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DANTE *GIOCO*SO: BRONZINO'S BURLESQUE OF THE
*COMMEDIA**

In a famous chapter of Della Casa's *Galateo*, the narrator offers his nephew some tips on graceful speech. The advice proffered by the elderly unschooled narrator tends to be eminently practical and, at times, humorously ingenuous. Della Casa's lesson on the "arte dello esser grazioso" (48) is a case in point. In it he singles out Dante as a singularly inauspicious rhetorical model as the poet was "presuntuoso e schifo e sdegnoso, e quasi a guisa di filosofo mal grazioso" ("presumptuous, scornful, and disdainful, and lacking in grace, as philosophers are"). Moving from precept to example, the narrator then proceeds to list some of the poem's more "disoneste o sconce o lorde" ("indecent, vulgar, or coarse") passages:

se non ch'al viso e di sotto mi venta;
o pur quelle:
però ne dite ond'è presso pertugio

...

E un di quelli spirti disse: Vieni
dirietro a noi, che troverai la buca. (50-51)¹

("except for the wind blowing in my face and from below;" or else these: "tell us again where the opening is at hand...and one of those spirits said: "Come behind us and thou shalt find the gap.")

In each example the narrator wrenches a phrase from its original context to emphasize a cheeky, vulgar or erotic meaning. Whereas Dante describes the wind striking his face during his dramatic ride upon Geryon's back (*Inf.*17.117) in the first example, the "wind" imputed to these lines by Della Casa's narrator is flatulence. In a similar manner, the narrator hints at salacious connotations to words such as "pertugio," "dirietro," and "buca" in Dante's request for directions on the mountain of Purgatory

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(*Purg.* 18.111-14). Ostensibly reticent, the narrator criticizes Dante's use of "indecent" locutions only to highlight ambiguous meanings in expressions, which in their original context, are patently innocuous. The examples are all the more sensational because they have been culled from one of his culture's most celebrated works — Dante's *Commedia*.

In practicing what he condemns, the narrator, no less than Della Casa himself, implicates himself in a peculiarly provocative activity, namely the pursuit of "indecent, vulgar and coarse" meanings in Dante's *Commedia*.² Other writers, little interested in the "art of being elegant," take matters a step further: whereas the narrator in the *Galateo* confines himself to worrying about indecorous misreadings, later poets create ambivalence where none had existed through a variety of sly parodies, recontextualizations and transformations. The focus of this essay is one particularly insouciant example of the tradition of "indecent" adaptations of the *Commedia*, the burlesque poetry of the artist-poet Agnolo Bronzino (1503-1572). My purpose in focusing on Bronzino is twofold — to draw attention to the painter's poetry, which deserves consideration in its own right, and to clarify its relation to an earlier tradition of parodies of Dante.

From its earliest diffusion Dante's masterpiece has inspired imitations, both reverent and irreverent. The range of appropriation is vast: poets and artists have sought to imitate its content, illustrate scenes from the poem, or incorporate Dantean motifs in their work. While respectful tributes have received considerable attention, works which spoof the *Commedia* have been largely overlooked. We can best contextualize these capricious reworkings of Dante by briefly recalling the ways in which *literati* paid homage to Dante and the nature of more traditional imitations. By the beginning of the fifteenth century Dante's *Commedia* had acquired the status of a literary classic. Not only had eminent humanists such as Leonardo Bruni decreed Dante one of the "three crowns of Florence," but the appearance of numerous commentaries confirmed the poem's literary status. The addition of this critical apparatus accorded Dante's poem the treatment bestowed upon revered classical and biblical works. Dante's popularity was further fueled by public lectures. Distinguished humanists such as Francesco Filelfo and Cristoforo Landino gave lectures on the *Commedia*, the former in the Duomo, the latter at the Florentine *studio*. Notwithstanding the blow dealt to the poem's fortunes by Bembo's pronouncements in the *Prose della volgar lingua* on the indecorousness of the *Commedia's* diction, Dante's works continued to command the attention of philosophers, poets, artists, scientists, and intellectuals, especially in his native city of Florence.³

Imitations of the *Commedia* appeared shortly after its completion. Dante's two fellow "crowns" were among the first to model compositions on Dante's masterpiece. Boccaccio's *Caccia di Diana* follows Dante in his predecessor's use of *terza rima* and Boccaccio's *Amorosa Visione* (1342) describes what the God of Love revealed to the narrator in a vision; Petrarch's *Trionfi* (1374) details what the poet witnessed in a series of triumphs or victorious pageants. Other works inspired by the *Commedia* include Fazio degli Uberti's *Dittamondo* (1345), Federico Frezzi's *Quadriregio* (1400-1403), and Matteo Palmieri's *Città di vita* (1465). All are written in *terza rima* and describe imaginary voyages under the guidance of mythical figures.⁴ In all three works the purpose of the journey, like Dante's, is moral or intellectual elucidation.

Alongside these traditional imitations, there also appeared a variety of parodies. Before turning to other writers' comic reworkings, however, it is important to recall Dante mocks himself in the *Commedia*. While among the narrators, one of the devils threatens to poke the pilgrim in the backside with his grappling hook (*Inf.*21.101). Later in his journey the late-penitent Belacqua gently chides Dante for his zealous interest in the sun's movements (*Purg.*4.98-99). Thus the tradition of a Dante *giocos* begins with the poet himself. Not surprisingly, Boccaccio was the first notable author to pursue further comic reworkings: in the *Decameron* noble Dantesque characters such as Can Grande della Scala are satirized and many of the damned are humorously rehabilitated.⁵ While figures such as Ciaccio, Guglielmo Borsiere, Ghino da Tacco retain traces of the sins for which they are damned in the *Commedia*, in Boccaccio's work clever ploys and witty retorts enable these characters to exercise some measure of control over their fates. While Boccaccio's refashionings tend to involve a figure or motif from the *Commedia*, other adaptations follow the contours of traditional imitations, albeit in a decidedly different register. Writers start parodying the Dantesque voyage around the beginning of the fifteenth century. The narrators in poems such as Stefano Finiguerra's "La buca di Montemorello" and "Il gagno" (1406-1409) provide an account of a vision that has passed before them, but the world portrayed is hectic, the characters in it disreputable and hedonistic. Nothing is known of Stefano Finiguerra aside from the fact that he was indigent, a fact to which he refers more than once in his poems. It is tempting to see in his public recitals the familiar figure of a street performer singing to the crowds in the hopes of making some money. Generally, Finiguerra's appropriations of Dante tend to be superficial. Recited to the crowds that would gather in the Piazza di San Martino, these highly colloquial poems were very pop-

ular among Florentines familiar with Dante's vision and easily entertained by rollicking spoofs of it. Finiguerra's most well-known poem, "La buca di Montemorello," describes a procession of more than two hundred misers, each eagerly awaiting his turn to descend into the treasure-filled "buca" or cave of Mount Morello, a hill which overlooks Florence. "Il gagno" proceeds along similar lines: here the travelers encountered are destitute profligates making their way to Gagno — the isle of earnings.⁶ Finiguerra transforms the fantastic voyage into a comically mundane one: rather than meeting characters whose lives might lead to moral elucidation, we read of an endless stream of degenerates.

Ostensibly, "La buca di Montemorello" and "Il gagno" deride misers or profligates seeking easy money. But equivocal meanings and erotic associations also pervade both works. In burlesque poetry of the fifteenth century the term "monte" typically referred to the buttocks, while the words "buca," "bucò," and "gagno" (an abbreviated form of "guadagno" ["gain"]) referred to the anus.⁷ Hence on another level both "Montemorello" and "gagno" can be read as double entendres for sodomy.⁸

In addition to comic versions of the vision motif, there appeared humorous adaptations of a more sophisticated nature. In Luigi Pulci's mock epic the *Morgante* (1478) for example, we find a liberal sprinkling of facetious quotation. Loosely inspired by the *Chanson de Roland* and the *cantari popolari*, Pulci's poems retells the adventures of the knight Orlando and his giant friend Morgante. The giant often quotes Dante when speaking of his scandalous companion Margutte, the gluttonous marauding demi-giant. Indeed Morgante punctuates his initial encounter with Margutte by quipping "co' santi in chiesa e co' ghiotti in taverna" (*Morgante*, XVIII, 144), a line which repeats Dante's characterization of the ten unruly devils (*Inf.* 22.14) who escort Dante and Virgil from the *bolgia* of the barrators to that of the hypocrites. After savoring Margutte's culinary wizardry, Morgante announces "tu se' il maestro di color che sanno" (*Morgante*, XIX, 199), breezily bestowing on his companion the same accolade Dante had given to Aristotle in Limbo (*Inf.* 4.131). Elsewhere in the poem Morgante deems Margutte a "ladro e ghiotto e padre di menzogne" (*Morgante*, XIX, 142), words that echo the hypocrite Loderingo's characterization of the devil (*Inf.* 23. 144). In other passages, Pulci acknowledges Dante as a great authority, but, in keeping with the satiric tone of his poem, he also deflates him.⁹ Pulci's comic reworkings, more subtle than Finiguerra's, clearly reflect the more refined ambience of his literary production — Lorenzo de' Medici's circle.¹⁰

As Dante's poem becomes more firmly ensconced as a classic, it continues to receive the dual treatment accorded many authoritative texts. On

the one hand glorified by humanists and commentators, the *Commedia* also undergoes festive inversions at the hands of both popular writers operating at the fringes of the "official" center of culture as well as humanists intent on mocking vernacular traditions. Accordingly, the culture that witnessed one of the most spectacular tributes to Dante —the publication of Landino's 1481 commentary replete with illustrations by Botticelli, also spawned one of the most irreverent spoofs of the *Commedia*— Lorenzo de' Medici's *Simposio* (1466-69), also known as "I beoni" ("The Drunkards").¹¹ The extent to which Dante's poem undergirds the *Simposio* (25) is apparent from the opening lines:

Nel tempo ch'ogni fronde lascia el verde
 e prende altro color e 'mbiancon tutti
 gli àlbiori e poi ciascun sue foglie perde;
 e 'l contadin con atti rozzi e brutti,
 ch'aspetta el guiderdon d'ogni suo affanno,
 vede pur delle sue fatiche e frutti;
 e vede el conto suo, se 'l passat'anno
 è stato tal che speranza gli dia
 o di star lieto o di futuro danno;

(That time of year when all the leaves change hue
 and lay aside their green, and all the trees
 turn pale and, later, lose their foliage too;
 then, when the peasant with his rustic ways,
 awaiting some reward for all his labors,
 looks forward to the fruit of toilsome days,
 and reckons up his gains to get some sense
 whether the year gone by will grant him hope
 of happiness, or future indigence;)¹²

The passage offers a *tour de force* of revision and recontextualization. The rustic evocation of autumn and description of a peasant who looks forward to his labors recalls the opening simile of *Inf.*24, in which a farmer, anxious to begin his morning chores, is daunted by a blanket of frost which he mistakes for snow. Other Dantesque appropriations take the form of quotations, many of which undergo a lively change in register. While Lorenzo follows Dante (*Par.*12.87) in his use of the verb "imbiancon" to describe the withering of plants, the ill tidings betokened by the echoing of "futuro danno" (*Inf.*13.12) are decidedly more light-hearted in nature. In Dante's poem "futuro danno" refers to ominous premonitions augured by the presence of harpies in the wood of the suicides. In the *Simposio* the phrase denotes the peasant's homely calculations on the

yield of his crops.¹³ Lorenzo excels in transposing high-flown abstractions onto a material sphere. His other incorporations reveal the same droll disregard for his predecessor's lofty subject matter. Like Dante at the entrance to Hell, Lorenzo's narrator encounters innumerable throngs at the beginning of his journey; however, the individuals seen are not the damned in all their misery, but Florence's most notorious drunks and gluttons in all their dissolution. A similar blitheness underlies Lorenzo's reworking of Dante's famous description of Virgil as "chi per lungo silenzio pareo fioco" ("one who seemed faint because of the long silence") (*Inf.*1.63) to identify "un che per troppo ber era già fioco" ("[one] who through too much drinking was already weak").¹⁴ Similar in spirit to medieval parodies of liturgical texts, Lorenzo's jaunty appropriations are best seen as a kind of secular blasphemy.¹⁵ What is spiritual and sublime in Dante becomes raucous and earthy in Lorenzo's poem. One would be hard pressed to imagine a more grotesque realism than the insistent attention accorded the body and its functions—especially its ingestions and emissions—which dominate the notoriously scabrous eighth *capitolo* of the *Simposio*.

Parodies of Dante coexisted alongside glorifications of the poet, providing throughout the fifteenth century an antic counter-tradition. Whether inspired by popular impulses and the carnivalesque spirit of the marketplace or by the mockery found in more refined cultural circles, these works form a discernible and subversive sub-genre of the *Commedia*'s reception history. In the ensuing decades those poets, whose activities took them regularly from the street to the court, from the bustle of the "marmi" (to employ Doni's term for Florence's Piazza del Duomo) to the more refined ambiances of the Medici's various residences or literary academies, were unusually well-poised to exploit the different forms of homage that had come to surround Florence's most illustrious poet.

Bronzino took full advantage of these unique circumstances. The life of this most elusive and allusive of artist-poets embodies a number of notable disjunctions. As a member of the artisan class, Bronzino (1503-1572) received only the rudiments of any kind of formal education, certainly nothing resembling the classical education of humanists. He began his apprenticeship as a painter before the age of fifteen. Notwithstanding his sketchy education, by the time he was in his early thirties, he had developed close ties to distinguished *litterati* and statesmen, among them Benedetto Varchi, Vincenzo Borghini, Luca Martini, Laura Battiferri, and Annibal Caro.¹⁶ At the same time, Bronzino also moved in more free-wheeling social circles, associating frequently with Antonfrancesco Grazzi-

ni, the perfume maker Ciano, Giovanni Mazzuoli, and the rowdier members of the Accademia degli Umidi, before the institution underwent its purge and was rebaptized as the more sober-minded Accademia Fiorentina.¹⁷ Although Bronzino never married, he was the head of an extended household, which included the widow and children of his close friend Cristofano Allori, his own mother and a niece.¹⁸ In addition to his well-known activities as court painter to Cosimo I de' Medici and his wife, Eleonora da Toledo, Bronzino was a respected poet in his day, composing both sonnets in the Petrarchan mode and licentious *capitoli*. As this brief account of some of the more notable disjunctions of his life shows, Bronzino's literary and artistic activities took place in the midst of an unusually fluid and varied culture.

Various documents attest to Bronzino's keen interest in the writings of Dante and Petrarch. Varchi, in a letter of 1 May 1539 to Bronzino and the sculptor Niccolò Tribolo, declares:

oltra l'essermi ciascuno di voi egualmente amicissimo ed oltra la pari e grandissima eccellenza vostra, dell'uno nella scultura e dell'altro nella pittura, vi dilettrate ambo duoi ed intendere nelle cose poetiche, e massimamente il Bronzino come, oltra suoi componimenti, dimostra l'avere tutto Dante e grandissima parte del Petrarca nella memoria assai più oltre che non crederebbero per avventura quelli i quali non sanno che, sì come la poesia non è altro che una dipintura che favelli, così la pittura non è altro che una poesia muta.¹⁹

(In addition to both of you being equally very close friends of mine and to your equally high level of excellence—one in sculpture, the other in painting—you both enjoy and understand poetic matters, especially Bronzino, as is shown not only in his compositions, but also by the fact he has memorized the whole of Dante and a great part of Petrarch, far beyond what would perhaps seem credible to people who do not understand that just as poetry is nothing other than a speaking picture, so painting is nothing other than mute poetry.)

Varchi singles out for admiration Bronzino's artistic and poetic production, his capacious memory, and the painter's thorough familiarity with the works of Dante and Petrarch. In a similar vein Bronzino's most famous apprentice, Alessandro Allori, reveals in his dialogue *Sopra l'arte del disegnare le figure* (1590) that Bronzino met frequently with Varchi and Luca Martini, an engineer and respected patron of the arts, to discuss passages from Dante's *Commedia*.²⁰ Bronzino's interest in the vernacular classics of the Trecento was not confined to friendly discussions of Dante's and

Petrarch's poetry: he painted a series of portraits of Tuscan love poets, which included a (now lost) portrait of Dante, for the merchant Bartolomeo Bettini around 1532.²¹ As his involvement in these activities demonstrates, Bronzino was an active poet and avid reader, an engaged artist-poet who regularly discussed the merits of literary works with his friends.

In his *Life* of Bronzino Vasari singles out for praise the "bizarre and capricious" nature of the artist's *capitoli*. These words underscore the whimsical nature of Bronzino's compositions. As Vasari also makes clear, Bronzino's *capitoli* were inspired by those of Francesco Berni. Loosely modeled on the classical paradoxical encomium, the Bernesque *capitolo* is known for its comic realism, expressiveness, erotic double entendres, and parodic qualities. The poems are, above all, scurrilous. Burlesque poets, extending a practice made popular by earlier comic poets such as Finiguerra and the authors of Florentine carnival songs, typically transform or disguise the meaning of words. Under the pretext of treating an apparently innocuous subject, typically the praise or condemnation of a mundane object such as bells, gelatine, or peaches, the poet develops obscene implications through the use of a highly coded vocabulary. Hence words in burlesque poems characteristically provide two levels of signification. The first level is innocuous: the poet offers a facetious, amusing description of an object, psychological state, or condition. The second level, in contrast, is obscene. Berni's originality lies in the ingenuity with which this second meaning is elaborated. Determining the various means by which the meanings of words are altered, however, is no easy task, as burlesque poets tend, like Shakespeare's Cleopatra, to make all language use erotic, or like Berni, scabrous.

Bronzino was one of Berni's most accomplished followers: the artist's *capitoli* feature outlandish, teasing analogies as well as impudent caricatures of other poets' works. The painter's allusions to vernacular works often involve playful, saucy parodies. Like Pulci and Lorenzo, Bronzino revels in facetious quotation. The painter takes a particular delight in reorienting Dante's more colorful expressions, for example, providing numerous variations on "lascia pur grattar dov'è la rogna" ("let them scratch wherever it may itch") (*Par.* 7.129). One variation of this line from "In lode della galea" exemplifies the way in which Bronzino slyly adapts Dante's words: "e bene spesso gratta anche la rogna / e cavane in un tratto il pizzicore / e tutto fa per non aver vergogna" ("[the 'triacco,' a medical concoction composed of numerous herbs] very often scratches the itch as well and draws out its stinging in a moment, and it does all so as not to be put to shame") ("In lode della galea," II, 181-183).²² Dante's words come at a profound

moment in the *Commedie*. Cacciaguida, the poet's great-great-grandfather, urges the poet to tell the truth about all that he witnesses during his journey even if certain revelations will enrage many readers. Bronzino, however, redirects and coarsens the force of Cacciaguida's already seamy statement by recontextualizing the "rognà;" the "itch" is no longer the anguish caused by the disclosure of harsh realities, but a fanciful medicine which cures sexual pangs. In the painter's saucy reworking of this line, the coarseness remains, but its solemn profundity is considerably diminished: Cacciaguida's words address nothing less than the issue of how to write the *Commedia*, whereas Bronzino appears to tout a cure for sexual desire.

In other poems Bronzino's erotic allusions overlap and intersect with more complex literary parodies. In such passages one sees the spirited juxtaposition of two poetic traditions as Bronzino interweaves the colorful, provocative language of the burlesque *capitolo* with the refined language of the lyric. The three part poem "La cipolla del Bronzino pittore" exemplifies many of the most laudable features of Bronzino's *capitoli* — humor, wit, equivocal meanings, and capricious literary allusions.²³ The first *capitolo* rhapsodizes the onion's general qualities: its noble appearance, culinary versatility, miraculous medicinal qualities, and unique aroma. The second *capitolo* irreverently compares the effects of the onion to those of love, claims that the onion's stalk provided the inspiration for the first flutes, and describes a dinner at which onions form the *pièce de résistance*. The third *capitolo* of "La Cipolla" mocks philosophical concepts and familiar passages from the works of Dante and Petrarch. Bronzino wryly presents the onion as the inspiration for poets and philosophers. Dante, he puckishly claims, modeled the twisting journey through Hell's circles on the cutting of an onion. Philosophers learned the art of revealing only parts of their secrets from onions: "come voi vedeste loro / mezze scopirsi e mezze star nascose, / tal voi faceste del vostro tesoro" ("just as you [the philosophers] saw them [the onions] partly revealing and partly concealing themselves, so did you do the same with your treasure") Petrarch derived from the onion

quell'amare dolcezze e 'l pianto e 'l riso,
la verde speme e l'impiegato fianco,
e dovea disegnar, quand'era miso
dove ne fusse, me' che 'n pino o 'n sasso
nella prima cipolla il suo bel viso. ("La cipolla," III, 221-225)
(those bitter sweetesses, tears, and laughter, and the green hope,
and the wounded side; and when he came across any onions, rather
than on a pine or a rock he would have done better to have pictured
her [i.e., Laura] lovely face in the first onion he saw.)

These lines reprise a passage from Petrarch's canzone "Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte," in which the poet describes his evocation of Laura's face while wandering through a remote landscape: "Ove porge ombra un pino alto od un colle / talor m'arresto, et pur nel primo sasso / disegno co la mente il suo bel viso" ("Where a tall pine or a hillside extends shade, there I sometimes stop, and in the first stone I see I portray her lovely face with my mind"). Bronzino gently satirizes Petrarch's search for a suitably desolate landscape in which to contemplate his tribulations. Instead of providing his suffering lover with appropriate scenery, the "alto pino" and "colle," Bronzino merely observes, "quand'era miso" ("he stopped where he was") humorously depriving the poet of his customary atmospherics. Bronzino insouciantly reproves Petrarch for not having portrayed Laura's face in the onion. We descend once again from an aloof and disembodied sublime to a vital and material grotesque.²⁴

Bronzino's boldest parodies, however, are reserved for Dante. The last lines of "La Cipolla" caricature the opening of *Paradiso* 25, in which Dante envisions his return to Florence from exile. Dante opines

Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro
al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra,
sì che m'ha fatto per molti anni macro,
vinca la crudeltà fuor mi serra
del bello ovile ov'io dormi' agnello,
nimico ai lupi che li danno guerra;
con altra voce omai, con altro vello
ritornerò poeta, e in sul fonte
del mio battesimo prenderò 'l capello; (*Par.* 25.1-9)²⁵
(If it should happen . . . If this sacred poem—
this work so shared by heaven and by earth
that it has made me lean through these long years—
can ever overcome the cruelty
that bars me from the fair fold where I slept,
a lamb opposed to wolves that war on it,
by then with other voice, with other fleece,
I shall return as poet and put on,
at my baptismal font, the laurel crown;)

Bronzino, too, desires recognition for his poetic accomplishments in "La cipolla":

se mai continga ch'e si giunga al vero
fin di lodarle qualche 'ngegno acuto,
che possa al nove mio giugner un zero,
sarà ben degno ch'e' ne sia tenuto

conto e ch'e' se gli cavi la berretta
 e ch'e sia dalla fama intrattenuto
 e, come a simil poeti s'aspetta,
 carezzato e menato sopra il colle
 Parnaso fra le Muse e lassù in vetta
 coronato di foglie di cipolle. ("La cipolla," III, 268-277)

(If it should happen that some brilliant mind should arrive at the truth in the ultimate praise of onions such that he can add a zero to my nine, he will deserve to be respected and for people to doff their hats to him, and to be welcomed by fame and, as is fitting for such poets, to be embraced and led up to join the Muses on Mount Parnassus, and there on the summit to be crowned with the onion leaves.)

Read on the first level of parody, these lines impertinently dismiss one of the most poignant moments in the *Commedia*: Dante's cherished hopes of monumental achievement become a bathetic coronation ceremony.²⁶ While Bronzino follows the general contours of Dante's verses, the artist also makes some capricious alterations: "La cipolla" contains no allusions to hardships endured; a crown of onions playfully substitutes the laurel crown of poets.²⁷

Bronzino also introduces elements foreign to Dante's conception, notably the declaration that the poet who surpasses the painter in praising onions "possa al nove mio giugner un zero." On one level the line proclaims that this poet would be ten times a better writer than Bronzino — adding a zero to nine makes ninety. But read in terms of the erotic significance accorded numbers in burlesque poetry, the line acquires quite a different meaning: zero, because of its circular form, often represents the anus in burlesque poetry; nine is considered a phallic symbol due to its shape.²⁸ The artist, then, suggests that the reward for poetic achievement will be to sodomize his successor (or to be sodomized by his predecessor.) Bronzino's reworking of Dante goes beyond the mere humorous recontextualization of the poet's lines: the eroticizing of Dante's images and words makes this a particularly irreverent parody. A quick perusal of Jean Toscan's study of the equivocal meanings in burlesque verse shows that the passage teems with equivocal terms, among them — "berretta" (anus), "fama" (sodomy), "genio" (penis), "poeti" (sodomites), "il colle Parnaso" (buttocks), and "coronato" (orifice).²⁹ Given the redundancy and occasional contradiction of erotic meanings, however, one might question the extent to which a precise obscene meaning can be obtained. Unlike Aretino's *sonetti licenziosi* which are graphically erotic, Bronzino seems more

interested in reinforcing generally the idea of some kind of sodomitc reward for the poet who succeeds in praising onions than in generating a precise erotic meaning. In terms of subversiveness, Bronzino exceeds Finiguerra's earlier parodies considerably. Whereas Finiguerra queers the theme of a voyage, Bronzino's queering of Dante is much cannier. As elsewhere, Bronzino suffuses the passage with erotic innuendo. Like the banter of Mercutio and Benvolio in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, there is an abundance of salacious intent, but it is not necessarily exact or coherent.³⁰

Capitoli such as "In lode della galea" and "La Cipolla" furnish examples of Bronzino's irreverent reworkings of specific dantesque passages. The poem which shows the fullest extent of Dante's influence on Bronzino, however, is "Il piato," the painter's longest and most complex poem. Divided into eight different *capitoli* ranging from 180 to 240 lines, "Il piato del Bronzino Pittore," describes a fantastic voyage across the body of a giant named Arcigrandon. In this respect the poem follows the earlier tradition of comic reworkings of the Dantesque vision by Finiguerra and Lorenzo de' Medici. The poem's title, derived from "piatire," meaning to litigate or argue, can be loosely translated as "Bronzino the Painter's Defense" or more literally, as "The Argument" or "The Quarrel." In the opening lines Bronzino addresses a friend and elder, who resides among "l popolo afflitto."³¹ The reference is likely an allusion to Vincenzo Borghini, named *spedalingo* of the Ospedale degli Innocenti by Cosimo I in 1552.³² The allusion to Borghini suggests that the intended audience for this poem is a highly literate one capable of appreciating its equivocal references and literary allusions.

Ostensibly a fantastic journey loosely modeled on Dante's voyage through the afterlife, "Il piato" relays a series of violent encounters and altercations with bizarre creatures. The poem abounds in fantastic themes, complex allegories, and linguistic puns. As Bronzino observes these altercations, he is invariably approached or assailed by some of the litigants. The first fight takes place in an unspecified landscape where a "turba velenosa e ria" ("Il piato," 1.94) viciously attacks Bronzino. The first *capitolo* draws extensively on motifs inspired by the *Commedia*. Bronzino presents a "saggia," who arrives on the scene in terms highly reminiscent of Dante's characterization of Beatrice. She addresses Bronzino as "un de' miei fedeli" ("Il piato, 1.153), which echoes St. Lucy's characterization of Dante as "il tuo fedele" to Beatrice (*Inf.*2.98). Like Beatrice she is also swathed in white veils and descends from her blessed seat in Heaven to come to Bronzino's aid ("venni dal seggio mio puro e natio" ["Il piato,"

1.111]; cf. “venni qua giù del bio beato scanno” [*Inf.*2.93]). Bronzino also adopts Francesca’s famous line about her eternal attachment to Paolo “questi, che mai da me non fia diviso” (*Inf.*5.135) to stress the devotion of the “saggia” to the painter—“chi non fu già mai da me diviso” (“Il piato,” 1.104). The first *capitolo* ends with the guide (who, while never identified, likely embodies Truth) leading Bronzino to the foot of the giant.

In the second and third *capitoli* Bronzino, while climbing up the giant’s foot, is assailed repeatedly, trapped in a cave, and obliged to witness the tormenting of a young girl that recalls his earlier experiences. *Capitoli* five to eight describe the climb up the giant’s leg, the traversing of his chest, and the arrival at the top of the giant’s head. During this part of the journey Bronzino witnesses more strange scenes — people undertaking absurd activities such as attempting to fly, sages and commoners debating the meaning of a hybrid tree, and birds flying into the giant’s ears. Atop Arcigrandone’s head, a misstep causes Bronzino to fall down the giant’s nostril, where, inside the giant, he witnesses further bizarre sights. Bronzino emerges only after promising to bring an end to all arguments.

As the numerous accounts of furious assaults emphasize, “Il piato” presents a bleak vision of life as a succession of arguments. While the carnivalesque world which Bronzino witnesses atop Arcigrandone’s body is not presented explicitly as the Afterlife, it is clearly Dantesque in its depiction of a fantastic journey in which the principal figures are a pilgrim traveler and a virtuous guide. The world which Bronzino sees is a heightened and fantastic version of the fights which plague contemporary existence. The painter’s treatment of the vision motif is considerably more intricate than fifteenth-century parodies. Lorenzo’s spoofing of society’s foibles is as lighthearted as his reworkings of Dantesque motifs. Unlike Lorenzo’s merrier target of drunkards, Bronzino mocks the quarrels of his day. This raillery is directed primarily at contemporary scholars, sages, or prominent citizens, a fact evident from their apparell—togas and birettas. Such episodes in “Il piato” resemble the relegation of pedants, grammarians, and teachers to Hell in Teofilo Folengo’s *Baldus* (1517) and Antonfrancesco Doni’s *Inferni* (1552-53), two works which extend the earlier fifteenth century tradition of parodic treatments of Dante’s voyage. After passing the furies in Hell, Baldus and his companions enter the “Phantasiae domus,” also known as the “Gabia stultorum,” which is full of “gramaticae populi pedagogaque proles” engaged in irrational activities (I: 599). In a similar vein Doni’s *Inferni* contains seven arenas of punishment, one of which he designates the “Inferno degli scolari e de’ pedanti.” In Doni’s *Inferni*, a figure named Disperato describes the punishment

of the scholars and pedants after entering Satan's body through his navel. As Disperato reveals, these sinners must endure a more intense form of their earthly lives: they incur huge debts, arrive late for lessons, and beat and mock one another (Doni 223-224). Bronzino too witnesses a violent altercation among scholars when he peers into Arcigrandone's navel. Bronzino's parody of scholars shares the mocking spirit of such works and reflects the influence of contemporary polemics. The artist did not have to look far for inspiration: notable examples of tempestuous controversies include those between Varchi and Gelli over the origins of the Italian language, Borghini and Ruscelli over Dante's Italian, Grazzini and fellow members of the Accademia Fiorentina over the institute's cultural agenda, Cellini and Baccio Bandinelli (and many other artists) over artistic commissions, and Caro and Castelvetro over the subject of literary invention. In "Il piato" Bronzino irreverently transposes the subject of arguments into a fantasy realm populated by irascible men and creatures who quarrel over trifles.

While Bronzino's poem reflects the spirited, mocking tone of work by Folengo and Doni, it displays some significant departures. Doni and Folengo relegate teachers to Hell, where they endure punishments which essentially exaggerate their pedantry and futile inquiries. Such representations constitute fairly predictable satires. In contrast, Bronzino's tactics, by interweaving social satire with erotic innuendo, produce a more subversive parody. An argument which Bronzino witnesses while traversing Arcigrandone's abdomen exemplifies the fusion of these two derisive practices. Bronzino marvels at the size of the crevice which forms Arcigrandone's navel employing terms that teem with obscene allusion. Peering into the enormous cavern, Bronzino sees a marble statue bearing only the last four letters of a Roman emperor's name—"anus"—(presumably the full name is something like Adrianus or Troianus).³³ Bronzino's treatment then returns to more familiar parodying of scholars: the statue holds a scepter in one hand and a decayed, worm-ridden book in the other. As Bronzino notes, the book "*era tanto in margine chiosato / di tante mani e di tante postille, / che lor, né 'l testo, non s'intendien fiato*" ("was glossed in the margin in so many hands and with so many notes, neither the glosses nor the text could be understood at all") ("Il piato," 6.136-138)—a perfect image of scholarly glossing run amok. Having set the stage for a ribald travesty of scholarly practices, Bronzino next describes a nearby scene in which wise men argue over the nature of the fruits on the fig-sorb tree. As he reveals, more than a thousand sages surround this wondrous tree:

Intorno a questi stavano i migliori
 di que' più savii e mostravano spesso
 la parte dentro per quella di fuori
 e giudicando l'arbor per processo
 mostravano esser sorbe i fichi e fichi
 le sorbe e gli scambiavano anco spesso. ("Il piato," 6.172-177)

(Around it stood the best of the most wise men, and they often revealed was inside instead of the outside, and judging the tree by trial, they showed the figs to be sorbs and the sorbs to be figs, and they continually interchanged them.)

On one level the episode trivializes the hairsplitting arguments of subtle academicians who argue truths that contradict everyday appearances in conventional terms. But the erotic connotations of figs (a common euphemism for the female genitals) adds a further saucy implication to the argument; moreover, the frequent use of sorbs in burlesque poetry to denote either a forceful thrust of the penis or sodomitical acts compounds the riotous lubricity of the passage.³⁴ Ultimately the claim that the sorbs are figs and vice versa and the exchanging of the two fruits implies a blurring of sexual boundaries.

The allusion to these fruits also evokes one of the more ambivalent episodes in the *Commedia* — Dante's meeting with the sodomite Brunetto Latini in *Inferno* 15. Brunetto advises Dante to avoid his fellow Florentines, noting: "tra li lazzi sorbi / si disconvien fruttare al dolce fico" ("among the sour sorbs / the sweet fig is not meant to bear its fruits") (*Inf.* 15. 66). For Brunetto, Dante, the sweet natured "dolce fico," cannot flourish among citizens bitterly engrossed in party politics. Hence Bronzino may intend a sly reference to Dante's canto of the sodomites in his use of the terms "sorbe e fichi" as well.

Bronzino's adaptation of other Dantesque motifs testifies further to this zest for facetious reformulations of vernacular classics. *Inf.* 34, which describes Dante's and Virgil's climb down Satan's body, forms the principal subtext for the central motif of a voyage across the body of a giant.³⁵ The figure of Acrigrandone, on the other hand, derives, at least in part, from Dante's portrayal of the giants in *Inf.* 31. For Dante, the giants represent unbridled pride and superhuman force. Dante's giants — Nimrod, Antaeus, Ephialtes, Tithon, and Tityus — are haughty overreachers who challenge divine authority. Gazing at the Biblical giant Nimrod, Dante observes: "ché dove l'argomento de la mente / s'aggiugne al mal volere e a la possa /, nessun riparo vi può far la gente" (for where the mind's acutest reasoning / is joined to evil will and evil power, there human beings can't

defend themselves) (*Inf.*31.55-57). Like Dante's giants, Arcigrandone is fearsome in appearance and immobile. In this respect, both Arcigrandone and Dante's giants resemble traditional portrayals of giants in the Bible and folklore as violent and cannibalistic. The resemblances, however, end here. Bronzino appropriates certain formal elements from Dante — emphasis on the giants' immobility, colossal proportions, and menacing appearance — but dismisses their symbolic content — the giants' incarnation of pride, stupidity, and brute force. Arcigrandone also bears little resemblance to Pulci's benign, raucous giants, Morgante and Margutte, the sinful giants in two of Michelangelo's poems ("Un gigante v'è ancor, d'altezza tanta" and "Nuovo piacere e di maggiore stima"), Folengo's good-natured Fracassus, Ariosto's mauling Caligorante, Girolamo Amelongo's warmongering giants in *La gigantea*, or Rabelais' erudite, boisterous giants, Gargantua and Pantagruel.³⁶ Arcigrandone constitutes a much looser formulation. He remains a static figure throughout the poem, barely moving or speaking. One must infer his savagery from scattered evidence such as the human remains floating in his stomach. His one action consists of swallowing Bronzino — an action of which he seems barely aware, as his torpid response "Chi mi tocca?" ("Il piato," 7.148) suggests. Arcigrandone is less a character than the setting for Bronzino's journey.

Arcigrandone functions primarily as a symbol. When Dante and Virgil approach Satan, Virgil declares: "Ecco Dite...ed ecco il loco / ove convien che di fortezza t'armi" (Look! Here is Dis, and this the place where you / will have to arm yourself with fortitude) (*Inf.* 34. 20-21), words which suggest that all of Hell is a monument to Satan. Arcigrandone, too, embodies a world — not so much a monument to sin but a world of arguments. Arcigrandone represents a macrocosm of the world, a gigantic and chaotic arena of arguments, but one which is ultimately static and irresolute. Such a novel formulation would have undoubtedly amused readers such as Borghini, who would have easily recognized both the appropriations from Dante's text and the departures from it.

Elsewhere in "Il piato" Bronzino transforms Dantesque locutions as well as motifs for comic effect.³⁷ Before relaying each of his three dreams in Purgatory, Dante notes the early hour of the day. Each of these passages begins with the words "nell'ora." This solemn opening precedes Dante's first dream of the eagle:

Ne l'ora che comincia i tristi lai,
la rondinella presso a la mattina,
forse a memoria de' suo' primi guai,
e che la mente nostra, peregrina

più da la carne e men da' pensier presa,
a le sue vision quasi è divina (*Purg.* 9.13-18)

(At that hour close to morning when the swallow
begins her melancholy songs, perhaps
in memory of her ancient sufferings,
when, free to wander farther from the flesh
and less held fast by cares, our intellect's
envisionings become almost divine—)

The dreams accompany important transitional moments—here the progression from Antepurgatory to Purgatory. Dante's haunting mythological and astrological evocations impart a mysterious aura to these passages. Bronzino appropriates Dante's formulation ("nell'ora"), but, as we might expect, jettisons the majestic tone:

Nell'ora che son cotte le vivande
dal calor naturale e che Morfeo
il secondo riposo ai lassi spande
e che ser Pier, ser Marco e ser Matteo
hanno tanto assommato il mattutino,
ch'e' son vicini a 'ntonare il Taddeo,
e canta il gallo del nostro vicino
la terza serenata e batte l'ale
e scalda il ferro il fabbro contadino
e la serva è chiamata —e l'ha per male—
che ponga l'acqua e vada a fare il pane
e mette il basto a' muli il vetturale
e che Titone in asso si rimane,
ché la fanciulla sua s'è già cavata
la cuffia e sopra 'l pettine ha le mane, ("Il piatto," 1.19-33)

(At the hour when all the foods have been cooked by natural heat and when Morpheus pours forth the second stage of sleep to the weary and when ser Pier, ser Marco, and ser Matteo have completed so much of matins that they are near to intoning the Te Deum, and our neighbor's rooster crows the third serenade and beats its wings, and the rustic blacksmith heats the iron and the servant girl is called —and takes it badly— to place the water and to go make the bread, and the carter puts the burden on the mules, and when Tythonus is abandoned because his girl has already taken off her bonnet and has her hands on the comb ...)

The descent from Dante's celestial spheres to the barnyard could not be more emphatic. Bronzino revels in presenting a rustic catalogue of the early morning activities of artisans, servants, and animals. Bronzino even

parodies the mythological allusions: the painter's characterization of Aurora as a "fanciulla" adjusting her hair and bonnet deflates Dante's subliminal image of the goddess's forehead glittering with stars at the beginning of *Purg.* 9 — "(di gemme la sua fronte era lucente" [*Purg.* 9. 4]). A fanciful sensibility underlies these burlesque manipulations. The humor derives from the eclectic list of morning activities and the incongruities between Dante's magisterial and Bronzino's comic inversion of the dawn.

Bronzino's adaptations of Dantesque motifs comprise a particularly spirited chapter in the long history of the *Commedia's* transmission. The artist-poet both esteems Dante's great achievement and revels in mocking it: he exploits and spoofs the master text.³⁸ Notwithstanding the impudence of some of his adaptations, one never doubts Bronzino's admiration of Dante. Indeed much of Bronzino's poetry depends on the reader's ability to recognize and appreciate his sly refashionings of famous passages. Bronzino does not wish to subvert Dante's world: his interests lie in appropriating bits and pieces of a canonical work in order to provoke a different response and perhaps an unstable combination of responses.³⁹ The adaptations function like decorative ornaments or droll commentaries: some enhance the painter's own account of a fantastic journey; others titillate and amuse through wordplay, puns, and teasing recontextualizations. Bronzino's poetry, unbounded by the constraints imposed on his painting by patronage, provides the ideal forum for lighthearted caricatures, teasing innuendoes, and whimsical formulations. Ultimately these spirited adaptations serve to reaffirm Dante's greatness. One might define Bronzino's relation to Dante as that of an acolyte, albeit a highly puckish one. More a technician than visionary or pioneer, Bronzino clearly considers his talents secondary to Dante's. Content to disport himself with Dante's verses, Bronzino confines himself to spoofing or incorporating whatever bits of a masterpiece his fancy dictates. As in the case of Della Casa's doting narrator, for Bronzino the impulse to explore "quel favelare che ha nome enigma" (*Galateo* 48) was irresistible.

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NOTES

¹ I cite below the balance of Della Casa's passage describing the narrator's comments on the inappropriateness of Dante as a rhetorical model: "...e la onestà de' vocaboli consiste o nel suono o nella voce loro, o nel significato; conciossiacosachè alcuni nomi venghino a dire cosa onesta e nondimeno si sente risonare nella voce istessa alcuna disonestà, sì come *rinculare* (la qual parola, ciò non

ostante, si usa tuttodi da ciascuno);...e perciò quelle che sono, o vogliono essere ben costumate, procurino di guardarsi non solo dalle disoneste cose ma ancora dalle parole; e non tanto da quelle che sono, ma eziandio da quelle che possono essere, o ancora parere, o disoneste o sconce e lorde, come alcuni affermano essere queste pur di Dante (50-51). The quotes from the *Commedia* cited in the first paragraph of this essay follow the citation. All translations of the *Gialateo* are from Della Casa, *Galateo*, 1986, 42.

² On the narrator's use of preterition, see Weinapple.

³ For a recent assessment of Dante's critical fortune in the early modern period, see Parker "Dante in the Renaissance," 11:122-124. For an investigation of the commentary tradition to the *Commedia* in the early modern period, see Parker, *Commentary and Ideology*.

⁴ In the *Dittamondo* the narrator, guided by Caius Iulius Solinus, voyages across Northern Africa and the present-day Middle East; the *Quadrilegio* describes Minerva's guiding of man from a sin-ridden state to a virtuous one through four realms; and in the *Città di Vita* the Cumaean Sibyl leads the poet through the heavenly spheres.

⁵ For recent studies of Boccaccio as a reader of Dante, see the bibliography in Hollander and Forni, 68n15. For an examination of the way in which Guglielmo Borsiere is transported from the *Commedia* to the *Decameron*, see Kirkham.

Franco Sacchetti in the *Trecentonovelle* also portrays characters from the *Commedia* in situations which highlight their sly wit rather than damnable shortcomings. For a study of Sacchetti's "rehabilitation" of one Dantesque character, Beatrice d'Este, see Parker, my "Ideology and Cultural Practice. Sacchetti's revisionary impulses are also evident in the stories featuring Dante as a character. In these tales Dante is no longer the "grave," "mansueto," "mirabilmente...composto e civile" poet described by Boccaccio in his biography but an irascible, impetuous individual keenly intent on punishing anyone who desecrates his poem through hapless recitals.

⁶ Finiguerra wrote a third poem, the *Studio d'Atene*; here the parade of personages mocked are presumptuous and haughty doctors, lawyers, and notaries. Bronzino, too, mocks *litterati* in "Il piato."

⁷ For a discussion of ambiguous allusions in Finiguerra's poetry, see Pierone. For an overview of his three extant poems, see Del Gallo.

⁸ Finiguerra's adaptation of Dantesque motifs is largely confined to the parodying of the theme of the voyage itself. His citations of Dante tend to be superficial, limited to repeating the type of expression used employed by Dante the pilgrim when making general inquiries about a soul or epithets referring to Virgil: examples of the former include "Chi è colui?" "Deh, dimmi," "Ed e' rispose"; among the latter we have "Disse 'l mio conforto," "Maestro mio." For a more detailed discussion of his rather general use of Dante, see Pierone, 65.

⁹ On Dante's influence on Pulci, see Messina; Davie, 49n19. For a discussion of Pulci's respect for Dante as an authority, see Jordan, 150-55.

¹⁰ An intimate member of Lorenzo's circle from the late 1460s to the end of the 1480s, Pulci drew on popular and humanist influences in writing the *Morgante*.

¹¹ Dante is not the only author parodied by Lorenzo. The title, *Simposio*, is intended to evoke Plato's work of the same title. The *Simposio* also contains comic allusions to Ficino and parodies of biblical passages.

¹² All Italian citations of the *Simposio* are from Tateo's edition. I also consulted the edition of the poem edited by Mario Martelli. For the English translation, see Medici, *Selected Poems*, 43. Both Sturm, 44-48 and Thiem, 15-17 discuss the vexed interpretive history of Lorenzo's *Simposio* and his other satiric works. Some past scholars have tended to dismiss these compositions because of their bawdy subject matter. The offended sensibilities of some critics has also affected the critical reception of other poets writing in a burlesque mode, among them Burchiello, Berni, and Bronzino. Many of these critics are ill-disposed to seeing canonical works such as the *Commedia* mocked by satiric poets.

¹³ The line "sue foglie perde" is likely a variation on "sua vita perde" (*Purg.*23.3). See the notes to the editions of the *Simposio* edited by Tateo, 25 and Martelli, 99-100 for discussions of these echoes of Dante's poem.

¹⁴ For other echoes of motifs inspired by Dante's poem, see Sturm, 44.

¹⁵ On parodies of liturgical texts in the Middle Ages, see the Introduction to Bahktin.

¹⁶ Bronzino's membership in the Accademia Fiorentina spurred his interest in Dante. While explication of Petrarch's poetry occupied much of the group's attention, many lectures were also devoted to the explication of the *Commedia*. In November 1541, for example, members heard both Gismondo Martelli's exposition of Petrarch's sonnet "Una candida cerva" and Pier Francesco Giambullari's lecture on the site of Dante's mountain of Purgatory.

Bronzino entered the Accademia Fiorentina (at that time known as the Accademia degli Umidi), along with forty-one other persons on 11 February 1540, in a mass admission designed to increase support for Cosimo within the Accademia Fiorentina. On 4 March 1547 reformers within the Academy decided to expel the more carefree and spirited members, which included most of the artists, among them Bronzino and Tribolo. The Academy modified this resolution in 1549 and decreed that those who had been rejected could be reinstated upon the presentation of a poem which passed the approval of the censors. Among the artists only Bronzino took advantage of this opportunity. He won readmission at the age of sixty-two, on 26 May 1566 after the presentation of three canzoni on the Grand Duke. This second application for admission to the Accademia Fiorentina suggests that the artist attached considerable importance to his literary pursuits. For discussions of Cosimo's influence on the tenor of the Accademia Fiorentina, see Plaisance; Heikamp; Samuels; Di Filippo Bareggi; and Romei, 83.

For discussions of Bronzino's friendship with Varchi, see Plaisance, 374-375, 377; Mendelsohn, 4-5; 31-33; Gaston, 264-268, and Cecchi's two articles. For a general study of Varchi's works, see Pirotti.

¹⁷The influence of Grazzini, one of the painter's poetic correspondents, should not be underestimated. Grazzini, also known as Il Lasca, published an edition of the satirical sonnets of the Quattrocento poet Burchiello in 1552 as well as an edition of Florentine carnival songs. For a lively account of the more fun loving members of Bronzino's *brigata*, see Heikamp, 139-63.

¹⁸Although there is no external documentation to confirm his sexual orientation, Bronzino presents himself as a sodomite in his burlesque poetry. For accounts of Bronzino's artistic production, see Furno, McComb; Baccheschi; and McCorquodale.

¹⁹BNF Magl. VII 730. For other contemporary accounts of Bronzino's artistic and literary activities, see Alessandro Allori's and Antonfrancesco Grazzini's funeral orations for Bronzino. Allori's and Grazzini's praises are cited in Furno, 56.

²⁰For Pontormo's allusion to this bet, see Pontormo, 54. In his dialogue, Allori reports that Bronzino, Varchi, and Martini would frequently gather to discuss "alcuni passi sopra il nostro stupendissimo poeta Dante." See Allori cited in Furno, 52. Bronzino dedicated "I romori" and the "Capitolo contro a le campane" to Luca Martini and "In lode delle zanzare" to Benedetto Varchi. Varchi dedicated his two poems the "Capitolo del finocchio" and the "Capitolo dell'uova sode," which were published in the 1548 *Primo libro dell'opere burlesche*, to Bronzino and Luca Martini. Such dedications underscore further the solidarity among this group of friends with mutual cultural interests.

²¹The portraits, which included Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, were painted for the lunettes of Bettini's bedchamber. For a discussion of these works, see Nelson, 65-69.

²²All citations of Bronzino's burlesque poetry refer to Bronzino, *Rime in burla*. Numbers following titles of poems refer to line numbers.

²³Bronzino's praise of the onion recalls other burlesque poems on food—Berni's tributes to artichokes and peaches, Varchi's poems on fennel and ricotta. See Longhi, 57-94 for a discussion of the popularity of the theme of food in burlesque poetry. For recent studies of Italian burlesque poetry, see Parker, *Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet*, 192n17.

²⁴With respect to Boccaccio, Bronzino notes that the writer gave the name Fra Cipolla to one of his more scurrilous monks "per mostrar di fuori / come cosa di forza e di gran pregio / certi segreti e non intesi errori" ("La Cipolla," III, 220-222, 229-231).

²⁵All citations from the *Commedia* are to the Bosco and Reggio edition. For translations, see Alighieri, 1980.

²⁶ It is worth noting that a painting which has been attributed to Bronzino's workshop, the *Allegorical Portrait of Dante* in the National Gallery, Washington, D.C., depicts the poet holding the *Commedia* open to this passage. For a recent discussion of the authorship of this painting, see Nelson, 67-68.

²⁷ See Longhi, 60 for other examples of burlesque poems which parody the laurel crown of poets.

²⁸ See Toscan, II:907-978 for a discussion of the equivocal meaning of numbers in burlesque poetry.

²⁹ See Toscan, IV, s.v. for the equivocal meanings of these terms. Many of the words listed have more than one equivocal meaning.

³⁰ Bronzino has a clear affinity for Dante's verses. The pervasive presence of Dante's verses in Bronzino's *capitoli* ultimately constitutes an affectionate and whimsical tribute to a poet whom Bronzino admired greatly. The *Commedia's terza rima* rhyme scheme is the same as that of the *capitolo*. This metrical scheme with its open rambling structure facilitates capricious transformations such as those effected by Bronzino. By the fifteenth century the *capitolo* had become the preferred meter of poetic satire.

³¹ Although the agency of the "I" is not obvious, I assume that the speaker in the burlesque poem is essentially the author; Bronzino and the narrator is elided in his poetry.

³² The allusion to Borghini helps date the composition of the poem, which was likely written between 1552-1555.

³³ In her notes to "Il piato," Petrucci Nardelli suggests that the poem is a kind of sexual autobiography. While such a reading is plausible, it needs to be demonstrated. Petrucci's reading largely consists of glossing occasional words according to Jean Toscan's lexical dictionary. Accordingly, she sees the reference to the marble statue as a reference to the penis. While one might wish to connect Bronzino's playful subversive attitude with his sexuality, there is no extant documentation on his sexual activities. Pulci's *Morgante*, especially the end of the poem, in which the author introduces autobiographical elements, is a likely source for this aspect of "Il piato." The poetry of another fifteenth-century poet, Burchiello, also contains many sardonic autobiographical allusions.

³⁴ Toscan, IV:1750.

³⁵ Dante's description of Virgil's and Dante's climb down Satan's body constitutes Bronzino's principle source for a voyage across the body of a giant. In Folengo's *Baldus*, the giant Fracassus, carries Baldus and his friends across the Nile River, but in this work it is the giant who does the traveling. In addition to Finiguerra's poems and Lorenzo's *Simposio*, the motif of a fantastic voyage could have been inspired by a wide range of texts, all of which were well known to Bronzino. They include: Boccaccio's fanciful account of Frate Cipolla's search for relics in *Decameron* VI.10; Ariosto's story of Astolfo's journey to the moon in the *Orlando furioso*, and the parodies of Dante's journey through the Afterlife found in

Folengo's *Baldus*, and Doni's *Inferni*. Like "Il piato," all these works describe bizarre visions and encounters with wondrous creatures. With the exception of Folengo, Bronzino alludes to all these authors elsewhere in his poetry.

³⁶ For an examination of Renaissance, and especially Rabelais' treatment of giants, see Stephens. While it would be tantalizing to entertain the possibility of Rabelais' influence on the painter, it cannot be established with any certainty whether Bronzino had read or heard of Rabelais's stories on Gargantua and Pantagruel. Both authors were influenced by burlesque works such as Florentine carnival songs, Pulci's *Morgante*, Berni's poetry, and Folengo's poems. In book 2, chapter 32 of *Pantagruel*, Rabelais describes a scene which takes place inside Pantagruel's mouth. Bronzino, too, finds himself inside Arcigrandone's mouth at one point, but whereas the painter only notes the giant's horrible gnashing teeth, Rabelais describes an entire world inside Pantagruel's mouth. Interestingly, both Bronzino and Rabelais were in Rome in 1549, but Bronzino was there in March and Rabelais in July. One possible source from which Bronzino might have gleaned some knowledge of Rabelais' works is Annibal Caro, who owned a copy of *Pantagruel*. For the diffusion of Rabelais in Italy, see Tetel.

³⁷ The following list provides other instances of Bronzino's adaptations of Dante's lines: the first set of numbers refer to the *capitolo* of "Il piato," the second to the line numbers. They include: I, 91-93 and *Inf.* 1.45-96; I, 97-99 and *Inf.* 5.135; I, 109-111 and *Inf.* 1.93 or *Purg.* 1.61-62; I, 160-62 and *Inf.* 13.46-47; II, 1-3 and *Inf.* 30.136-138; II, 13-15 and *Purg.* 26.69; II, 130-132 and *Inf.* 26.88-89; II, 193-195 and *Par.* 193-95; II, 218-220 and *Par.* 7.19; 2, 233-235 and *Purg.* 9.33; III, 22-24 and *Purg.* 32.72 and *Purg.* 19.35; IV, 121-123 and *Purg.* 9.145 and *Purg.* 10.60, 63; IV, 180-82 and *Purg.* 5.84; V, 73-75 and *Inf.* 29.138; VI, 43-45 and *Purg.* 28.52-57; VI, 73-75 and *Inf.* 2.4-5; VII, 34-36 and *Par.* 1.48; VII, 43-45 and *Inf.* 4.118 and *Purg.* 8.114; and VII, 76-78 and *Purg.* 9.115-16. I am indebted to Professor Peter Armour for his assistance in identifying many of these textual echoes.

³⁸ For a highly sardonic contemporary account of the way in which any great work of art can be made to look ridiculous and the impulse to effect such caricatures, see Bernhard, 57-61.

³⁹ Bronzino's quotation of Dante's verses is similar to his quotations, in another different medium, of the works of another great artist, Michelangelo. For a discussion of Bronzino's adaptations of Michelangelo's works, see Parker, *Bronzino: Renaissance Painter as Poet*, 91-96, 124-124-127, and the more extensive bibliography on this subject on pages 205n26 and 206n41.

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