

Mario D'Alessandro

**LUIGI TANSILLO'S *IL VENDEMMIATORE*:
A MOCK-DIDACTIC POEM OF LOVE**

That *Il Vendemmiatore* was an immediate success for the young Neapolitan poet Luigi Tansillo is demonstrated by the poem's wide diffusion, first in manuscript form, and then by the several editions printed between 1537 and 1549¹. Among its many sources, the most obvious is Pietro Bembo's *Stanze*.² Written for *carnevale* 1507 in honour of Elisabetta Gonzaga and Emilia Pia, the *Stanze* are rich in Neoplatonic (Stanzas 18-20) and Stilnovistic (Stanza 25) ideas about love, and contain a "history" of lyric poetry from Catullus to Petrarch (Stanzas 21-22). Like *Il Vendemmiatore*, Bembo's *Stanze* invite women to become lovers. Yet the arguments Bembo makes in favour of love are far different from Tansillo's. Ranging from the positive political consequences of obeying Love's law (Stanzas 1-15), its ennobling qualities (Stanza 17), and its importance in inspiring poetic creation (Stanza 21), to its role as a fundamental procreative force (Stanza 39), and the pleasures and emotional security it can offer to lovers (Stanzas 43-44), Bembo's arguments move from the ideal, the transcendent and the collective, to the natural, the material and the particular.

¹ For an account of the early success of *Il Vendemmiatore* and for a brief history of its many and various editions, cfr. Francesco Flamini's introduction to his *L'Egloga e i poemetti di Luigi Tansillo*, xxxiv-xlvii.

² Flamini gives an accurate account of the Bembian sources of *Il Vendemmiatore* in his introduction to *L'Egloga e i poemetti* (1-1v). He argues that the poem is principally an imitation of Bembo and that Tansillo must have had "sott'occhio" Bembo's "poesie latine e volgari" when writing his *poemetto* (xlx), and that in the first part of the *Vendemmiatore* he had followed "le... Stanze del Bembo" (1). All references to Bembo's *Stanze* are from Pietro Bembo, *Prose della volgar lingua. Gli Asolani. Rime*. Ed. Carlo Dionosotti. Torino: UTET, 1966.

There are nevertheless specific points of contact between the *Stanze* and Tansillo's *Il Vendemmiatore* which interest us. These occur at Stanzas 30, 31 and 32 of Bembo's poem:

E per bocca di lui [Amore] chiaro vi dico:
 non chiudete l'entrata ai piaceri suoi;
 se 'l ciel vi si girò largo et amico,
 non vi gite nemiche e scarse voi.
 Non basta il campo aver lieto et aprico,
 se non s'ara e sementa e miete poi:
 giardin non colto in breve divien selva,
 e fassi lustro ad ogni augello e belva. (30)

È la vostra bellezza quasi un orto,
 gli anni teneri vostri aprile e maggio:
 alor vi va per gioia e per diporto
 il signor, quando può, sed egli è saggio.
 Ma poi ché 'l sole ogni fioretto ha morto,
 o 'l ghiaccio a le campagne ha fatto oltraggio,
 no 'l cura, e stando in qualche fresco loco
 passa il gran caldo, o temprà il verno al foco. (31)

Ahi poco degno è ben d'alta fortuna,
 chi ha gran doni e cari, e schifa usarli.
 A che spalmar i legni, se la bruna
 onda del porto dee poi macerarli?
 Questo sol, che riluce, o questa luna
 lucesse in van, non si devria pregiarli.
 Giovinezza e beltà, che non s'adopra,
 val quanto gemma, che s'asconda e copra. (32)

(And through his mouth [of Amor] I will tell you clearly: do not close the entrance way to your pleasures; if heaven has been generous and friendly to you, do not behave parsimoniously, or like an enemy. It is not enough to possess a happy and sunny field if then you do not plough and plant and sow: an uncultivated garden soon turns into a forest, and becomes attractive to every sort of bird or beast.)

(Your beauty is almost a garden, your tender years are your April and May: that is when your lord goes there for joy and recreation, when he can, if he is wise. But when the sun has killed every small flower, or ice has ravaged the countryside, he no longer looks after it, and staying in some cool place passes away the hot summer, or tempers winter's cold by the fire.)

(Alas, the person who has great and costly gifts and is loath to use them is hardly worthy of great fortune. Why oil the ships if the dark waves of the port must then chew them up? This sun which radiates, or this moon, would shine in vain, nor would we value them. Youth and beauty which is not used is worth as much as a gem which is hidden and covered.)

If Bembo's *Stanze* treat a wide range of subject matter, Tansillo's *Il Vendemmiatore* concentrates above all on those images of the garden, of spring, and of youth contained here.¹ This difference is highly significant: if Bembo's *Stanze* read almost like an exhaustive treatise covering all of love's benefits, Tansillo's poem clearly rejects such an elevated objective and concentrates instead on the naturalistic elements of these stanzas.² *Il Vendemmiatore* is, in fact, a rich and subtle mock-didactic poem which, much like an Aristophanic comedy, inverts many of the traditional moral and philosophical values which Bembo's *Stanze* affirm.³ Indeed, the poet-*vendemmia-*

¹ Tansillo stresses the human body. He will not, for example, celebrate love as the Neoplatonic meeting of minds or souls as in Bembo's *Stanze* (43ff.); rather, through the "allegories" of the garden and the *menta* above all, he celebrates, in Bakhtinian terms, those parts of the human body open to the outside world and to the regenerative powers of nature: the genital organs. Cfr. *Rabelais and his World* 26.

² Tansillo is doing more than simply exercising his poetic talent by writing in a lyrical genre in which the master Petrarchan poet had also written. The fact that he had sent *Il Vendemmiatore* to Giacomo Carafa means that he thought highly of it. The claim that it be read "senza gli occhiali del riggido Catone" (without the glasses of the strict Cato) during the days consecrated to "Bacco" (Bacchus), and that it not be thrown into the fire but preserved so that it may be enjoyed when recalled in future by "la medesima stagione" (the same season — the grape harvest) (Letter to Giacomo Carafa, *L'Egloga e i poemetti* 50), clearly indicates that Tansillo saw *Il Vendemmiatore* as a significant poetic achievement.

³ As Pietro Mazzamuto points out, Tansillo was influenced by the Neapolitan Humanism of Agostino Nifo, a humanism grounded in Aristotelian principles: "Nell'alvo stesmo dell'Umanesimo napoletano operò la tradizione pontaniana di un epicureismo etico, che, sistemato in schemi aristotelici, avrebbe avuto in Agostino Nifo, maestro del Tansillo, una valorizzazione integrale della voluttà che nasce dalla bellezza" (1262) (At work at the very centre of Neapolitan humanism was the Pontanian tradition of ethical epicureanism, which, organized

tore, using a slyly sophisticated rhetoric, seemingly creates his own morally charged yet consciously fictitious "cosmic order" intended to lend weight to his comic enterprise: to persuade his young and beautiful female listeners to love him and him alone.

Through the fictitious narrator of the poet-*vendemmiatore* Tansillo distances himself immediately from the poetic tradition which Bembo praises: Tansillo's poet is not inspired by the Muses or the waters of the Castalian font, but by *Bacco* and *Amore*:

Gran meraviglia avrete, com'io sia
fatto di rustico uom culto poeta,
senza ber di quell'acqua, che solia
far l'uom repente diventar profeta. (2.1-4)¹

(You will marvel greatly at how, from a rustic man, I was made a cultivated poet, without drinking that water which used to turn a man suddenly into a prophet.)

His poetry, moreover, is "senz'arte" (3.1) (artless) and gives more profit and pleasure to his listeners than "tutte le carte / che ornando scrisser mai Grecia et Egitto" (3.3-4) (all the pages which Greece and Egypt ever ornately wrote). His *furor poeticus* is inspired by "altro licor" (2.5) (another liquor), by wine, a product of the earth. And like wine his poetry has the power to transform torment into pleasure:

togliendo del mio dir la minor parte,
terrete della vita il cammin dritto,
e voi stesse cangiando, in un momento
cangerete in piacer vostro tormento. (3.5-8)

according to Aristotelian schemes, would have had, through Agostino Nifo, the teacher of Tansillo, an integral valorization of the pleasure that is born from beauty). Thus, as we shall see, a serious anti-Neoplatonic philosophical vein, one grounded in a belief in the priority of experience over the *a priori* rationalism of Neoplatonism, also runs through Tansillo's comic and indeed parodic poetic enterprise. As such, the openness of the human body to regeneration also implies a subtle parallel with the openness of the mind to new thought. On Tansillo's *Vendemmiatore* cfr. also Bonora 133-4, Cremante 240, Scotti 143ff.

¹ All references to Tansillo's *Vendemmiatore* are from *L'Egloga e i poemetti di Luigi Tansillo*. Ed. Francesco Flamini. Napoli: Vecchi, 1893.

(Taking from my speech even the least part, you will keep to life's straight path, and, changing yourselves, you will in a moment turn your torment into pleasure.)

Yet, as the passage just cited indicates, the poetry of the *vendemmiatore* pretends also to be instructive: through it, the poet promises to teach his ladies "il cammin dritto" (the straight path). Thus, for example, the contrast between the "donne superbe" (haughty women) of Stanza 4 and the "donne che son grate al cielo" (women who are pleasing to heaven) of Stanza 5 provides a highly instructive "lesson":

Ché troppo (e con ragion, s'io ben discerno)
s'adira il Ciel con voi, donne superbe,
che negli orti ond'ei diede a voi 'l governo
languir lasciate i fiori e morir l'erbe!
Non vi doveste lamentar del verno,
quando voi stesse a voi siete sí acerbe;
non si doglia d'altrui, né si lamenti
chi dà cagione ei stesso a' suoi tormenti. (4)

Tutte le donne che son grato al Cielo,
e non hanno qual voi rigidi i cuori,
vivon contente; e poi che neve e gelo
copron la terra in vece d'erbe e fiori,
ancor che col piacer cangino il pelo,
nuovo pensier non han che l'addolori:
non ha l'agricultor di che si doglia,
pur ch'al debito tempo il frutto coglia. (5)

(Because heaven too often gets angry with you, haughty women, and, if I understand well, with good reason: because in the gardens over which it gave you rule, you leave the flowers to languish and the grass to die! You should not complain about winter when you are so harsh to yourselves; one should not complain of others, nor should one complain if he is the cause of his own torment.)

(All the women who are pleasing to heaven and do not, like you, have rigid hearts, live happily; and when snow and frost cover the earth instead of grass and flowers, although with pleasure they see their hair turn to grey, they have no new thought to pain them: the farmer has nothing to upset him, provided he picks his fruit in due course.)

The "donne superbe" govern badly "negli orti", which the heavens gave them to cultivate; conversely, the grateful ladies live happily and contented. The poet thus paints an image of contrasting possibilities which provides his female listeners with a fundamental moral and perhaps even theological-existential lesson: those women who refuse love, who lead their days "sterilmente tutti" (6.2) (all sterilely), are "del proprio ben nemica altiera" (6.1) (the haughty enemy of their own good). Their greatest torment, indeed their greatest punishment, is regret or "pentimento":

Credete a chi n'ha fatto esperimento,
 che fra tutti i martir, donne mie care,
 nessun ve n'è maggior che 'l pentimento,
 poi che 'l passato non si può disfare:
 e ben che ogni pentir porti tormento,
 quel che piú fiera piaga ne suol fare,
 ove rimedio alcun sperar non lece,
 è quando un potea molto e nulla fece. (7)

(Give credence, my dear ladies, to one who has had experience: of all suffering, there is none greater than regret, since the past can never be undone: and, although each regret brings torment, the fiercest of all wounds, and one for which it is useless to hope for a remedy, occurs when one could have done much and did nothing.)

Moreover, the poet strengthens his claims to wisdom in matters of love by establishing his own experience as a sort of comic-ironic epistemological standard: "credete chi n'ha fatto esperimento" (give credence to one who has had experience), he claims. Later he will reaffirm the supreme epistemological status of material experience over books and *a priori* speculation when he comes to talk about his "arte del vendemmiare" (the art of harvesting grapes). Thus he feels qualified to state unequivocally that the way to error "è l'empia ingratitudine" (9.5) (impious ingratitude) toward heaven and its natural gifts: "O quanto spiace al donator gentile [il Cielo], /quanto vede i suoi don tener a vile!" (10.7-8) (oh how it displeases heaven, that noble donor, when he sees his gifts despised). Those women who refuse love thus threaten the vitality of the earth, the natural element which is theirs to govern:

La terra, che a far frutto il Ciel vi diede
con la pioggia del nostro dolce umore,
per vostra colpa secca, arida siede,
e nel suo seno ogn'erba, ogni fior more. (10.3-6)

(The earth, which heaven gave you to fructify with the rain of our sweet humour, is dry and sits arid by your fault, and in its bosom all the grass, all the flowers die.)

By refusing love they refuse "la pioggia" (rain), the masculine element that fertilizes the earth. Their sin is thus one against cyclical nature:

Il candido ligustro, il bel iacinto,
e tanti vaghi fior cari tra noi
come aprile ornerian, s'a l'uno estinto
non succedesse l'altro? (11.1-4)

(The candid privet and the beautiful hyacinth, and the many pretty flowers dear among us, how will they decorate April if the one that goes extinct is not replaced by another?)

It is no surprise, furthermore, that female beauty is identified with that of the flowers and the grass, the most delicate and ephemeral products of nature: men are inspired to love them only when the time is most ripe ("primavera" or springtime). If erotic desire is in harmony with nature, then nature provides an example to the women to love when their natural beauty is at its peak. The poet thus intensifies the anxiety of not loving, of missing out on the most significant aspect of life:

Erbe son dunque e fior vostre bellezze,
e primavera gli anni che menate;
voi siete gli orti, che le lor vaghezze
ne' dolci grembi vostri riserbate,
accìò ch'ogn'uom vi brami, ogn'uom vi apprezze;
e perché ne l'autunno e nella state
suo convenevol frutto ogni fior porti,
noi semo gli ortolan, voi sete gli orti. (13)

(Grass and flowers, thus is your beauty, and the years which you carry are your springtime; you are gardens which hold their beauty in their sweet wombs, so that every man desires you, every man prizes you; and, in order that in autumn and in summer each flower brings forth its appropriate fruit, we are the gardeners and you are the gardens.)

The myth of the Hesperides is perhaps the most significant rhetorical element in the poet's arguments in favour of love. Refusing to narrate the many examples of women who have suffered the painful regrets of chastity, the poet prefers to narrate a myth in mock-allegorical language — "ombrando il vero" (14.2) (disguising the truth) — that lends a comically theological-mythological dimension to his argument. The story of Hercules who defeats the dragon of the Hesperides contains not a hidden sense difficult to reconstruct but a sense that is wholly univocal. The poet, glossing his own verses, reveals the following truth behind the words:

Le poma d'or son le bellezze care,
 donne, che avete, il drago è la fierezza,
 che dentro a' vostri cuor chiusa dimora,
 et ogni bel piacer caccia o divora. (15)

(The golden apples are the precious beauties, ladies, which you possess; the dragon is pride, which lives closed within your hearts, and chases away or devours every lovely pleasure.)

The pagan myth of the Hesperides serves to turn on its head the myth of the fall from Eden.¹ It is indeed a counter-myth to the sinfulness attributed to sexual love by the Biblical tradition. According to the poet-narrator of *Il vendemmiatore*, the human condition had been a "fallen" one until Hercules freed humankind from the tyranny of the dragon "fierezza" (pride). Only when men and women are allowed to love freely do they achieve their fullest potential. The myth thus teaches two fundamental lessons: that to refuse love means to betray the fruits of Hercules' tremendous labour, and that the refusal to love means a return to a sub-human or barbaric state.

The poet-*vendemmiatore* thus builds his "case" for love upon strong philosophical and moral foundations: experience provides the epistemological ground (the poet, as we have seen, has wisdom about the painfulness of regret); the obligation of women to rule well that which nature has allotted to them, the earth, provides a moral ground; finally, the myth of the Hesperides provides a theological and mythical

¹ Cfr. Bakhtin's notion of the world of carnival as "a parody of the extracarnival life, a 'world turned inside out' " (11).

"tradition" that views acceptance of erotic love as the foundation for an elevated, humanized existential condition.

The rhetorical strategies thus far employed by the poet reach their climax in his considerations on time. Indeed, it seems that the true meaning of the myth of the Hesperides is that time and time alone is the enemy of man:

Prima che 'l tempo, vie piú d'Ercol forte,
uccida i pensier vostri, e la beltade
ne porti via per farne dono a Morte,
cogliete i frutti de la verde etade;
aprite ai bei desir le chiuse porte,
cacciandone di fuor la crudeltade,
che le vostre bellezze in guardia tiene,
e non vi fa gioir di tanto bene! (16)

(Before Time, much more powerful than Hercules, kills your thoughts and carries beauty away as a gift for Death, pluck the fruits of the verdant age; open your closed doors to the lovely desires, thus exiling that cruelty which keeps guard over your beauty and does not allow you to rejoice over such riches!)

By exiling "crudeltade," the women who had once refused to love now exile time as well. The death of the dragon means that humankind recovers an existential condition in which time symbolically is put to death. The achievement of a one-dimensional notion of time is central to the poet's rhetoric, his art of persuasion. The "Quel paradiso" of Stanza 17 refers to future time, the ontological status of which the poet seeks to undermine, together with any notion of a "geographically" located paradise or utopia — "a che loco cercar da voi diviso?" (17.7) (why go searching [for paradise] in a place outside your bodies?) — that promises more delight than the human body naturally offers. If the notion of a future time is undercut, then a return to the Biblical Eden is neither possible nor desirable. The *Vendemmiatore* makes the realities of cyclical time its own ontological ideal, while the true Eden is contained within the human body itself:

Quel paradiso, che bramar solete,
che pensate che sia, altro che un orto?
E se quest'orto in grembo vel tenete,
perché non vi pigliate indi diporto?
A che loco cercar da voi diviso,
se in voi stesse trovate il paradiso? (17.3-8)

(That paradise which you desire, what do you think it is but a garden? And if you have this garden in your womb, why then do you not take pleasure in it? If paradise is to be found in yourselves, why go searching for it in a place outside your bodies?)

In the famous Stanza 19,¹ the poet-*vendemmiatore* furthermore urges:

Lassate l'ombre, et abbracciate il vero,
non cangiate il presente pel futuro:
anch'io d'andare in ciel già non dispero,
ma per viver piú lieto e piú sicuro,
godo il presente, e del futuro spero,
cosí doppia dolcezza mi procuro;
ch'avviso non saria d'uom saggio e scaltro
perdere un ben per aspettarne un altro. (19)

(Leave behind the shadows and embrace the truth, do not exchange the present for the future: even I do not despair of going to heaven, but, in order to live more happily and securely, I enjoy the present and hope for the future; thus I procure a double sweetness. It would not, I will have you know, be characteristic of the wise and shrewd man to lose one good in order to await another.)

The Platonic notion of the material or temporal realm as mere shadow and the ideal realm as the true and eternal one is here reversed, much as was the myth of the fall. Within the context of the rhetorically functional cosmic order created by the *vendemmiatore*, the supreme ontological status of the material and temporal realm is reaffirmed. Its highest expression is sexual love: only by giving in to erotic desire do we meet our highest moral obligations, do justice to our ennobled condition, and succeed in transcending time. Only by loving, finally, do we

¹ Flamini points out that there was some controversy as to the significance of this and the following stanza. Whereas Tommaso Stigliani "rimase scandalizzato" (was left scandalized), Giordano Bruno "sembrò di scorgervi sensi riposti" (seemed to notice hidden meanings). According to Flamini, Bruno "esaltò il pregio e l'importanza" (exalted the worth and importance) of these stanzas "oltre la misura" (lv-lvi) (beyond measure). For Flamini, these stanzas are an attempt "di conciliare col sentimento religioso l'ideale epicureo" (lvi) (to reconcile the Epicurean ideal with religious sentiment).

achieve that supreme existential state, that "vera gioia" (true joy) which surpasses all others.

In the first part of the poem the *vendemmiatore* claims that personal experience is his source of wisdom in matters of love in order to establish the epistemological grounds for his argument. In the second part of the poem (Stanzas 28-49) he argues that experience — "per prova" (by proof) — is the best teacher of his art and not books: "per voltar le carte" (by the turning of pages). This is an invitation to the women to "learn" the art of love directly from him, a literal invitation which parodies Bembo's didactic role as interpreter of the messengers of Venus (*Stanze* 14):¹

Et io, come un di quei che di quest'arte
da che nacqui fui vago, e sono ognora,
e come usar si debba, a parte a parte,
a qual guisa, a qual loco et a qual ora,
per prova so, non per voltar di carte,
e che per vostro amor contento fòra
andar, s'uopo vi fusse, al regno stigio;
a voi m'offerò sempre a tal servizio. (28)

(And I, as one who since birth have been desirous of this art, and still am now, know it from experience, and not from the turning of pages: how it must be used, step by step, in what way and what place, and in what time; and, if it would help, I would be happy to go to the stygian realms for your love, and I will always offer my services to you.)

If Tansillo here portrays himself as an "auto-didact" who has been "expert" in love from birth, then Bembo portrays himself

¹ The *vendemmiatore's* direct invitation reflects the fact that the *vendemmia* or grape harvest is a popular festive occasion in which all distinctions between poet and audience are broken down: "Carnival... does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators.... Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no life outside it" (Bakhtin 7). If, moreover, carnival is a festival in which all participate, then there is no identifiable recipient of the poetic message. Bembo's *Stanze* are addressed specifically to Elisabetta Gonzaga and Emilia Pia, whereas Tansillo's poem has no identifiable addressee.

as a translator of the arcane language of love sent down to earth from Venus by her messengers:

E perch'essi [i messaggieri di Venere] non sanno il parlar nostro,
per interprete lor seco ne vegno,
e 'n lor vece dirò, come che al vostro
divin cospetto uom sia di dire indegno; (*Stanze* 14.3-6)

(And because they [Venus's messengers] do not understand our speech, I come as their interpreter, and in their stead I will speak, although in your divine presence man is unworthy of speech.)

Again at Stanza 34 the poet-*vendemmiatore* reaffirms his materialistic, empirically grounded "philosophy" in opposition to the idealistic Neoplatonism of Bembo:

Di queste e d'altre cose s'io abbondo,
non credete a mia lingua, ma a vostr'occhi;
e se 'l veder non basta, i' vi rispondo,
che m'offro a far che 'l ver con man si tocchi.
E cose troverrete rare al mondo;
non facciate l'error, che fan gli sciocchi,
in rimaner contente del pensiero!
L'esperienza è il paragon del vero. (34)

(If I abound in these and other matters, do not believe my tongue but your eyes; and if seeing is not sufficient, I say to you that I offer myself so that you may touch the truth with your hands. And things rare to the world you will find; do not make the same mistake as those foolish people who remain content with the thought alone! Experience is the paragon of truth.)

The poet's description of his "arte" is, purposely, an overt metaphor of the pleasures of sex meant to inflame the minds and hearts of his female listeners. If in the first twenty-seven stanzas the poet's rhetoric is directed at the mind or reason as well as at the moral and religious conscience, then here his comically transparent "allegory" attacks the appetites by suggesting facile images meant obviously to arouse sexual desire. Significantly, these images effectively convey the notion of degradation important to Bakhtin's treatment of the grotesque,

a notion in which degradation implies contact with the earth as a preliminary to rebirth:¹

Con tanta agevolezza il palo adopro,
che un tal sospir di bocca non esalo.
Pria, con la falce in man, la terra scopro,
indi nel grembo suo lieto mi calo,
e col mio corpo tutta la ricuopro,
piantando nel bel sen tutto il buon palo;
cava, né mai dal suo cavar si tolle,
fin che col suo sudor fo il fosso molle. (36)

Rigido, acuto, grosso, duro e tondo
è, donne, il pal ch'i' pianto nella terra,
e di tanta lungezza e di tal pondo,
quanto par si richieda a simil guerra:
finché la punta sua non preme il fondo
mai non s'arresta di passar sotterra;
e mentre in su e 'n giù cade e risorge,
quanto piú fiere, piú dolcezza porge. (38)²

(With so much ease I employ the rod that I exhale not so much as a sigh. First, with sickle in hand, I uncover the earth, then into her womb happily I descend, and with my body I cover all of

¹ In discussing degradation Bakhtin points out that "earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts)... Degradation. .. means coming down to earth, the contact with the earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time" (21).

² These stanzas may be seen as a play on the rhetorical notion of *obscuritas*. Cfr. Lausberg who points out that "*obscuritas* come licenza richiede dal pubblico...una certa misura di collaborazione all'opera dell'artista: l'artista lascia alla sua opera certe oscurità e consente al pubblico di completare lo stadio finale dell'opera: la chiarezza dell'opera che così ne risulta è il frutto del lavoro del pubblico" (81) (*obscuritas* as licence requires from the audience...a certain degree of collaboration with the artist's work: the artist grants his work certain obscure qualities, and allows his audience to complete the final stage of the work: the clarity that results is thus the fruit of the work of the audience). As collaborators in the poet's discourse the women are obviously more than capable of reconstructing his sexual meaning. Yet that same facile sexual imagery may also be seen as pointing to deeper philosophical and intertextual implications unimportant to the fictitious audience of women.

her, planting my good pole into her beautiful bosom; it digs, and does not stop digging until with its sweat it makes the hole damp.)

(The rod I plant in the earth, ladies, is rigid sharp, thick, hard and round, and is of such length and weight as would appear necessary for this type of war: until its tip touches the bottom, it never stops piercing underground; and as it rises and falls, up and down, the harder it strikes, the more sweetness it offers.)

That this sexual imagery is to some degree effective is suggested at stanza 49, verses 5-6: "Voi del mio dir tutte ridete; anc'ora / ne brameresti far l'esperienza?" (you all laugh at what I say; do you even now desire to try it?).

The moral and philosophical dimensions of the second part of the poem culminate in a *vituperatio* in which the poet attacks the opinions of those impious and profane "vecchi" (old folks) who claim that the garden should be "watered" only once weekly. Such arguments in favour of moderation and temperance are not only fallacious and misleading, but sinful. He who fails to water his garden at least three times during the night, the *vendemmiatore* argues, "iniquamente pecca, / e puossi dir ministro del suo danno" (47.1-2) (unjustly sins, and can be called the minister of his injury). The supreme moral imperative here is total satiety and the full celebration of erotic desire, vitality and fecundity: excess is definitely a virtue. This imperative is given religious sanction by the god Priapus:

Se così pie, religiose e sante
a questo dolce dio [Priapo] vi mostrerete,
oh che bell'erbe, oh che leggiadre piante
ne' ben colti terren surger vedrete,
che nascer già non vi poteano innante!
Così, cangiando stil donne, farete,
acciò ch'uom mai di voi non si lamenti,
gli orti fecondi e gli ortolan contenti. (58)

(If you show yourselves pious, religious and holy to this god [Priapus], oh what beautiful grass, oh what lovely plants you will see spring forth in your well-cultivated lands, things that could never have been born there before! Thus, changing your style, ladies, you will make your gardens fecund and your gardeners happy, so that no man can complain about you.)

The final part of the poem is an "allegory" of plants in which the poet-*vendemmiatore* seeks to instruct an imaginary "pura verginella / che senza prova ad ascoltar ne vegna" (59.1-2) (pure young virgin, who without experience comes to listen) about that plant "ch'a gli orti vostri meglio si convegno" (59.4) (which is most suitable to your gardens). The plant that is praised above all others is "la menta":¹

Quella non mi sovien come si chiama
dagli ortolan di Roma, a un certo modo
che vuol dir menta piccola tra noi,
è l'erba, donne mie, degna di voi. (69.5-8)

(I do not recall how she is called by the gardeners of Rome; among us she is called by a certain name that means "small mint": this is the plant, my ladies, worthy of you.)

An allegory of the phallus, this plant or "erba" contains properties which are miraculous and life-giving:

ma il sugo, che premendola ne scorre,
potria quasi dar vita a corpo morto;
sanar vid'io sovente con quest'erba
donne ch'eron già presso a morte acerba. (62.5-8)

(But the juice that issues forth when you press it is almost able to restore life to a dead body; I have often seen women who were very close to bitter death healed by this plant.)

Of course the poet, in keeping with the "Aristotelian" tone of his rhetorical strategy, invites the women to experience its miraculous properties directly: "orsú, sciogliasi il laccio / di quella tasca ove si suol serbare!" (72.2-3) (come on, undo the strings of the pocket where it is usually kept). This invitation is followed by a final invective against Shame ("Vergogna"):

Vergognar tu, Vergogna, ti dovresti
d'apparir qui tra noi nel tempo quando
le parole e i pensier gravi et onesti
son da noi rilegati e posti in bando. (76.1-4)

¹ On the *menta* and its principal source for Tansillo in the latin poetry of Bembo, cfr. Flamini (liv-iv).

(You should, Shame, be ashamed to appear here among us at the time when grave words and honest thoughts have been bound up and banished by us.)

Having created a comic-moral cosmos in which sexual pleasure is "la vera gioia" (the true joy) of human existence, the poet seeks finally to undermine the last stronghold of natural restraint by attempting to banish Shame. Significantly, Shame is deaf to those who would otherwise banish her; ironically, her ears, her only "opening" to the outside world, are closed to the poet's message: "Dovevi udir, se non sei sorda, questi, / che ti van con lor grida discacciando" (76.5-6) (you should have listened to these [women], if you are not deaf, who go about with their shouts attempting to banish you). Yet if the women refuse the poet's invitation, if their ears remain "closed" to his message, he nonetheless hopes that Amor will place ("riponga") those pleasures which he has just celebrated in their beds ("ai vostri letti" [79.4]), and that their bodies will be "open" to them.

In the last stanza of the *poemetto*, finally, the poet refers to the aurora, the morning which the sky ("il ciel") opens ("aprirà"). If the sky is male and the aurora female, if the one will soon penetrate or be penetrated by the other, then the last stanza celebrates at one and the same time both the body's openness to regeneration and cyclical change as well as the openness of the mind to the poetic message:

Tosto ch'aprirà il ciel la bella Aurora,
qualunque trae dolcezza de' miei detti
di sfacciata prontezza il petto s'armi,
e torni un'altra volta ad ascoltarmi. (79.5-8)

(Whoever draws sweetness from my words, let her, as soon as the beautiful Aurora opens up the sky, arm her breast with shameless readiness, and let her return another time to hear me.)

If the "dolcezza" (sweetness) of the poet's "detti" (teachings) have any effect at all, then at least some of the women will return with the newly reborn day to hear his message. Yet it should be noted that it is not altogether clear here whether the male element penetrates or "opens" the female element or vice-versa. The inversion of roles nevertheless appears to remain a possibility, one which echoes the poet's own philosophical inversion of ideal and real, of higher and lower. The *Vendem-*

miatore thus remains a subtle response to Bembo's Neoplatonic *Stanze*: while celebrating or expanding the imagery of the garden and of nature, Tansillo provides a more radical carnivalesque poem while also championing an anti-Neoplatonic version of erotic love as well as of the cosmos.

University of Toronto

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