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LASCA'S VILLA POEMS.
NETWORKING AND SUBVERSIVE POETICS
IN TIMES OF CULTURAL CONFORMITY

On 5 May 1566, Lasca was formally elected a member of the Accademia Fiorentina.¹ He thus re-entered the academy which he himself had founded in 1540, but from which he had been expelled for almost twenty years.² Various scholars have considered Lasca's friendship with Leonardo Salviati, consul of the academy in 1566, to be the main cause for his academic reintegration. Peter Brown, Salviati's biographer, has described Lasca's influence on the younger Salviati's playwriting, demonstrating their shared interest in comic theory.³ In Brown's opinion, reinstating Lasca was the first significant deed of Salviati's term as a consul, a deed that bore testimony to a determined as well as courageous character. To underscore the consul's courage, Brown stresses how Lasca had found himself in an isolated position ever since his expulsion in the 1540s.⁴ Other scholars have played down Brown's view by suggesting that Lasca's reinstatement was not merely caused by the personal favouritism of a consul, but was rather the formal confirmation of a process of social and cultural reintegration that had taken its course in the preceding years. Michel Plaisance has shown that from 1559 onwards Lasca established relations with various branches of the Medici family, in particular with Francesco I, to whom Lasca dedicated his *Tutti i Trionfi*.⁵ Furthermore, both Plaisance and Franco Pignatti have suggested that Lasca's alliance with Raffaello de' Medici during the early 1560s was instrumental in this process as well.⁶ Domenico Zanrè, too, has argued that through his love poems to Raffaello, Lasca sought to forge an alliance with a new generation of prominent Florentines, thus securing his cultural rehabilitation.⁷ Indeed my own findings confirm that Raffaello occupied a central position as the patron of a relatively coherent network of literary men in the 1560s, in which Lasca was the senior and most dominant poet. In the course of the 1560s, this network became of increasing interest to the members of the Accademia Fiorentina.

¹ See *Annali dell'Accademia Fiorentina*, c. 19 (Firenze, Biblioteca Marucelliana, B III 52, I-III, III). Lasca was re-admitted by appealing to regulations laid down in 1549, which stated that anyone excluded in 1547 should be able to re-enter on censorial approval of a literary work. Lasca submitted *La prima parte delle opere pastorali*, a collection of ten *ecloghe*, to which censor Adriani and consul Salviati added their consent on the first of May 1566. For the autograph and the approval and signatures of Adriani and Salviati, see: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Magl. VII, 1240; for a description of this manuscript, see GRAZZINI 1882: LVII-LVIII; see also PIGNATTI 2007 (forthcoming).

² For a detailed analysis of both the founding of the academy and Lasca's expulsion, see above all: PLAISANCE 2004: 29-122 (*Une première affirmation de la politique culturelle de Côme Ier: la transformation de l'académie des "Humidi" en académie florentine [1540-1542]*) and 123-234 (*Culture et politique à Florence de 1542 à 1551. Lasca et les "Humidi" aux prises avec l'académie florentine*).

³ BROWN 1974: 106-125.

⁴ BROWN 1974: 106-108.

⁵ PLAISANCE 2005: 145.

⁶ PLAISANCE 1973: 79; PLAISANCE 2005: 145; PIGNATTI 2002: 37-38.

⁷ ZANRÈ 2004: 70-78.

In this article, I analyse how Lasca positioned himself within this network by looking at a group of poems that I propose to call his 'villa poems'.⁸ In these poems, I will argue, we can both trace the outlines of Lasca's network in the early 1560s, and the poetic strategies he adopted to strengthen the ties within the group. While Raffaello is a constant factor in many of these poems, a more dynamic literary game developed in which other participants were involved, such as Giovanni Bini and Lutozzo Nasi.

A sonnet written by Lasca when he was visiting Giovambattista Cini's villa 'Le Rose', in San Lorenzo alle Rose, a small hamlet in the hills near Impruneta, is a typical example of such a villa poem.⁹ Addressed to Giovanni Bini, this sonnet not only provides us with one of Lasca's rather obscure contacts within the group centered around Raffaello de' Medici, it also yields information about the various factors that shaped the group's identity. In the poem, Lasca urges Bini to come to Cini's villa at once:¹⁰

Noi vi aspettiam, messer Giovanni mio,
come sapete, in luogo ampio ed adorno
e ricco e lieto fuor, dentro e d'intorno,
Giovanbattista vostro, Cini ed io.
Venite a contentar nostro disio,
senza far dove sete più soggiorno,
chè mille volte vi chiamiamo il giorno:
venite tosto per l'amor di Dio.
Venite via, chè mille e mille onori,
or ch'è l'aer benigno e temperato,
qua vi faran le ninfe ed i pastori.
Venite via, chè voi sete aspettato
e dalle piante e dall'erbe e da i fiori,
quasi che ognun di voi sia innamorato.

Or se cortese e grato
ascolti il ciel nostre preci amorese,
venite tosto a vederci alle Rose.

⁸ The poems I consider to be part of the group of villa poems are the following (the addressees and subjects are between brackets. Raffaello and Liglano appear in practically all the poems): *Sonetti XIX* (Benedetto Varchi), LXXXVII-XCII (Lorenzo de' Medici, Lutozzo Nasi, Ridolfo), CXXVIII-CXXXI (Giovanni Bini); *Madrigali* XXIV-XXV, XXIX (Tobia); *Madrigalesse* XII-XIII (Bastiano Antinori, Giovanni Bini, Ulivo), XIV (Piero Bini), XLII (Piero Fagioli, Bini, Cini); *Ottave* XI (Lutozzo Nasi), XVII (Bastiano [Antinori], Salvati); *Capitoli* XII (Giovanni Bini, Cini). Furthermore there is a group of poems I have not studied closely that may also be counted among the villa poems: *Sonetti* XCIII-XCVI (Bernardo Ulivi, Ridolfo, Tobia); *Madrigalesse* IX (Vincenzo Buonanni?); *Ottave* X (Lutozzo Nasi), XXVII (Odoardo Belfratelli, Ridolfo, Lutozzo Nasi, Eufrosino Lapini); *Capitoli* XI, XIII (Salvati?, Lutozzo Nasi), LII (Piero Fagioli). All numbers are based on: GRAZZINI 1882. Zanrè dates Lasca's poems to Raffaello between 1560 and 1565, 1566 since this is before Raffaello got married and obtained a public function that made him less available (ZANRÈ 2004: 73). Plaisance furthermore dates the poems on Liglano to Lorenzo de' Medici and Bastiano Antinori in the early 1560s (PLAISANCE 2005: 21n.). Considering the thematic coherence, I assume that other poems on Liglano should be dated in the same period, as do the poems on Cini and Bini.

⁹ On Villa le Rose (also called Torre alle rose), see LENSI ORLANDI CARDINI 1954: 115; CAROCCI 1907: II 309-310.

¹⁰ GRAZZINI 1882: 105, Sonetto CXXX, A M. Giovanni Bini.

The prominent role of the *campagna* is, of course, an important aspect of these villa poems; several villas figure repeatedly as the sites where the poems were written and where the group met and amused themselves. The central position of the Medici villa 'Liglano' is striking in the poems featuring Raffaello. The poems dedicated to (or featuring) Giovanni Bini, give prominence to Cini's villa Le Rose. Other villas that may have been a meeting place, but that are less prominent in the poetry, were 'I Tattoli' of the Bini family,¹¹ Benedetto Varchi's 'La Topaia', and a villa owned by a certain Lutozzo Nasi, which I have not been able to locate.¹²

As we shall see, the prominence of *villeggiatura* in the group's gatherings invited the adoption of pastoral elements in the poems. The sonnet to Bini, however, also shows a playful use of the conventions of courtly love poetry. Both literary models are at some points subverted, and attributed with an erotic double meaning. In order to analyse the role of the villa poems in the process of Lasca's reintegration in the Florentine academic circuit up to 1566, I will first draw the outlines of his villa network based on the poems and archival evidence. Secondly, I will analyse the poems' contents, which, I will argue, show how Lasca deliberately used the burlesque subversion of his models to achieve social acceptance.

The villa network

Apart from the Medici scion Raffaello, Giovambattista Cini and Giovanni Bini, several men appear to have gathered in the *campagna* on a regular basis. While the poems referring to Le Rose focus exclusively on Bini or Cini, as if they were the only ones present, at Liglano a larger crowd appears to have attended. In the villa poems, obscure and unidentifiable figures appear: we get to meet a certain Tobia, a Zebe, Maso, Lutozzo Nasi and Piero Fagioli. But we also encounter Cini and Giovanni Bini in Raffaello's presence. Furthermore some well-known and documented academicians and public figures as Lorenzo de' Medici, Eufrosino Lapini, Bastiano Antinori and Leonardo Salviati stayed at the Medici villa.¹³ Giovanni's brother Piero Bini is the addressee of a madrigal on the Bini mansion.¹⁴

¹¹ This fifteenth-century villa is situated in the hills of San Casciano, and has remained in possession of the Bini's until this very day, see: <http://www.tattoli.it>.

¹² Lasca wrote an octave 'Su la porta della villa di M. Lutozzo Nasi', see GRAZZINI 1882: 359, Ottava XI.

¹³ On Lorenzo di Galeotto di Lorenzo de' Medici, *cavaliere* and *canonico del Duomo*, see PLAISANCE 2005: 20. Plaisance describes how Lasca, on the 15th of October 1562, wrote a letter to Benedetto Varchi telling how he was invited to Pieve de San Pancrazio by Lorenzo de' Medici. He stressed the *cavaliere's* affection for literary men, and for poets in particular. On Eufrosino Lapini, see PLAISANCE 2005: 310-311. Lapini, a Florentine priest, was a member of the Fiorentina from 1560 onwards. Plaisance links Lapini to a circle of intellectuals that also included Cini and that was frequented by Lasca after 1566. Lapini's appearance at Liglano, however, seems to indicate that their acquaintance was from a prior date. Lapini's alliance to Raffaello de' Medici can also be supported by the fact that Lapini dedicated *Stanze sopra la dignità dell'uomo* to him in 1566. Lasca mocks Lapini in a series of sonnets entitled *La Eufrosinaria*. In one of the sonnets he refers to the discussion on comedy, as Plaisance has pointed out. On Bastiano Antinori, see SALVINI 1717: 250. Antinori was consul of the Fiorentina in 1565, with Benedetto Varchi and Leonardo Salviati as his counselors.

¹⁴ GRAZZINI 1882: 269, Madrigalessa XIV, A M. Piero Bini. This madrigal mocks the name of villa I Tattoli: «Tattoli ricordare, o forte o piano, / nome gli par di un paesaccio strano» (vv.

The son of Francesco di Raffaello di Giuliano de' Medici, Raffaello de' Medici (1543-1629) was a descendant of a powerful Medici line. He studied at the university of Pisa and was married to Costanza di Piero di Ludovico Alamanni in 1565 or 1566. In 1565 he was elected as a member of the *Balia* of the Military Order of the Knights of Saint Stephan, and in 1572 he made it to the rank of admiral.¹⁵ Lasca's acquaintance with Raffaello probably dates from as early as 1561, when Raffaello was only eighteen years old. In this year Lasca's comedy *La Spiritata* was performed in the house of Bernadetto de' Medici during the carnival festivities, and when the play was published, Lasca dedicated it to Raffaello.¹⁶ Besides this comedy, Lasca dedicated many poems to Raffaello, among which the well known *capitolo* 'In lode del bagnarsi in Arno'.¹⁷ Furthermore, he sang the praise of Raffaello in a series of poems in name of Narcissus and composed an unfinished (and lost) chivalric epic on knight *Ruggier da Risa*, which he intended to dedicate to Raffaello.¹⁸ On top of this, Lasca wrote the villa poems that eulogize Raffaello's villa Ligiano.¹⁹

Obviously, Lasca treasured his connection with the young Raffaello. Though Zanrè stresses the fact that Lasca "seems to have been particularly captivated by his charms and good looks",²⁰ the most obvious reasons for his devotion were his desire to be socially accepted on the one hand, and the conditions Raffaello provided, as a patron, to the functioning of the villa circle on the other. Raffaello, of course, benefited in a rather different way from the relation with a eulogizing poet who was forty years his senior. Pignatti's suggestion that Lasca may have taken on the role of a mentor is probably not far off, though there are, of course, other possibilities.²¹

In contrast to Raffaello, Giovanni Bini and his brother Piero have hitherto been virtually unknown.²² Their father Piero, who was born in Florence in 1486 as the

9-10). Lasca refers to Ligiano and Le Rose to indicate what name he himself would like for a villa («Il contrario è Ligiano, / le Rose, o Calenzano», vv. 11-12) and subsequently explains his objections to the word 'Tattoli': it cannot be easily used in literature: «per che Tattoli poi, se ben si stima, / mal si può dire in prosa, e peggio in rima» (vv. 13-14). Lasca subsequently urges Piero to choose another name for the family mansion, one that can compete with those villas that are held in such high esteem by 'gli amici' (v. 17). The previous reference to Ligiano and Le Rose makes it clear that 'gli amici' are the guests that attend these villas.

¹⁵ ZANRÈ 2004: 72-73; PLAISANCE 2005: 309n.

¹⁶ PIGNATTI 2002: 37-38; PLAISANCE 2005: 306.

¹⁷ GRAZZINI 1882: 491-495, Capitolo X, A M. Raffaello de' Medici.

¹⁸ The Narcissus poems were published in 1860 and 1877 as *I Narcisi. Madrigali sopra un giovane inteso per Narciso*, see PLAISANCE 2005: 309. On Ruggier da Risa, see PLAISANCE 2005: 305-307.

¹⁹ Ligiano came into Raffaello's possession on the 27th of April 1549, when he was only five or six years old, and he remained the owner until his death in 1593. The villa, which was probably built in the thirteenth century, is situated near the valle d'Ema, in Antella. On Ligiano, see LENSI ORLANDI CARDINI 1954: 46; CAROCCI 1907: II 153-154.

²⁰ ZANRÈ 2004: 73.

²¹ PIGNATTI 2002: 38.

²² The biographies of their father Piero and uncle Bernardo contain only limited biographical information on Giovanni and Piero. Thorough research in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze might yield more specifics. The two brothers were not the only Bini's among Lasca's acquaintances. In his *Primo libro delle opere burlesche*, some *capitoli* are included by a certain 'messer

son of Giovanni Bini, lived several years in France for business, but returned to Florence, where he married in 1533. His wife died the same year, but he soon remarried. His second wife was the widow of his cousin Giovanni di Bernardo: Ginevra di Luca Ubertini, who was to become the mother of Giovanni and Piero. After Piero senior's death in 1551, his children were left under the guardianship of their mother Ginevra, her brother Lorenzo and Giuliano di Piero Capponi.²³ The Bini family was a Florentine family of considerable esteem and with some powerful alliances. Through their uncle Bernardo Bini and his sons in particular, the Bini brothers were allied to the Medici family.²⁴

Like the Grazzini's and the Cini's, the Bini family lived in the Florentine *Quartiere di Santo Spirito*, and all three families were residents of the same *popolo*. The acquaintance that is reflected in the poems on *Le Rose*, thus probably had its roots in neighbourly chats in the square after church-attendance.²⁵ Piero and Giovanni were born in the second half of the 1530s.²⁶ So when Razzi dedicated his comedy *La Balia* to Giovanni in 1560 (see below), the elder Bini brother was in his early twenties. In the years up to 1566, Giovanni and Piero probably started to mingle in the Florentine cultural scene. During this period their contacts with the poet Lasca – originating in an old acquaintance as neighbours – must have intensified. As in the case of Raffaello, Lasca might have taken up the role of mentor, introducing the brothers to his friends and familiarizing them with the discourses current in cultural Florence.

The participation of Giovanni and Piero in the cultural and literary field, however, is scarcely documented. What we do know belongs to the debate on comedy. The abovementioned madrigal in which Lasca voices his disapproval of the name of the Bini villa I Tattoli, suggests that Piero had an interest in the

Bino'. In all probability, this Bino is Giovan Francesco Bini. Born in Florence, Giovan Francesco lived in Rome, in close acquaintance with Francesco Berni. Furthermore, Lasca wrote several poems to a certain Antonio Bini, among which the two well-known poems "contro le sberrettate", see GRAZZINI 1882: 319-321, Madrigalessa XLVI, A M. Antonio Bini; 436-440, Ottava CVIII, A M. Antonio Bini. A third poem to Antonio Bini is: Ottava XLVII, 392-393. I have not been able to trace any biographical information on Antonio Bini.

²³ LUZZATI 1968b: 518.

²⁴ LUZZATI 1968a: 503-506. For the genealogical tree of this branch of the Bini family, see: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Poligrafo Gargani 312, 'Bini Quartiere di S. Spirito', c. 128.

²⁵ See: MELONI TRKUIJA 1991. In this facsimile edition of the register of the Florentine census of 1562 we find the *rede* di Piero di Giovanni Bini (c. 9^v), father of Giovanni and Piero, and the offspring of «Grazino d'Ant^o Grazin» (p. 16) registered as parts of the *popolo di S. Felice in piazza*. According to RODINI (1970: 3), Lasca was born on the *Via delle caldaie* in the Santo Spirito quarter as the firstborn of Grazino d'Antonio Grazzini. The *rede* di Francesco Cini is also registered in this *popolo* (c. 17^v). Though Cini's father was named Francesco as well, it is by no means certain that Cini's household would be referred to in this manner, since he died before Cini came to Florence in 1548.

²⁶ LUZZATI 1968b: 518. We cannot be sure about their dates of birth, but considering the marriages and death of father Piero, an estimation can be made. Piero's first wife died within a year after their marriage in 1533. If we assume that he remarried to Giovanni's mother Ginevra in 1534, the earliest possible year of birth for Giovanni or Piero could have been 1535. We should also remember that the children were left in tutelage of their mother and other relatives in 1551, which suggests their minority.

theoretical discussion on comedy.²⁷ The question whether comedy should be written in prose or verse was a current issue among Florentine playwrights. Lasca preferred prose, which, he argued, best approached the Florentine spoken in the streets, but others stuck to verse, according to the classical tradition. The first indication of Piero's interest in this debate can be found in Lasca's criticism of the pronunciation of the Bini villa's name: «per che Tattoli poi, se ben si stima, / mal si può dire in prosa, e peggio in rima» (vv. 13-14).²⁸ Though subtle, this hint was likely to be picked up, especially in combination with the end of the madrigal. Here, the issue is raised whether a modern, national comic mode should either replace the classical tradition or depend on it. Lasca urges Piero to rename I Tattoli, supplying him with the following suggestion:

mettete tutti i mezzi,
per che 'l Buonanni Greco la sbattezzi,
ed un nome gli trovi per avante
bello, chiaro, gentile, alto e sonante,
[...]
e che stia bene in prosa e meglio in versi. (vv. 18-21; 26)

Buonanni's position in the debate on comedy is obscure. He is best known for his comment of Dante's *Inferno* in the 1570s and his interest in reforming the Florentine language at the end of the 1550s. Obviously, Buonanni's reputation as a language reformer inspired Lasca's suggestion that Buonanni should rename the villa («sbattezzi»).²⁹ But for Lasca, the *questione della lingua* was not an isolated debate, as he links Buonanni's preoccupation with language reforms to comedy writing in several poems.³⁰ The same pattern seems to exist in this madrigal. Since Lasca addressed Piero on this matter, we can assume that he, too, took an interest in the discussions on comedy.

An indication of Giovanni's involvement in the debate is found in Girolamo Razzi's comedy *La Balia* (reprinted in 1564). Prefixed to the play is a letter by Razzi's printer Filippo Giunti dated the 15th of March 1560, which is addressed 'Al molto Magn. M. Giovanni di Piero Bini suo osservandissimo'.³¹ Giunti asks Giovanni to be the guardian of the comedy, not only because he regards Giovanni «cortese e gentile», but in particular because he expects the play to appeal to him: «E avverrà forse ancora, se io non sono ingannato, che non vi farà discaro, che la sia conosciuta per cosa vostra». When Razzi, in his introduction subsequently discusses the purpose of *La Balia* and the nature of comedy in general, he takes an active stance in the debate by underscoring the pedagogic value attributed to comedy in the classical tradition. The fact that Giunti brought both the play and its theoretically biased introduction to Giovanni Bini's attention, is a clear indication of the latter's involvement in the debate on comedy.

²⁷ See: note 14. GRAZZINI 1882: 269, Madrigalessa XIV, A M. Piero Bini.

²⁸ On Lasca's ideas as a *commediografo*, see BROWN 1974: 106-125.

²⁹ BALLISTRERI 1972: 144-145.

³⁰ See for instance GRAZZINI 1882: 422, Ottava XCII. In this poem Buonanni is equated with Florentine comedy writers such as Salviati, Cini, Cecchi, Lotto and Lasca himself.

³¹ RAZZI 1564: I-II.

Though the Bini's actual participation in the Florentine literary circuit is merely hinted at in Lasca's madrigal and Razzi's *La Balia*, the literary merits of the Bini brothers must have been substantial, for according to the annals of the academy, both Piero and Giovanni were elected members in 1566. The date of their instalment is remarkable: both men were nominated on 22 April, and their election was approved on 5 May, during the same meeting in which Lasca was reinstalled.³² This fact may be indicative for the tight connection between Lasca and the Bini's. As for Raffaello de' Medici: his instalment in the Fiorentina came through during these days as well. He was nominated on the 20th of April and elected to be a member the day after.³³ Thus, both Piero, Giovanni, Raffaello and Lasca entered the Accademia Fiorentina within two weeks time; a fact that may be indicative of the cohesion of their circle and of the interest the academy attached to them as a group.

The collective entrance in the academy of Lasca and Piero and Giovanni Bini was, as has been said before, not entirely consul Salviati's doing. Raffaello, once he was a member, was an important ally as well. But we should not forget that Lasca's connection with Cini (1528 [1529 stile pisano]-1586) will also have favoured it. The Bini brothers, as special friends of both Cini and Lasca, may have profited from this particular alliance as well. Cini had been an active member of the Fiorentina from at least as early as August 1547, when his name was recorded in the membership role.³⁴ Cini was not yet twenty years old then, but his young age did not interfere with an active participation. His considerable social standard was partly due to the protection of the Duke. Since Cini was orphaned from his Pisan parents at a young age, Cosimo I had him brought to Florence in 1540 to be raised and educated.³⁵ Most of Cini's literary work was the result of his alliance to the Medici, and composed in honour of the family.³⁶ His first comedy, *La Vedova* (1569), for instance, was written on the occasion of the entrance of Archduke Charles of Austria in Florence. His second, *Il Baratto* (1577), was occasioned by the birth of Francesco de' Medici's son.³⁷ Besides these theatrical works Cini worked on Cosimo's biography *Vita del serenissimo signor Cosimo de' Medici Primo Gran Duca di Toscana*, which was published only after his death, in 1611.³⁸ Though Cini never reached the higher positions of the academic magistrature, his powerful acquaintances made him an influential player within the academy. In 1566, the year of Lasca's return, he was even nominated consul, but was outnumbered by Salviati.³⁹

The connection between Cini and Lasca can be traced back to 1559, when Lasca included Cini's 'Canto de' venti' in *Tutti i Trionfi, Carri, Mascheate [sic] o canti*

³² See *Annali dell'Accademia Fiorentina*, III, c. 19.

³³ See *Annali dell'Accademia Fiorentina*, III, c. 18v.

³⁴ DI FILIPPO BAREGGI 1973: 551, based on *Capitoli dell'Accademia Fiorentina*, cc. 1r-38r.

³⁵ FRANCESCHINI 1981: 608.

³⁶ CINI 1953: 11.

³⁷ *La Vedova* was published at Giunti in 1569 (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Magl. 3.5.230). See for a modern edition of the comedy, CINI 1953, a cura di Benedetto Croce; *Il Baratto* remained unpublished in its own time, for a modern edition see CINI 1972, a cura di Maria Luisa Doglio.

³⁸ FRANCESCHINI 1981: 611.

³⁹ *Annali dell'Accademia Fiorentina*, III, 15v.

Carnascialeschi.⁴⁰ Their contact seems to have been enduring, with various moments of co-operation and expressions of mutual respect.⁴¹ Interesting for my purpose here, and significant in respect to Lasca's readmittance in the Fiorentina, is the co-operation between Lasca and Cini during the festivities of Francesco I de' Medici's wedding in 1565. Cini was responsible for the composition of the six *intermezzi* in *La Cofanaria*, the comedy by Francesco d'Ambra that was performed during the *nuzze* at the 26th of December in the Sala Grande in the Palazzo Vecchio. It was a huge success.⁴² An anonymous writer, probably Domenico Mellini, instantly published a description of the event at Giunti's: *Descrizione dell'apparato della Comedia et intermedii d'essa*, thus cutting the ground from under Cini's feet.⁴³ The latter immediately reacted by seeing to a print of his own, for which he asked Lasca to be the editor. This edition of D'Ambra's *Cofanaria* was published by Torrentino and Pettinari. It contained a foreword by a certain Alessandro Ceccherelli, dated on the 15th of January 1565 (stile fiorentino). It also contains a *fascioletto* of Cini's *intermezzi* by Lasca and a dedication in his name to Francesco de' Medici.⁴⁴

Since this edition was delivered mid-January, only a few months prior to Lasca's readmittance in the Fiorentina, the close collaboration with Cini in the preceding months is not unlikely to have been of influence on his return. The annals of the Fiorentina offer some support for this hypothesis, as they record how Lasca, in the three years following his reinstatement, as an *elezionario* nominated Cini for key positions during academic elections. In January 1567 (stile fiorentino) he proposed Cini as a candidate for the consulate, in 1568 to be a censor and in 1568 he once again put him forward to be *consul*.⁴⁵ None of these nominations proved to be successful, but they do suggest that Lasca wanted to repay Cini for his services.

Lasca's villa poems featuring Raffaello and Giovanni Bini provide the outlines of a small network. Combined with evidence from the academy's annals, they draw the picture of a cohesive circle of Florentine *letterati*, that as a whole became of interest to the Fiorentina. The sequence in the admission of Lasca and his young friends from well-established families, all in one way or another related to the Medici, to the academy, can hardly be a coincidence. Furthermore, they seem to

⁴⁰ CINI 1559: 229-230.

⁴¹ An example of their continued alliance is their shared interest in the matter of the censorship and the rewriting of Boccaccio's *Decamerone* in the 1570s. In a letter to Vincenzo Borghini Cini says he forwarded the former's «notizie del povero Boccaccio» to «Grazino a Staggia», demonstrating how he valued his opinion. See Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Magl. VIII, 1393, c. 71, «Var. lettere scritte a Monsig. r Borghini dal Maestro del Sacro Palazzo sopra la correzione delle Novelle del Boccaccio, e di altri sopra altre materie»; Lasca's involvement with Cini's projects, on the other hand, is evident in several poems. See GRAZZINI 1882: 415, Ottave LXXVIII-LXXIX, A M. Gio. Battista Cini; 378, Ottava XXX.

⁴² FRANCESCHINI 1981: 609.

⁴³ Lasca wrote three octaves mocking Mellini, see GRAZZINI 1882: 414, Ottave LXXV-LXXVII.

⁴⁴ FRANCESCHINI 1981: 609. Lasca's rendering of the *intermezzi* can be found in any edition of *La Cofanaria*, see for instance: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Palat. 12.5.3.5 (1750); Palat. 2.9.2.33 (1593).

⁴⁵ We can find the various election rounds at the following *carte*, respectively: *Annali dell'Accademia Fiorentina*, III, 22v, 26, 27v.

have shared an interest in the debate on comedy. This is at least safe to say for Lasca and Cini, but the Bini brothers were probably involved as well. Since this debate on comedy was of special interest to consul Salviati, and had also been a recurrent issue in the Fiorentina during the 1560s, we may conclude that the academicians expected Lasca's villa circle to contribute specifically to this academic debate.

Writing (in) a pastoral world

Having detailed the social conditions of Lasca's return to the Fiorentina, now let us turn to his villa poems and their function in shaping cohesion within this circle. As mentioned above, Zanrè rightly suggests that by way of his love poems to Raffaello de' Medici, Lasca deliberately sought an alliance with a new generation that was unbiased by his controversial reputation in the past. Zanrè points out how Lasca, in his love poetry to Raffaello, adopted the conventions of courtly love for the *gentildonna* and Petrarchan lyric poetry to «the deliberate deployment of a homoerotic canvas». Furthermore, he stresses the importance of literature for the consolidation or creation of male bonds in the early modern period, with a rhetoric that depended on a passionate and intimate language. These expressions of male friendship were exchanged in letters and in poetry, as various scholars have pointed out.⁴⁶

The same patterns of male bonding can be found in the group of villa poems. In the following example, Lasca addresses Giovanni Bini, who had not yet arrived in Cini's villa despite Lasca's repeated requests. Lasca begs him to come, clearly exploiting the conventions of courtly love: «Ma io vi scuso; che sete lontano, / e forse ancor che non son capitare / le lettere e i sonetti in vostra mano».⁴⁷ In the villa poems to Giovanni Bini and Raffaello, however, the pastoral provided an evident model. Lasca depicts villa life as his own ideal pastoral world, in which specific conditions determine the state of perfection that can be achieved. But in order to operationalize these conventions in a literary game directed towards male bonding, Lasca had to subvert them. The following paragraph explores how Lasca uses and abuses the literary topoi of *villeggiatura* and the pastoral.⁴⁸

In *La letteratura di villa e villeggiatura* (2004), Rinaldo Rinaldi argues that the villa and its garden are often depicted as a paradisiacal refuge. In the Italian tradition it was probably Alberti who initiated this *topos*, as he referred to the villa as 'un proprio paradiso' in his *I libri della famiglia*. Rinaldi furthermore stresses the artificiality of this paradise.⁴⁹ This concept of perfection of nature, cultivated by human hands, was a convention of the pastoral ever since Virgil's *Bucolics*. Lasca readily conformed to this convention when he praises the gardens of Ligiano:⁵⁰

⁴⁶ ZANRÈ 2004: 73-77.

⁴⁷ GRAZZINI 1882: 498-499, Capitolo XII, A M. Giovanni Bini, vv. 55-57.

⁴⁸ For recent studies on early modern *villeggiatura* and the villa in literature, see LILLIE 2005 and *Letteratura di villa e di villeggiatura* 2004.

⁴⁹ RINALDI 2004: 355-357.

⁵⁰ GRAZZINI 1882: 367-370, Ottava xvii, 'Sopra la villa del Sig. Cav. De' Medici Bali di Firenze', vv. 17-26.

Ha dietro un orto volto a mezzo giorno,
 che tiene un quadro di palazzo appunto,
 cinto di mura tutto intorno intorno,
 molto ben compartito e bene in punto,
 d'erbe e di piante e di buon frutti adorno,
 come se gli conviene appunto appunto,
 ed or ci sono e vesciole e piselli
 e carciofi e scalogni freschi e belli.
 Nel domestico i campi lavorati
 con ordine son tutti, e con misura;

Stressing the enclosed intimacy of the gardens, cultivated and flourishing by human hands, Lasca uses imagery that can also be found in works such as Antonfrancesco Doni's *Le ville*⁵¹ and Gaspara Stampa's 'In lode di Fiumane, luogo dell'illusterrissimo signor Conte della Torre preposto di Verona'.⁵² It is uncertain whether Lasca knew Doni's work, but Stampa's poem could well have been a model:

in questo avventuroso almo paese
 l'ornamento del ciel si mostra in terra,
 ch'a farlo un paradiso in lui discese.
 [...]
 Non cede l'arte a la natura il vanto
 Ne l'artificio del giardin, ornato
 d'alberi colti e sempre verde manto;
 sovra 'l qual porge, alquanto rilevato,
 d'architettura un bel palagio tale,
 qual fu di quel del Sol già poetato.

Besides being illustrative for the pastoral emphasis on artificiality, the first three verses of Stampa's poem are significant in another respect. Stampa uses the Petrarchan antithesis of terra-cielo (v. 2) to allude to the beauty of the land (v. 1) and its paradisiacal atmosphere (v. 3). This is exactly what Lasca does in many of the villa poems. In *madrigalessa XII* to Bastiano Antinori, for example, he writes:⁵³

e se l'aria è serena e 'l ciel cortese,
 voi sapete, il paese
 come sia largo e grasso,
 boscato e cultivato,
 e quanto sia dotato
 d'ogni piacer villesco, e d'ogni spasso.

Though Lasca never mentions paradise, the antithesis cielo-terra is so pointedly present in his villa poetry, that we can easily accept that he, too, means to depict

⁵¹ See in particular the following fragment by Doni: «Il Signor Bartolomeo Zanne ha una Villa lontana tre miglia da Bologna, sopra una bellissima collina, dalla sua diligenza, industria et ingegno fatta miracolosa, perché per forza di picconi, di scarpegli, et con grossi muri, spesse siepi, posticci monticelli artifitiati, et con grossi muri attorno attorno, ha fatto un paradiso terrestre», DONI 1969: 74, cited by RINALDI 2004: 358.

⁵² STAMPA 1953: 338, 340, quoted in RINALDI 2004: 358.

⁵³ GRAZZINI 1882: 265-267, *Madrigalessa XII*, A M. Bastiano Antinori, vv. 12-17.

villa and countryside as an earthly paradise, formed by human hands. A beautiful second hint in this direction is his pet name for Raffaello de' Medici, his beloved 'angel terreno'. Our poet thus aligns himself with the classical tradition of pastoral imagery that was in vogue among contemporary writers.

However abundant and lyrical, Lasca's praise of villa life is somewhat misleading. As it happens, he is enthusiastic about villa life only on specific terms; the theme of *villeggiatura* serves as a frame within which he projects his very personal reading of a pastoral ideal world. According to the villa poems, Lasca regarded the villa as a highly suitable accommodation for literary production, the peace and splendour surrounding him were features stimulating his writing. In order to achieve an actual satisfactory level of inspiration and performance, however, one condition had to be fulfilled: only in the presence of a beloved young friend he could truly shine. In Lasca's villa poems, natural beauty, poetry and male friendship are inseparable.

In several villa poems Lasca suggests that his main pastime at Le Rose and Liglano consisted of intellectual amusement such as reading, discussing and writing. He presents himself as the 'residential poet', who is appreciated by the villa guests for his poetic contributions. In *Madrigalessa XII* to Bastiano Antinori, for instance, Lasca reveals how the other villa guests expect him to write. When circumstances do not allow him to stay at Liglano («Poi che all'Antella star con Raffaello / non posso a villeggiare») (vv. 1-2), he longs for these feelings of heightened expectation:⁵⁴

Non ho sempre vicino
chi mi tormenti, e dica e voglia ch'io
faccia a dispetto mio
capitoli o sonetti,
stanze e madrigaletti,
o commedie o novelle,
come le stampe avessi, o le pretelle.

Though the tone of this passage admittedly is somewhat ironic, Lasca's wish to write seems to be sincere. In an octave that was probably addressed to Antinori as well, the link between villa life and writing is voiced again:⁵⁵

Or dov'io son, largamente v'ho detto,
e più che mai felice e lieto vivo,
Bastian mio caro, e con gioia e diletto
prose e versi all'usanza canto e scrivo.

This sentiment can be found not merely in Lasca's correspondence with Antinori. In a poem to Lutozzo Nasi, Lasca wrote about his *villeggiatura* in the same vein:⁵⁶ «Lutozzo, io vo' che sappi [...] come quassù vivo: / io mangio e beo e dormo e leggo e scrivo / gli antichi fatti di Ruggier da Risa» (vv. 1-4).⁵⁷ When Lasca calls upon the Gods to help him compose his verses in a second sonnet to Nasi,⁵⁸ it

⁵⁴ GRAZZINI 1882: 265-267, *Madrigalessa XII*, A M. Bastiano Antinori, vv. 44-50.

⁵⁵ GRAZZINI 1882: 367-370, *Ottava XVII*, 'Sopra la villa del Sig. Cav. De' Medici Bali di Firenze', vv. 97-100.

⁵⁶ GRAZZINI 1882: 74, *Sonetto XC*, A M. Lutozzo Nasi.

⁵⁷ See note 18.

⁵⁸ GRAZZINI 1882: 74-75, *Sonetto XCI*, A M. Lutozzo Nasi.

turns out that in doing so he hopes he can meet Nasi's wishes: «così forse potrò, come bramate, / messer Lutozzo, contentarvi in parte» (vv. 7-8).

The verses to Antinori and Nasi demonstrate how Lasca regarded his position at the villas. He presented himself as an entertainer, a poet who wrote for the company gathered in the *campagna*. This task he undertook with such seriousness, that he did not feel worthy to stay in the countryside if he did not perform well:⁵⁹

Se voi volete prosa,
o versi sciolti, sarebbe un piacere,
ch'io vi farei sguazzar, non che godere.
Qui venne per avere
con voi spasso maggior d'oggi in domane,
e non per lavorare a settimane.
Oh speranze mie vanel!
da poi ch'io non vi posso contentare,
io mi poteva in Firenze restare;

That country life did not only favour poetic inspiration can be derived from a *sonetto caudato* to Benedetto Varchi.⁶⁰ Here it appears that despite its favourable position, Le Rose cannot protect its inhabitants from the cold winds that run through the hills in December and January. Since he is «quasi agghiadato» (v. 14), Lasca informs Varchi of his plans to join him at La Topaia the next day. In this sonnet Lasca complains about his difficulties in keeping warm. He suffers an ever greater inconvenience however; the season at Le Rose has made him lose his ability to write – in both a practical and inspirational sense: «I fogli e 'l calamaio / e le penne e le Muse in un momento / m'ha mille miglia via portato il vento» (vv. 18-20). In this sonnet, the *topos* of the *campagna* as an ideal world of inspiration is reversed.

Obviously, in Lasca's view, *villeggiatura* and poetry were intertwined activities; life in the countryside had a major impact on Lasca's poetic inspiration. Even more influential, however, was the presence of his two young friends: Raffaello and Giovanni. In the *sonetto caudato* to Giovanni Bini cited in the introduction, Lasca invites Giovanni to join him and Cini at Le Rose.⁶¹ He describes how eagerly they are both waiting for him, and how they are captivated by him all day long («mille volte vi chiamiamo il giorno») (v. 7). Another sonnet urging Giovanni to visit Le Rose shows Lasca linking his own well-being explicitly to the presence of Giovanni:⁶²

Noi siam, messer Giovanni, senza voi,
come dir, proprio pesci fuor dell'acque,
or per quella bella che in voi rinacque,
vi preghiam che vegnate a veder noi.
Leggere e ragionare e scriver poi,
ire a spasso e veder montagne ed acque,
ed ogni cosa che prima ci piacque,
per lo vostro tardar, par che ci annoi:

⁵⁹ GRAZZINI 1882: 74-75, Sonetto XCI, A M. Lutozzo Nasi, vv. 18-26.

⁶⁰ GRAZZINI 1882: 20, Sonetto XIX, A M. Benedetto Varchi.

⁶¹ GRAZZINI 1882: 105, Sonetto CXXX, A M. Giovanni Bini.

⁶² GRAZZINI 1882: 105-106, Sonetto CXXXI, A M. Giovanni Bini, vv. 1-8.

That the lethargy Lasca experiences during Giovanni's absence stems from love sickness, is suggested in both *sonetti caudati* to Bini. When speaking of his and Cini's eagerness to see Giovanni, Lasca claims that nature is equally desperate, specifying its feelings as amorous: «Venite via, chè voi sete aspettato / e dalle piante e dall'erbe e da i fiori, / quasi che ognun di voi sia innamorato» (Sonetto CXXX, vv. 12-14). In the second poem he refers to Petrarch and applies a typical Petrarchesque declaration of love to illustrate the nature of his feelings for Giovanni: «anzi senza la dolce, amica vista / de' bei vostri occhi, a non dir or bugia, / come al Petrarca, ogni loco ci attrista» (Sonetto CXXXI, vv. 9-11). The fair face and beautiful eyes Lasca claims to miss in this sonnet are the objects of an amorous passion, an infatuation so serious that it effects not only his mental state and the amount of pleasure he takes in *villetta*, but also his perception of the rural surroundings:

Dunque venite omai, venite via
a dileguar da noi la ingrata e trista,
che n'affligge ad ogn'or, maninconia.
La vostra compagnia,
ove ogni dolce ben par che si pose,
farà rallegrar noi, fiorir le Rose. (vv. 12-17)

This last *terzina* can be seen as representative for all Lasca's villa poems. They are centred around a beloved young friend whose presence or absence is responsible for Lasca's functioning as a person and a poet. The object of his love even affects the poet's perception of the natural attractions that surround him, as the return of his beloved Giovanni would 'make the roses bloom'.

Subverting the pastoral model: roses and wind

The image of the blossoming roses occurs in different variants in the Bini poems.⁶³ Obviously, it refers to the name of Cini's villa Le Rose and its immediate surroundings. Indeed, even today the *Via di San Lorenzo alle Rose* is flanked with hedgerows of soft pink roses. At the same time, however, Lasca employs the rose image in an ambiguous game. According to Jean Toscan, the rose has been used by various early modern poets for its sexual connotations.⁶⁴ Behind Lasca's pastoral villa world and his Petrarchan adoration of young Bini, an erotic subtext appears to be hidden, which utterly subverts his models.

A madrigal to Piero Fagioli suggests that we should indeed interpret this metaphor in an erotically ambiguous way.⁶⁵ In this poem Lasca counters Fagioli's complaint that he has taken his friends away from him (vv. 1-9). Lasca claims to have done nothing of the kind, and stipulates that their defection is due to the courtesy of the friends themselves, namely «mio amico il Bino» and «il Cino» (vv. 10-15). The poem rapidly degenerates into a brawl, in which Lasca turns the tables

⁶³ See also GRAZZINI 1882: 498-499, Capitolo XII, A M. Giovanni Bini, vv. 71-73: «ma fra le cose più maravigliose / Giovambatista e me restar contenti, / ed al vostro apparir fiorir le rose».

⁶⁴ According to TOSCAN 1981, the image of the rose appears as a metaphor for both the female genitals and the anus.

⁶⁵ GRAZZINI 1882: 311-313, Madrigalessa XLII, A M. Piero Fagioli.

on his competitor, claiming that it is in fact Fagioli who is a mean thief, since he stole Raffaello from Lasca («anzi passaste il cor con un coltello, / [...] / quando voi mi rubaste Raffaello») (vv. 21, 23). Lasca continues to rage for more than fifty lines, but the most interesting part of this poem for our purposes is the end:

ognun vi chiede e brama
e ognun v'aspetta e chiama
come suo favorito, anzi suo cucco;
ed io son presso a voi un uom di stucco;
sì poca cura il cielo in farmi pose,
da far seccar i fior, non che le rose. (vv. 78-83)

Though everybody, including Cini («Giovanbatista v'ha per uom divino», v. 74), seems to adore Fagioli, Lasca claims to remain untouched («di stucco»), by Fagioli's charms; in his presence he even dries up («seccar») like the flowers and the roses. The word «seccar», of course, suggests sexual impotence. This is underlined by a similar use in the middle part of the madrigal, where Lasca describes his feelings now that Raffaello has been stolen from him:

[...] ond'io rimasi,
come direste, quasi
morello senza lecco,
o capra senza becco,
od una lasca in secco. (vv. 26-30)

Obviously, as the fish is a well-known phallic symbol, «secco» denotes Lasca's lack of sexual appetite in the absence of Raffaello. It is worth noting that Lasca applied the exact same metaphor when he wrote about the absence of Giovanni: «noi siam senza voi proprio pesci fuor dell'acque». In Fagioli's case, it is in fact his presence that makes Lasca lose his sexual excitement, symbolised in the drying of the flowers and roses. Thus depending heavily on burlesque imagery involving birds and overt phallic symbols like fish, the erotic undertone of this madrigal can hardly be missed.

The image of the rose subverts the interpretation of the poems on Cini's villa. A similar burlesque mechanism can be observed in Lasca's use of the image of the 'wind' in the Liglano poems. On the one hand, the wind was an appropriate image in the pastoral context of the villa poems. When Lasca presents the wind as a discomfort in the countryside, he follows Virgil's *Bucolics*, in which Boreas, the Northern wind, is the only threat to the ideal pastoral world. In the above-mentioned *sonetto caudato* to Varchi the Virgilian influence is obvious.⁶⁶ Lasca states he is almost frozen («quasi agghiadato», v. 14), and in the *coda* of the sonnet the wind turns out to be the offender: «e come disperato / resto, temendo alfin, che qua rovai / abbia condotto dicembre e gennaio» (vv. 15-17). The word «rovai», one of many synonyms Lasca uses to refer to wind, is a direct reminder of the Virgilian wind since its etymology leads to Boreas. Whereas Boreas kept Virgil's shepherds from their work in the fields, «rovai» keeps Lasca from his poetic labor. In this sonnet to Varchi, the pastoral wind is also a vehicle that blows away Lasca's

⁶⁶ GRAZZINI 1882: 20, Sonetto XIX, A M. Benedetto Varchi.

paper and his pen. In a metaphorical sense, therefore, the wind is the vehicle for lack of inspiration.

A comparable metaphoric appropriation of the pastoral wind can be distinguished in some of the Raffaello poems. In a madrigal that is part of a sequence about Raffaello's affair with the prostitute Silea, Lasca suffers from the thought of his «angel terreno» in the arms of a woman. He clearly envies Silea, and maliciously accuses her of spreading venereal diseases.⁶⁷ In the end, however, Lasca observes that his laments are in vain; his words are blown away by the wind, never to reach his beloved Raffaello.⁶⁸

S'io mi dolgo e lamento
con accenti diversi,
s'io canto, o piango in versi,
tutti i sospiri miei ne porta il vento;
e come fanno i matti
io fo parole, e la Silea fa fatti.

The same effect is depicted in madrigal XII to Bastiano Antinori. Here, too, Lasca regrets that he is not able to go to Liglano. Though the company of Giovanni Bini offers some consolation, Lasca would have instantly exchanged him for Raffaello. But, again, the wind puts a spoke in his wheels:⁶⁹

Ma se l'empio fatale
non fusse destin mio crudele e fello,
messer Giovanni or saria Raffaello.
ma di monte Morello
io mi do nel bellico,
mentre che questo a voi, scrivendo, dico;
e se ben m'affatico,
tutte l'imprese mie ne porta il vento.

In this case the wind serves not so much as a metaphor of lost inspiration but more so of vain love, another threat to the poet's ideal villa world.

But like the rose, the wind is not confined to one set of conventions. Besides being a threat to an ideal, pastoral situation, the wind has a burlesque meaning. Lasca's use of the word «tempone» is particularly illustrative of its erotic connotation, and characterizes the nature of the male gatherings in the villas. Inviting Lorenzo de' Medici to join him in the *campagna* in the company of either Tobia, Maso or Zebe, Lasca offers the prospect of «fare tempone» (v. 14), obviously alluding to sexual acts between the various visitors.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ This group of madrigals can be found in GRAZZINI 1882: 231-236. The following madrigal speaks of prostitutes with *malfrancese*: «Se l'angel mio terreno / è il medico celeste / se gli varrà; perchè fia tosto pieno / non vo' già dir di canchero, o di peste / ma ben d'aspre e moleste bolle e doglie; / per che prima senz'erbe e senza foglie / la terra e gl'arbor fieno in ciascun mese, / che mai puttana senza malfrancese» (GRAZZINI 1882: 233-234, Madrigale XXXI). See also PLAISANCE 2005: 324n.

⁶⁸ GRAZZINI 1882: 235, Madrigale XXXV.

⁶⁹ GRAZZINI 1882: 265-267, Madrigalessa XII, A M. Bastiano Antinori, vv. 57-64.

⁷⁰ A similar use of *tempone* can be found in GRAZZINI 1882: 267-269, Madrigalessa XIII, A M. Bastiano Antinori, vv. 41-43: «con appetito poi mangiare e bere, / attendendo a godere e

Madrigalessa VI, which again refers to «d'angel mio terreno» and Liglano, reveals quite a wide range of amorous and erotic layers in the image of the wind.⁷¹ In this madrigal, Lasca urges Aeolus, the mythical storm god, to curb Auster, Favonius, Corus and Notus, minor wind-deities who inflicted severe damage both at sea and in the mountains. He thoroughly wishes for calm weather to return. This wish, as it turns out in the last verses of the poem, has everything to do with his longing for Raffaello: «acciò che possa l'angel mio terreno, / tornato il tempo bello a mano a mano, / venirsi a star queste feste a Liglano» (vv. 69-71). The storms caused by the four wind-gods, appear to be the cause of Raffaello's absence. Only Aeolus, the ruler of the winds, has the power to turn matters around.

Within this mythological frame of reference, however, Lasca plays a burlesque game, fraught with sexual ambiguities. When he asks Aeolus to temper the other winds, he uses a particular phrase: «non lasciar più la briglia o 'l freno in mano / all'Astro, a Favonio, a Coro, a Noto» (vv. 18-19). This equine imagery is not only borrowed from classical iconography, in which the minor winds are frequently portrayed as horses in Aeolus's stable, it also belongs to Lasca's burlesque lexicon.⁷² The poet calls on Aeolus to stir up his own rage («furia») and use his whip («sferza») and spurs («sproni») in order to restore his reputation as the supreme wind.⁷³ Both the 'rage' and the equine terminology have a strong sexual connotation.⁷⁴ The sexual overtones are amplified in the following passage: «che coll'usata sua stupenda forza / stingue intrafattafin, non pure ammorza, / degli altri venti la rabbia e 'l furore» (vv. 23-25). Again, Lasca states that Aeolus should exert his power to overrule the other winds, but «forza», «rabbia» and «furore» are all words related to sexual heat. «Forza» moreover is a quality inherent to the active role in a sodomitic relationship, as Toscan points out.⁷⁵ In this madrigal, the winds are not only associated with sexual passion, but, more specifically, with sodomitic rage. Lasca's assertion that the commitment of the powerful 'wind' Aeolus will bring back Raffaello to Liglano, carries the implicit, burlesque meaning that with true 'sexual passion', he will win him Raffaello's heart. Secondly, the imagery suggests Lasca's desire for a *sodomitic* relationship, a pederastic alliance between the poet and the younger Raffaello.

Significantly, the obstacles to Lasca's desired sexual relationship with Raffaello are female objects. To clear the skies, for example, Aeolus has to hunt down clouds and mist: «All'apparir tuo muore, / o ventavol gentile, / tutto il valor de' nugoli e nebbioni» (vv. 26-28). «Nugoli» and «nebbioni» are frequently used as metaphors for menstruation, as Toscan observes.⁷⁶ The four minor winds are connected to

far tempone, / fin che 'l Ridolfi torni alla magione».

⁷¹ GRAZZINI 1882: 256-258, *Madrigalessa VI*.

⁷² See for instance: GRAZZINI 1882: 46, Sonetto LIV, 'In morte di Alfonso de' Pazzi', v. 11.

⁷³ GRAZZINI 1882: 257, vv. 29-38. The passage I refer to reads as follows: «Mettiti, mangiafango, omái gli sproni / e ripiglia la sferza; / acciò che con maggiore e più gran furia, / soffiando alteramente, / vendicar possa, colla nostra ingiuria, / il tuo si fatto scorso / contro a quei di ponente / e que' venti plebei di mezzogiorno, / ch'al tuo primo apparir volgon la faccia».

⁷⁴ TOSCAN 1981: 1167, interprets «furia» as 'erection', words like «sferza» and «briglia» are linked to sexual movements.

⁷⁵ TOSCAN 1981: 1181.

⁷⁶ TOSCAN 1981: 263, 623.

«female» imagery as well: «c'hanno quasi il mar vòto» (v. 20). In burlesque poetry, «mare» frequently refers to the female sexual organs.⁷⁷ Thus, read in a burlesque way, the battle of the winds becomes a battle between male, sodomitic sexual relations and female sexuality. In Lasca's earthly paradise female sexuality, whether represented by a real woman such as Silea, or by female attributes, is presented as a threat to his well-being, while the presence or absence of 'male', sodomitic passion determines the success or failure of his love for Raffaello.

A similar prevalence of male over female imagery may be detected in the following sonnet on Lutozzo Nasi:⁷⁸

S'io potessi nascondermi, o fuggire
in qualche mondo nuovo e sconosciuto,
io non vorrei più in questo esser veduto,
dove i nugoli e i venti han tanto ardore.
Nè compor com'io voglio, nè dormire,
o stanotte, o stamani ho mai potuto;
chè questo vento arrabbiato e cornuto
vi so dir io che s'è fatto sentire.

Once more, the wind has a negative effect on Lasca's writing. Significantly, this effect is phrased in words with obvious sexual connotations: «ardore», «arrabbiato» and «cornuto». Here, too, Lasca claims he wants to escape a place where clouds, «nugoli», are present. The *doppio gioco* in this sonnet is most apparent, however, in Lasca's playing with the various possible meanings of wind. When, in the two *terzine*, the poet elaborates on the cause of his inability to write or sleep, he describes the terrible noise of the wind in the middle of the night («o tramontano, o rovai, o ventavolo, / chiaminlo come voglion le persone», vv. 13-14), causing a «fracasso» (v. 9) even the devil could not produce. The implicit reason for this 'loud wind', however, is explained in the tail of the sonnet:

Ma Rodolfo è cagione
d'ogni mio mal, che quel buon camerino
mi fe lasciare a Lutozzo vicino.
E com'io m'indovino
per suo mi fece, e non per mio contento,
n'una badia tornare a spazzavento;
acciocchè colà drento
rinchiuso stessi e lontan dal suo amore,
ch'ancor la gelosia gli rode il cuore. (vv. 15-23)

The *svolta* reveals that the wind keeping Lasca awake is caused by Lutozzo, who happens to spend the nights next door to our poet. Possibly, Lasca plays on the scatological connotation of wind in the sense of loud farting, but the ultimate

⁷⁷ TOSCAN 1981: 574.

⁷⁸ GRAZZINI 1882: 75-76, Sonetto XCII, vv. 1-8. Verzone records this sonnet immediately after the two sonnets addressed to Nasi, of which the first refers to Raffaello. The second sonnet, like the one quoted, does not explicitly mention the villa where it is staged; it could either be Ligiano, or Nasi's own villa. See also note 79.

terzina shows that the wind can also be understood as an amourous storm: Lutozzo is tormented by a jealous rage.⁷⁹

Stories of villa adventures like Nasi's were probably recorded (or made up) to entertain the guests. We can assume that this is true for all of Lasca's poems on villa love: his sketches of the hidden world, phrased in a coded language, were exchanged, read and performed in order to entertain the friends during the villa stays, to seduce them to come or to keep them involved when they were not around.

Literary subversion, cultural conformity

Manipulating genre conventions, Lasca supplied the pastoral world of his villa poems with an erotic and subversive subtext. But while his use of the burlesque had contributed to his expulsion from the Academia in the 1540s, in the 1560s the purpose of his literary subversion was not to put others at a distance, but rather to strengthen the bonds within the circle of male villa guests. Lasca achieved this by creating a private world for the members of Raffaello's circle.

These members entered a domain that was set apart from the city of Florence in various ways. Of course, the villas were retreats in a geographical sense, but Lasca purposely widens the gap between city and *campagna*. He does so in the first place by presenting the *campagna* as a male world, which is inhabited only by poets and patrons, and explicitly (the blunt rejection of Silea) as well as implicitly (the subordination of female attributes in the poems) refusing female participation. Secondly, the villas were depicted as places of sexual licence, pastoral sanctuaries where men of disparate ages gathered in an impassioned «tempone». Whether these male erotic relationships that the poems seem to advocate were actually consumed or not, is besides the question. Either way, the burlesque *doppio senso erotico* functions as a kind of code language, which was undoubtedly understood and appreciated by those involved.

It should be clear, however, that Raffaello is never subjected to Lasca's burlesque machinations. Nowhere is his love for Raffaello subverted or ridiculed – as are Lasca's other villa loves and those of his competitors. It seems to have been heart-felt. However, against the background of the villa poems, it should still be understood as a literary affection, which was experienced and explored in poetry only. In a game with literary conventions, Lasca's poetic love for Raffaello functioned as counterpoint for the burlesque. Where Raffaello represented the *modello*, Lasca's villa circle embodied the *anti-modello*.

Perhaps this contrast even had a performative function. We can easily picture the success Lasca must have had as a poetic performer 'courting' his angelic host Raffaello while sneering at his fellow guests during banquets at Liglano. Apart from the villa adventures, other groups of poems for Raffaello, such as the

⁷⁹ In the madrigal 'Su la porta della villa di M. Lutozzo Nasi' Lasca hints at the nightly turmoil at Nasi's villa, the last verse contains a warning: «Ognun sarà ben visto e carezzato, / e potrà qui per suo spasso e piacere / venire a riposarsi e stare agiato, / ragionar, disputar, mangiare e bere; / ancor fia trattenuto ed onorato, / se gli parrà, con leggere e vedere / quante vuol rime e prose antiche e nuove, / ma pensi di dormir la notte altrove» (GRAZZINI 1882: 359, Ottava xi).

Narcissus madrigals, the adventures of Ruggier da Risa, and the envious snapping on *cortigiana* Silea, could have been part of similar entertainments.

Michel Plaisance has suggested in passing that Lasca, in the 1560s, tried to escape the burlesque by exploring new genres. As an example of such an attempt to become more conventional, he names the pastoral *Eglogue* the poet submitted to achieve his official return to the Accademia Fiorentina.⁸⁰ In my opinion, however, Lasca never tried to escape the burlesque. As we have seen, in the process preceding Lasca's readmittance to the Academy in 1566, he had been able to subvert the very same pastoral genre to great effect. Comparing the use of the *burla* in the villa poems to Lasca's use of burlesque mechanisms in other stages of his career, however, it is striking that the biting satire we have come to know as an established characteristic of his burlesque style is entirely absent. While the affairs and members of the Fiorentina and the Florentine cultural scene were the main topic in most burlesque poems of the 1540s, in the villa poems Lasca abstains from biting references to topical questions. Except in the madrigal to Piero Bini, he even managed to evade the academic debate on comedy, in which some of the addressees of the villa poems seem to have had an interest. Rather than abandoning his favourite style, he had learned to apply the burlesque in situations where it was appropriate.

⁸⁰ PLAISANCE 2005: 306.