly forays into poetry:

Com' in collera? Ohimè, ben sarei stolto,
Erato nostra, a volerla con voi
e vi siete oramai scusata molto,
ch'io fussi stanco pel vagheggiare e poi
già fusse l'alba e fusse ora d'andare
a dare alla mia arte i tempi suoi.

(“Il secondo delle scuse,” lines 1–6, p. 192)

(Me, upset? Alas, my Erato, I would truly be foolish if I were angry with you, and you have already apologized a lot, that I might be tired from wondering and then that it might already be dawn and time to go to my work.)

Bronzino knows, however, that he must still apologize for his literary imperfections, just as when the painter makes mistakes—“e quand’egli avverrà ch’è non s’osservi / non pur muscoli o pelle o ombre o lumi, / ma posto a caso ogni cosa vedervi” (and when it will happen that one cannot see either muscles or skin or shadows and lights, and everything one can see is randomly placed)—and seeks every possible easy “excuse” for his technical failings:

Scusisi alcun con dire: “Io cominciai
contr’ a voglia quest’ opra e m’è venuta
a noia affatto e vo’ sbrattarla omai”
(“Il secondo delle scuse,” lines 70–72, p. 194)

(Some apologize by saying: “I started this work against my will and now it is a nuisance for me and I want to brush it away.”)

Or rather, if the figures have a strange shape, the painter will say “ch’ei son scorci” (line 80; They are in perspective), and if the error is obvious, he might say “che licenza i pittor, come i poeti, / hanno” (lines 91–92; painters, like poets, have their own artistic licence), or “che ‘l sentiero / omai del Buonarroto sia tropp’erto” (lines 145–46; “Michelangelo’s road is by now too steep”),³⁹ with a generous tribute to one of his preferred models not only in painting, but also in poetry, as attested by the poetic homages to Michelangelo in his *canzoniere*.⁴⁰

In this *capitol*, Bronzino also finds a way to defend himself against accusations of laziness and excessive delays that were often made against him in

39. See Parker, 125.

40. BNCF, II IX 10, fols. 139v–140r. Bronzino would ask Varchi in the sonnet on Michelangelo’s death, “Ma qual prima lodar potrete voi / senza l’altre ingiuriar, sendo in lui tante / e si pari virtù perfette e prime?” (BNCF, II IX 10, fol. 173r, lines 9–11; But which one would you praise first, without offending the others, since he has so many, all worthy and perfect virtues in him?).

(And as the Northerners took many a liberty and were much appreciated [...], maybe one day it will be pleasant to see legs growing from a woman's breast where she has tits.)

This second *capitolo* "Delle scuse" constitutes, in fact, one of the most interesting and complex moments of Bronzino's burlesque poetry, with deeply serious implications for painting and, more generally, for the aesthetics of his age. After the verses against the "excuses" of those painters of dubious value, Bronzino turns to an attack on sculptors and architects, whom he finds not less, but even more guilty with respect of their artistic flaws. Lines 226 to 273 contain a succession of criticisms against the latter. Unlike painters, who must respect the laws of perspective and foreshortening, sculptors are exempt from them ("poi che nell'arte / da prospettiva e scorci esenti fuste," lines 236–37; as in your art you were exempted from perspective and foreshortening), but they often make the same mistakes in "le misure" (line 232) and then they respond that such errors result "dal metallo o dal marmo" (line 243; by saying that those errors come from the metal or the marble). Nor does the "volgo" know "ch'un rozzo scalpellino ardisce, / pur ch'e' sappia il mazzuolo o lo scarpello / oprare e far le pietre piane e lisce // quand'egl'è posto inanzi un buon modello / e un marmo" (lines 259–63; that an artless stone-cutter, if able to use the mallet or the chisel, becomes bold when he has a good model and marble in front of him). In short, any "scalpellino" thinks he can aspire to be a great artist just because he knows something about how to use the tools of his trade: the tools of a craftsman rather than those of a true artist. Anyway, Bronzino suggests mischievously, the sculptor can just add "un tassello" to hide his errors: "Pur, quando si facessi qualche fallo, / con un tassello o qualche modo vago, / accertamente potreste scusallo" (lines 271–73; Furthermore, when one makes a mistake, one can shrewdly "excuse" it by adding a wedge or some similar device). In reality, however, he has just sternly warned "ch'à chi lieva, il ripor non è concesso" (line 249): he who ought to be "removing" material to shape his work, cannot "put it back."⁴³

The concept that sculpture is the art of "removal" was a key element of sixteenth-century aesthetic theory; indeed, one needs only to think of Michelangelo's poetry, specifically his sonnet "Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun

43. Also, Petrucci Nardelli (417) finds obscene references in the words "levare" and "riporre."

concetto.”⁴⁴ With this in mind, if one considers Bronzino's position in the dispute over the “maggioranza dell'arti” (noblest arts) initiated by Varchi in 1547 at the Accademia Fiorentina, his reflections on painting and sculpture become very interesting.⁴⁵ In fact, in addition to participating directly in the debate with a letter in response to Varchi (never officially sent, perhaps because in 1547, in the midst of the dispute, Bronzino was removed from the Accademia), Bronzino also indirectly makes his position clear with the front and back panel depicting the court dwarf, Morgante. Its “two-sidedness” stands as a challenge to the three-dimensionality of sculpture and even to literary narrative (the scenes on both sides of the picture take place respectively before and after the hunt). Thus, Bronzino lines up squarely on the pro-painting side of the debate, for once on the opposite side to both Varchi and Michelangelo (but his position would blur considerably later on).⁴⁶ It is no coincidence, then, that in 1546 Varchi had commented precisely on Michelangelo's sonnet “Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto” in the Accademia Fiorentina. It is this debate that stands at the centre of the *capitolo* “Il secondo delle scuse,” which is not crafted for purely “playful” and burlesque ends (quite present, instead, in the first *capitolo* “Delle scuse” and in the last part of the second *capitolo*, where the classical idea of “heroicism” is dismantled). Indeed, Bronzino's own words in his unfinished answer to Varchi on the “noblest arts”, at various moments sound like a direct paraphrase of this *capitolo*.⁴⁷

44. See Ambra Moroncini, “La poesia di Michelangelo: un cammino spirituale tra Neoplatonismo e Riforma,” *The Italianist* 30.3 (2010): 352–73, 363–65; and Matteo Residori, “Autoportrait de l'artiste en ‘feuille blanche’. Les métaphores de l'art dans les poèmes de Michel-Ange,” *Chroniques italiennes* 6.4 (2004): 1–21.

45. Leatrice Mendelsohn, *Paragoni: Benedetto Varchi's Due lezioni and Cinquecento Art Theory* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982); Marco Laffranchi, “La maggioranza delle arti’ di Benedetto Varchi (1546),” *Lettere e arti nel Rinascimento. Atti del X Convegno internazionale, Chianciano–Pienza, 20–23 luglio 1998*, ed. Luisa Secchi Tarugi (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2000), 647–58. Marco Collareta, however, has interpreted the incompleteness of the answer to Varchi precisely in relation to the portrait of Morgante, which would not have sufficiently demonstrated the validity of his claims; see Marco Collareta, “La pittura e le sue sorelle. Il Bronzino di fronte al sistema delle arti,” in *Bronzino. Pittore e poeta alla corte dei Medici*, ed. Carlo Falciani and Antonio Natali (Florence: Mandragora, 2010), 195–201, 195. On Bronzino and Varchi's positions as well as on their reflections about poetry, see also Parker, 114.

46. See Geremicca, 161–62.

47. See Baccheschi, 6–7.

Bronzino insists even more explicitly on the superiority of painting over sculpture in his *capitolo* “In lode del dappoco”: “però ch’il padre universal disegno / è molto più, ch’oprar regolo e seste / e delle pietre intendersi e del legno”, “Capitolo del Bronzino in lode del dappoco” (lines 289–91; because drawing, the universal father, is much more than working with straight edges and compasses or knowing about stones and wood); and in the same *capitolo* he justifies his poor opinion of hyperactivity, because he is happy with “dappoco,” as he repeatedly affirms: “Se la matita, i colori e’ pennelli / non mi desser le spese, io ti prometto / ch’i’ mi travaglierei manco con elli” (lines 82–84; “If chalks, colors and paintbrushes did not pay my expenses, I promise you that I would labor with them a lot less”).⁴⁸ This attitude to a concentrated pictorial production, rather than an extensive and wide-ranging one, is reinforced in his *capitolo* on “La vergogna,” “Un dipintor che senz’essa [la vergogna] lavora / abborracia d’un tratto, ove, con essa, / l’opere studia e vergogna l’onora” (lines 328–30; A painter that works without it [shame], would botch it altogether, while with it, he studies the works and shame honours him) and on “Il caparbio.” Here, he explicitly mentions his work on the contest between Apollo and Marsyas, where he reminds us that excessive stubbornness led to Marsyas’s demise and his being flayed by Apollo for daring to compete against the god’s artistic superiority:⁴⁹

Ma perch’io non vo’ fare or sì gran salto,
né ragionar del fato e delle stelle,
ma passeggiando andar per questo smalto [terreno]
 lascio andar cento cose buone e belle,
massimamente or ch’io fo quella storia,
quando Marsia fu tratto dalla pelle.
 Chi è caparbio aspira a vera gloria
E sa mostrare alla fortuna il viso
E ’l vero onor distinguer dalla boria. (lines 451–59, p. 170)

48. See Parker, 109.

49. Bronzino almost certainly refers to his designs for tapestries with this subject, and to the picture of the same name, which is an early work (Petrucci Nardelli, 415; but here she makes reference to the painting held in the Hermitage, which is merely a copy. Bronzino’s original, completed in his youth in any case, was only discovered in 1994); see John T. Spike, *La favola di Apollo e Marsia di Agnolo Bronzino*, trans. Enrico Frascione (Florence: Polistampa, 2000).

(But because I don't want to make such a great jump, or to discuss fate or the stars, but go strolling upon this crust, I let a hundred good and beautiful things slip by, especially now that I'm making that story, when Marsyas was pulled from his skin. He who is stubborn aspires to true glory and knows how to face fortune and to distinguish true honour from arrogance.)

In the long visionary poem "Il piato," however, certainly reminiscent of Dante's *Commedia* and, for Petrucci Nardelli, also of Boccaccio's *Amorosa visione*,⁵⁰ Bronzino claims to want to keep his two artistic activities, as poet and painter, clearly separated:

Or mi scuopre e da llato e davante
la smisurata faccia [...].
Non aspettate ch'io imbratti le carte
per disegnarvi appunto le misure,
ch'io cerco altrove di mostrar tal arte.
(“Il piato, Capitolo settimo”, lines 46–47, 49–51, p. 259)

(Now the measureless face appears beside and before me. [...] Don't wait for me to dirty these papers by, in fact, drawing the measures, because I try to show this art elsewhere.)

In reality, what follows is an extremely detailed picture—indeed a painterly one—of the hellish face of the monstrous giant upon which the poet climbs in his long vision: “Avea costui le ciglia grosse e dure, / la fronte crespata e gl'occhi soffornati” (lines 52–53; He had big and thick eyelashes, his forehead was wrinkled and his eyes sunken). This “pictorial description” continues until line 99, interspersed with preteritions and dialogues with the reader: the author denies wanting to dwell on the details, but then of course insists on a kind of paradoxical pedantry which is rather burlesque: “I denti mi pareano ... pur mi sto cheto, / Anzi, vo' dirlo! O di cane o di luccio, / che l'uno e l'altro mi frugava dreto” (lines 61–63; His teeth looked ... but I will shut up; no, I want to say it: they looked like those of a dog or a pike, for one and the other was

50. See Petrucci Nardelli, 426.

scratching my back); but “frugare” has also a more ambiguous meaning: to survey, to scrutinize. “Ove sono i capelli? Ove gl’orecchi? / Direste voi, secondo ch’io m’avviso. // Ma perch’in questo ancor non ci si pecchi, / dico ch’io non potei veder la fine | del capo mai...” (lines 79–87, p. 260; Where is his hair? And where his ears? I imagine you will say. But not to commit any other fault in this, I will tell you that I was never able to see the end of his head...).

A genuine *pendant* to Horace’s praise of *otium* in Bronzino’s *capitolo* “In lode del dappoco”—and the literary *otium* in the first *capitolo* “Delle scuse”—appears in “Del bisogno”. In its “Capitolo secondo” Bronzino reflects on the urgency of necessity as a motivation for his painterly pursuits.⁵¹

Qui nasce un dubbio e no ‘l risolvo io stesso,
 che pensando dipinger senza lui [il bisogno],
 meco di me mi maraviglio spesso,
 ché se ben fu ‘l piacer più volte cui
 mi trasse a lavorar, non però senza
 bisogno sono o spero essere o fui;
 (“Del bisogno. Capitolo secondo,” lines 79–84, p. 290)

(Here a doubt comes up and I cannot resolve it myself, because, thinking to paint without it, I am often astounded with myself, for, though most of the time it was pleasure that urged me to work, nonetheless I am not without need, nor expect to be or was.)

At the same time, in the *capitolo* “Del biasimo,” Bronzino declares himself grateful to those who criticize his painting, because in order for an artist to improve, criticism is more useful than praise:

Un dipintor, quando l’opere sue
 sente lodar, poco n’avanza e parli
 esser qualcosa almanco delle due;
 ma quand’egl’ode ch’uno o più ne parli
 con biasimarlo o sia vero o bugia,
 s’egli è da ben, non può se non giovarli,

51. Petrucci Nardelli maintains that the burlesque implication here is sexual (430).

("Del biasimo," lines 94–99, p. 333)

(When a painter hears his work praised, he does not progress much and thinks he is at least one of two things; but when he hears someone or more people speaking of him, and reproaching him, whether it be true or false, if he is a good man, this can do him nothing but good.)

Finally, Bronzino's pictorial art returns powerfully to the centre of his *capitoli* in "Lo sdegno." Here, to explain the incompatibility between opposing elements, Bronzino reels off the various colour conflicts and then the "indignation" of the brush toward certain painters:⁵²

Né par ch'il rosso acceso al verde piaccia,
anzi si sdegnan sì, ch'a porli insieme,
offendan gl'occhi e fanno una cosaccia.

Sdegnarsi il nero e 'l bianco e fan l'estreme
prove di contraddirsi, ancor che questi
non sien colori, ma d'ombra e lume il seme

[...]

Sdegenerassi un pannel con chi dipigne
tal volte e fa col dipintore in modo,
ch'a metterlo in riposo lo costringe.

("Lo sdegno", lines 235–40; 310–12, p. 359)

(It does not seem that green could like intense red, in fact they so scorn each other, that if you put them together they hurt your eyes and make a mess. Black and white scorn each other, and make the greatest attempts to contradict each other, even though they are not colours, but the seed of shadow and light. Sometimes a paintbrush scorns its painter and acts so that it forces him to put it to rest.)

Coming now to the compact cycle of "sonetti caudate" *Salterelli dell'Abbrucia*—an inheritance from Burchiello and Berni—we note that verses that directly evoke Bronzino's activity as a painter are located at the very

52. Note that an entire chapter of the monumental work of Toscan (851–84) is dedicated to the obscene double sense of colour in painting.

beginning of the work. The victim of the entire satirical series is the unfortunate Ludovico Castelvetro (1505–71), an advocate of the purest Petrarchan language. Castelvetro is immediately and mercilessly bombarded by Bronzino, just as the writer Annibale Caro (1507–66) had done a few years earlier in his *Mattaccini*, which became the direct inspiration for the *Salterelli*, even down to the rhymes:

Mentre che 'l Gufo ruguma, e la frotta
gli cresce intorno degli scioperoni,
Bertuccia, toi' de' fogli e de' carboni,
fammel da' piedi infin alla cicotta.
(*Salterelli dell'Abbrucia*, I, lines 1–4, p. 73)

(Bertuccia, while the Owl is ruminating and the crowd of layabouts grows bigger around him, take some paper and charcoal, and draw him from head to toe.)

Bronzino therefore invites a “bertuccia” (Barbary ape) to draw what we would call a caricature of Castelvetro (the Owl), “da capo a piedi” (from head to toe).⁵³ The result is obviously ridiculous: Bronzino likens the grotesque character that results from the portrait of the Owl to that of a comic novella of the *Decameron*. In the fifth novella on the eighth day, it is a judge—just as Castelvetro appoints himself a judge of language in opposition to Caro—who is hoodwinked by the three characters, Ribi, Maso, and Matteuzzo, also cited by Bronzino. Even more sadistically, on closing the first sonnet, Bronzino says that he wants to send out this ludicrous portrait to the whole world: “Or vo' che si conduche / un che me lo riduche / in istampa, e mandarne più d'un collo / pel mondo, e ch'e' si venda a fiaccacollo” (lines 14–17; Now I want to convince someone here to print it and to send more than a big box of them all over the world, and sell them at breakneck speed). Thus, there is a defined first level of interpretation in which painting and references to it are the starting

53. The “bertuccia” is one of the most present animals in the burlesque tradition. Castelvetro chose for himself the emblem of the owl, the symbol of wisdom; but Caro had already called him “Gufo” and “Barbagianni,” birds which represent obtuseness in the burlesque tradition (see Carla Chiummo, “Sì grande Apelle, e non minore Apollo: il nonsense del Bronzino manierista,” in *Nominativi fritti e mappamondi. Il nonsense nella letteratura italiana*, ed. Giuseppe Antonelli and Carla Chiummo. (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2009), 112–13.

point for the entire cycle of the *Salterelli*; but at a second level, more ambiguous and hidden, other references to the tools of painting and to its practice appear that have their origins—as already seen in the *capitolo* “Del pennello”—in the burlesque and obscene language of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries:

Tu l'hai *schizzato*? O buono! Or, perch'è' paia
più desso, to 'l colore e de' *pennelli*;
finiscil tosto pria ch'altri il *dibruche*.
(*Salterelli dell'Abbrucia*, I, lines 9–11, p. 73)

(Did you sketch it? Oh, good! Now, in order to make it more like itself, take paint and brushes and finish it quickly before someone else cleans it with his hand.)

“Schizzato,” “dibruche,”⁵⁴ and, even more, the “pennello” are ambiguous words that can certainly be understood literally with reference to painting,⁵⁵ but also as obscene allusions, especially if we keep in mind the tradition originating with Burchiello that, although “canonized” and emptied of its imaginative and linguistic creativity, was still very present in Florentine burlesque poetry of a century later.⁵⁶

On the other hand, at least two other fundamental elements of this tradition feature prominently in the *Salterelli*: gastronomic references (the *succiolaia*, the chestnut vendor *Salt. IV*; the *stidione*, or the spit, with rabbit, veal or capon, and *lardo d'arista*, and then *l'arrosto*, *Salt., VI*; the *strigoli* and the *arnioni*, or guts and kidneys, *Salt., VII*; alongside herring and *stoppioni* sauce, *coreggie*, and *busecchioni*, or tripe, and *cervellate*, *Salt., VIII*), and above all the tradition of parodies of literary controversies, primarily those surrounding Petrarchan language.⁵⁷

54. The meaning of the verb reported in the notes preserved in the Magliabechian manuscript of the cycle of sonnets makes the obscene implication even more plausible: “mondare una frasca facendovi scorrere la mano semichiusa” (to clean a branch, by passing one's hand half-closed from top to bottom). Moreover, the verb is taken up again in the second sonnet: “ogn'albero si sbruche” (Chiummo, “Sì grande Apelle, e non minore Apollo,” 89).

55. See Rossi Bellotto, ed., 89.

56. See Chiummo, “Sì grande Apelle, e non minore Apollo,” 115–19.

57. See Zaccarello, ed.; Crimi; Parker.

In the eleventh *sonetto caudato* that closes the *Salterelli*, Bronzino parades his friends and the other artists—both living and dead—to whom he sends the sonnets. Among them figure two other members of the Accademia Fiorentina: the sculptor and woodcarver Giovambattista Del Tasso (1550–55), who is also the recipient of verses in Bronzino’s *canzoniere*, and Luca Martini (1507–61), who was at once the engineer and *provveditore* of the most important civil engineering projects under Duke Cosimo I, a man of letters and amateur Dante scholar, and someone who provided Bronzino with important commissions in Pisa.⁵⁸

In conclusion, the *Salterelli* are the perfect demonstration of how serious and burlesque discourse remain absolutely inseparable and complementary in the poetry of Bronzino,⁵⁹ even more so for the pictorial themes present in both aspects of his poetry. Bronzino’s more serious poetry from his *canzoniere* also frequently touches on the topic of painting, in particular with such poetic “correspondents” as Varchi, Lasca, and Laura Battiferri, as well as in certain other compositions where he himself sings the praises of other artists, such as in the sonnets on the sculptors Del Tasso, Tribolo, and Benvenuto Cellini, and to an even greater extent those on the deaths of Pontormo and Michelangelo.⁶⁰ At the core of these works stands a poet at the intersection of burlesque and serious verse, particularly when it comes to pictorial themes. This brings Bronzino’s poetry closer to that of the greatest painter/poet of the sixteenth century, Michelangelo, whom some scholars have linked to the comic-realistic poetic tradition.⁶¹ When it comes to burlesque material, “the student” Bronzino

58. Franco Angiolini, “Luca Martini,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Treccani, 2008), 71:234–38.

59. This co-existence is a recurring theme in the Accademia Fiorentina’s circle, as well as in vernacular poetry from as early as the Origini; see Corrado Calenda, “Tra inosservanza e trasgressione: poeti giocosi e realistici tra due e trecento,” in *Gli irregolari nella letteratura. Eterodossi, parodisti, funambolisti della parola* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2007), 31–49.

60. Particularly interesting is the answer to a sonnet dedicated to him by Lasca, in which Bronzino writes, “Vivon gli scritti, e muoion l’opre” (Writings survive, while artistic works die), where he seems to accept Varchi’s idea of the superiority of literature over art (*Delle Rime del Bronzino pittore – Libro primo* Firenze: BNCF, MS. II IX 10, fol. 145r).

61. See Danilo Romei, *Berni e berneschi del Cinquecento* (Firenze: Centro 2 P, 1984), and Antonio Corsaro, *La regola e la licenza. Studi sulla poesia satirica e burlesca fra Cinque e Seicento* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 1999). Guglielmo Gorni has also indicated that Michelangelo poetry shared some topoi of the burlesque tradition (*grillanda, vesta, nastro, cintura, Cavalieri, baco*): see *Poeti del Cinquecento*.

turned out to be more wide-ranging in blending literary traditions. We should also not forget that behind both Michelangelo and Bronzino there already stood a respectable tradition of great artists of the calibre of Leon Battista Alberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, Leonardo da Vinci, and perhaps even earlier Andrea Orcagna,⁶² who had made their poetic and literary contributions, burlesque in various ways, on many topics of interest to artists.

It will be worthwhile to reflect further on these contributions, and specifically on how burlesque language and the pictorial field of reference interact in Bronzino. In his case, a specific trajectory seems to appear, which moves from the exploitation of the pictorial language for mostly burlesque purposes, especially in his earliest poetical production (see “Il pennello”) towards a superficially burlesque level of meaning with pictorial-aesthetic implications, which are in reality always more serious and challenging than they appear (see the *capitolo* “Il secondo delle scuse”). To complicate matters, the two levels of meaning often intersect, even chronologically, at least in the current state of philological research (Petrucci Nardelli, Rossi Bellotto, Tanturli). Furthermore, with the later *Salterelli*, burlesque-pictorial language is woven into a fundamental linguistic and literary controversy, namely that over Petrarchism: as if the presence of Petrarch and antipetrarchism in Bronzino's poetry were intertwined with the peculiar mixture of “classicism” and mannerism *sui generis*, proper to his painting.

I. *Poeti lirici, burleschi, satirici e didascalici*, ed. Guglielmo Gorni, Massimo Danzi, and Silvia Longhi (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 2001), 585, 592, 604.

62. Often debated is the identity of the *inventore* of the so-called poetry “alla burchia”: after Mariotto di Nardo di Cione won out, a descendant of the famous painter Andrea Orcagna (Zaccarello, ed., xiii), more recently theories concerning Orcagna have been revived; see Fabio Carboni, “L'Orcagna e il Frusta,” *Cultura neolatina* 69.1–2 (2009), 111–65; Lanza, ed., *Le poesie autentiche*, xxii–xxiii.

