4

Quanto si gode, lieta e ben contesta
di fior sopra ' crin d'or d'una, grillanda,
che l'altro inanzi l'uno all'altro manda,
come ch'il primo sia a baciar la testa!
Contenta è tutto il giorno quella vesta
che serra 'l petto e poi par che si spanda,
e quel c'oro filato si domanda
le guanci' e 'l collo di toccar non resta.
Ma più lieto quel nastro par che goda,
dorato in punta, con sì fatte tempre
che preme e tocca il petto ch'egli allaccia.
E la schietta cintura che s'annoda
mi par dir seco: qui vo' stringer sempre.
Or che farebbon dunche le mie braccia?

How joyful is the garland on her golden locks,
so happy and well fashioned out of flowers
each one of which thrusts forward past the others
that it might be the first to kiss her head.
Throughout the day, that dress is gratified
which locks her breast and then seems to stream down;
and what they call a spun-gold thread
never ceases to touch her cheeks and neck.
But even more delighted seems that ribbon,
gilded at the tips, and made in such a way
that it presses and touches the breast it laces up.
And her simple belt that's tied up in a knot
seems to say to itself, "Here would I clasp forever!"
What, then, would my arms do?

Sonnet, written on the verso of a letter dated 24 December 1507, which M received while working in Bologna. Much speculation has centered on whether this poem, one of the very few in which M praises specific details of the female form, was inspired by some particular woman he had met there (the putative "bella bolognese"). But there is no evidence linking him romantically to anyone at this time, and the sonnet seems essentially an exercise in a traditional Petrarchan conceit (cf. PD no. 160: "Qual dolcezza . . . vederla . . . tessendo un cerchio a l'oro"). The sensuous cataloguing of the woman's clothing may also derive from Poliziano (*Stanze* I:43, 46, 102). A17, written on the same sheet, expresses the same note of physical desire. Cf. no. 94 for a similar fantasy involving clothing.

5

I' ho già fatto un gozzo in questo stento,
come fa l'acqua a' gatti in Lombardia
o ver d'altro paese che si sia,
c'a forza 'l ventre appicca sotto 'l mento.
La barba al cielo, e la memoria sento
in sullo scrigno, e 'l petto fo d'arpia,
e 'l pennel sopra 'l viso tuttavia
mel fa, gocciando, un ricco pavimento.
E' lombi entrati mi son nella peccia,
e fo del cul per contrapeso groppa,
e' passi senza gli occhi muovo invano.
Dinanzi mi s'allunga la corteccia,
e per piegarsi adietro si ragroppa,
e tendomi com'arco soriano.
Però fallace e strano
surge il iudizio che la mente porta,
ché mal si tra' per cerbottana torta.
La mia pittura morta
difendi orma', Giovanni, e 'l mio onore,
non sendo in loco bon, né io pittore.

I've already grown a goiter at this drudgery—
as the water gives the cats in Lombardy,
or else it may be in some other country—
which sticks my stomach by force beneath my chin.
With my beard toward heaven, I feel my memory-box
atop my hump; I'm getting a harpy's breast;
and the brush that is always above my face,
by dribbling down, makes it an ornate pavement.
My loins have entered my belly, and I make
my ass into a crupper as counterweight;
without my eyes, my feet move aimlessly.
In front of me my hide is stretching out
and, to wrinkle up behind, it forms a knot,
and I am bent like a Syrian bow.

Therefore the reasoning that my mind produces
comes out unsound and strange,
for one shoots badly through a crooked barrel.
Giovanni, from now on
defend my dead painting, and my honor,
since I'm not in a good position, nor a painter.

Written ca. 1509–10, while M was frescoing the Sistine Chapel (1508–12). Next to the autograph is a sketch illustrating the artist standing and craning his neck upward while painting a cartoonlike figure on the ceiling (TC no. 174r). The tone is facetious yet bitter. M wrote numerous complaints to his family about being "worn out with this stupendous labor" and "enduring the utmost discomfort and weariness" (C. LXX, C, CIII, CVII; R. 51, 77, 81, 82); Vasari reported the same experience. The *sonetto caudato*, with its additional three-line "tail" (here doubled), was employed in the sixteenth century by the burlesque poet Francesco Berni; cf. nos. 25, 71. For another example of Bernesque humor, see no. 54.

2. *cats: gatti* might also refer to human residents of the area; the word was used by Burchiello to mean peasants or country people.

5. *memory-box:* i.e., the lower rear part of the skull. In his *Lezzioni*, Benedetto Varchi explained that the Florentines used *memoria* to mean both "memory" and the area of the brain where that faculty was believed located.

6. *hump:* here, a jocular reference to the spinal column, implying its deformation into something animal-like. *Harpies*, in Greek mythology, were hideous female creatures with a human head and the body of a bird.

10. *crupper* (*groppa*) refers to the rump of four-legged animals, again implying inhuman distention.

12. *hide: corteccia*, more literally "rind" or "bark," meaning an external covering, usually refers to grain or fruit.

14. a *Syrian bow* was shaped into a single semicircular arc. The image, found in Berni, recurs in no. 20.

17. *barrel: cerbottana*, originally a tubular blowpipe for bird hunting, was later applied to a small firearm of similar shape.

18. *Giovanni:* the autograph is addressed "A Giovanni, a quel propio da Pistoia"—probably the humanist and academician Giovanni di Benedetto da Pistoia, who wrote several sonnets to M. For later poems sent to him, see nos. 10, 71.

20. Vasari and Condivi record M's resentment at being removed from work on Julius II's tomb to fresco the ceiling. When one section of the painting was attacked by mold, the artist told the pope that painting "is not my art" (CW 57). Similarly, in 1509 he wrote to his father that painting "is not my profession" (C. LXII; R. 45).

247

Caro m'è 'l sonno, e più l'esser di sasso,
mentre che 'l danno e la vergogna dura;
non veder, non sentir m'è gran ventura;
però non mi destar, deh, parla basso.

Sleep is dear to me, and being of stone is dearer,
as long as injury and shame endure;
not to see or hear is a great boon to me;
therefore, do not wake me—pray, speak softly.

Epigram, composed in 1545–46 in response to a quatrain by the Florentine academician Giovanni di Carlo Strozzi that praised M's sculpture of Night in the Medici Chapel (begun in 1524); both were copied and printed together, with M's epigram headed, "Buonarroti's Reply." Strozzi's text, which puns on the artist's name, reads:

> The Night that you see sleeping in such a
> graceful attitude, was sculpted by an Angel
> in this stone, and since she sleeps, she must have life;
> wake her, if you don't believe it, and she'll speak to you.

M had imagined the words of both Night and Day many years before (no. 14), but in light of the changed situation in Florence since 1530, this later poem has a clear political content. The final establishment of the Medici dynasty, which led to the exile of many of M's Florentine friends in Rome and his own refusal to return to the city, was deplored by M. In several nearly contemporaneous poems, M alluded to the wickedness and ingratitude of his native city (see nos. 248–250), just as his sculptured bust of Brutus, the Roman who assassinated Julius Caesar, was reportedly commissioned by the *fuorusciti* Donato Giannotti and Cardinal Ridolfi sometime after the murder of Duke Alessandro de' Medici in 1537 to commemorate what to them was a parallel tyrannicide (VM 7:262; VB 413). In Giannotti's *Dialogi*, the speakers discuss Strozzi's epigram and M's reply, which one calls "very relevant to our times" (GD pp. 44–45); the continuing "injury and shame" in line 2 would have been understood as a criticism of Alessandro's successor Duke Cosimo and his regime, which the statue, "trapped" in Florence, prefers not to see.

36

Oltre qui fu, dove 'l mie amor mi tolse,
suo mercè, il core e vie più là la vita;
qui co' begli occhi mi promisse aita,
e co' medesmi qui tor me la volse.
Quinci oltre mi legò, quivi mi sciolse;
per me qui piansi, e con doglia infinita
da questo sasso vidi far partita
colui c'a me mi tolse e non mi volse.

It was over here that my love, in his mercy,
took my heart from me and, farther on there, my life;
here with his beautiful eyes he promised me solace,
and here, with the same, he turned to take it from me.
Over here he bound me, there he set me loose;
here I wept for myself, and from this rock,
with infinite pain, I saw him go away,
he who took me from myself and didn't turn back to me.

Two quatrains, probably the beginning of a sonnet though expressing a complete thought. Written on a sheet of accounts, the verso of which bears various architectural profiles, perhaps for the Laurentian Library, ca. 1524–25 (TC no. 531r). Petrarch, no. 112, used the same conceit of pointing out specific places where events in his love for Laura occurred; M expands the idea into an allegorical "highway robbery" (*togliere* can imply "rob" as well as "take away"). This poem may also have been inspired by Poliziano's "Una donna el cor m'ha tolto" (*Canzoni a ballo*, no. 10), though the gender of M's love is clearly male (*colui*, line 8). The reference may be to Gherardo Perini, though their correspondence dates from slightly earlier, in 1522 (see nos. 18, 22, 27, 32).

5. *he bound me:* for images of love's binding, cf. nos. 7, 23, 41, 70, etc.

21

Chiunche nasce a morte arriva
nel fuggir del tempo; e 'l sole
niuna cosa lascia viva.
Manca il dolce e quel che dole
e gl'ingegni e le parole;
e le nostre antiche prole
al sole ombre, al vento un fummo.
Come voi uomini fummo,
lieti e tristi, come siete;
e or siàn, come vedete,
terra al sol, di vita priva.
Ogni cosa a morte arriva.
Già fur gli occhi nostri interi
con la luce in ogni speco;
or son voti, orrendi e neri,
e ciò porta il tempo seco.

Whoever's born must come to death
in the course of time, and the sun
doesn't leave a thing alive.
Gone are joy and cause of sadness,
and all thinking and all speech,
and our ancient pedigrees,
shadows in the sun, smoke in the wind.
Once, we too were men like you,
sad and joyful, just as you are;
now we are, as you can see,
dust in the sun, deprived of life.
Everything must come to death.
Once our eyes were fully whole,
with a light within each cavern;
now they're empty, black, and frightful:
that's what time brings in its wake.

Now considered to date from 1524 or earlier, this songlike *barzelletta* or *frottola* uses the same trochaic meter and macabre imagery as the songs written for carnival processions, which were

S'alcun legato è pur dal piacer molto,
come da morte altrui tornare in vita,
qual cosa è che po' paghi tanta aita,
che renda il debitor libero e sciolto?
E se pur fusse, ne sarebbe tolto
il soprastar d'una mercé infinita
al ben servito, onde sarie 'mpedita
da l'incontro servire, a quella volto.
Dunche, per tener alta vostra grazia,
donna, sopra 'l mie stato, in me sol bramo
ingratitudin più che cortesia:
ché dove l'un dell'altro al par si sazia,
non mi sare' signor quel che tant'amo:
ché 'n parità non cape signoria.

If one is truly bound by a great favor,
such as bringing someone back from death to life,
is there anything that could repay such help
and give the debtor freedom and release?
And even if there were, the one well served
would be robbed of having hover over him
an infinite mercy, which thus would be deprived
of service in return, from one who turns to it.
Therefore, lady, in order to keep your grace
high over my lowly state, I long to feel
only ingratitude rather than kindness.
For if each satisfied the other equally,
the one I love so much would not be my lord:
for in equality there's no room for lordship.

Sonnet for Vittoria Colonna, ca. 1538–41, thematically related to no. 159: there he lamented his inferiority to her; here he goes further and wishes to retain it. M later used similar expressions to characterize his friendship with Luigi del Riccio, no. 252.

2. M credits Colonna with restoring him to spiritual life.

4–8. This quatrain is obscure; its central point is that to discharge his debt would be undesirable for both parties, since that would remove his inspiration to continue serving her.

12–13. Although the addressee is clearly female, M switches here to referring to her as "lord" (*signor*); cf. his description of Colonna as "a man within a woman," no. 235, or his writing to her as an *amico* ("friend," masculine; C. MCXLVII; R. 347).

83

Veggio nel tuo bel viso, signor mio,
quel che narrar mal puossi in questa vita:
l'anima, della carne ancor vestita,
con esso è già più volte ascesa a Dio.
E se 'l vulgo malvagio, isciocco e rio,
di quel che sente, altrui segna e addita,
non è l'intensa voglia men gradita,
l'amor, la fede e l'onesto desio.
A quel pietoso fonte, onde siàn tutti,
s'assembra ogni beltà che qua si vede
più c'altra cosa alle persone accorte;
né altro saggio abbiàn né altri frutti
del cielo in terra; e chi v'ama con fede
trascende a Dio e fa dolce la morte.

I see in your beautiful face, my lord,
what can scarcely be related in this life:
my soul, although still clothed in its flesh,
has already risen often with it to God.
And if the evil, cruel, and stupid rabble
point the finger at others for what they feel themselves,
my intense longing is no less welcome to me,
nor my love, my faith, and my virtuous desire.
To people of good judgment, every beauty
seen here resembles, more than anything else does,
that merciful fountain from which we all derive;
nor have we another sample or other fruit
of heaven on earth; so he who loves you in faith
rises up to God and holds death sweet.

One of M's best-known sonnets, for Tommaso de' Cavalieri, ca. 1534; written on the other side of a sheet of diagrams for architectural blocks (TC no. 485r). The language and metaphor are thoroughly Neoplatonic, praising the transport of the soul, through the medium of physical beauty, to knowledge of the divine source of all beauty; cf. nos. 89, 107, etc. Ficino had written in his *Commentary* how "the splendor of heavenly light can be admired and astound one through the body" (FJ 2:6).

58

Se l'immortal desio, c'alza e corregge
gli altrui pensier, traessi e' mie di fore,
forse c'ancor nella casa d'Amore
farie pietoso chi spietato regge.
Ma perché l'alma per divina legge
ha lunga vita, e 'l corpo in breve muore,
non può 'l senso suo lode o suo valore
appien descriver quel c'appien non legge.
Dunche, oilmè! come sarà udita
la casta voglia che 'l cor dentro incende
da chi sempre se stesso in altrui vede?
La mie cara giornata m'è impedita
col mie signor c'alle menzogne attende,
c'a dire il ver, bugiardo è chi nol crede.

If the wish for what's immortal, which uplifts
the thoughts of other men, would bring out mine,
perhaps that could again make merciful the one
who rules mercilessly in the house of Love.
But since the soul, by divine decree,
has a long life, while the body swiftly dies,
the senses can't fully describe or celebrate
its worth, which they cannot fully perceive.
Therefore—alas!—how can the chaste desire
that burns my heart inside make itself heard
by those who always see themselves in others?
So I am deprived of my precious time
with my lord, who pays heed to falsehoods,
for in truth, the liar's the one who doesn't believe.

Sonnet, 1532; although this is the first poem to Tommaso de' Cavalieri in Girardi's chronology, it would seem to follow an initial period of acquaintance (alluded to in line 12) during which M had already tried to make his strong feelings clear (perhaps in some of the more lyrical poems below; cf. no. 57). Here M strikes for the first time a note of frustration and fear that his passion, inadequately expressed, may be misunderstood as carnal rather than purely

291

Penso e ben so c'alcuna colpa preme,
occulta a me, lo spirto in gran martire;
privo dal senso e dal suo propio ardire
il cor di pace, e 'l desir d'ogni speme.
Ma chi è teco, Amor, che cosa teme
che grazia allenti inanzi al suo partire?

I think, indeed I know, that my spirit is crushed
by some sin, concealed from me, into great torment;
my senses and their own burning have deprived
my heart of peace and my desire of all hope.
But one who's with you, Love, need he fear that anything
could make your grace diminish before he leaves?

Incomplete sonnet, ca. 1555 or later. Written over a sketch of a candlestick for the tomb of Pope Julius II from about 1543 (TC no. 490v). On the recto of this sheet is a draft of no. 290.

2. Cf. no. 280, "some grave sin scarcely known to me."
4. *desire:* yearning for salvation.
5. *one who's with you, Love:* one who keeps God (divine love) spiritually close to him.
6. *before he leaves:* before death, i.e., during this life.

285

Giunto è già 'l corso della vita mia,
con tempestoso mar, per fragil barca,
al comun porto, ov'a render si varca
conto e ragion d'ogni opra trista e pia.
Onde l'affettüosa fantasia
che l'arte mi fece idol e monarca
conosco or ben com'era d'error carca
e quel c'a mal suo grado ogn'uom desia.
Gli amorosi pensier, già vani e lieti,
che fien or, s'a duo morte m'avvicino?
D'una so 'l certo, e l'altra mi minaccia.
Né pinger né scolpir fie più che quieti
l'anima, volta a quell'amor divino
c'aperse, a prender noi, 'n croce le braccia.

The voyage of my life at last has reached,
across a stormy sea, in a fragile boat,
the common port all must pass through, to give
an accounting for every evil and pious deed.
So now I recognize how laden with error
was the affectionate fantasy
that made art an idol and sovereign to me,
like all things men want in spite of their best interests.
What will become of all my thoughts of love,
once gay and foolish, now that I'm nearing two deaths?
I'm certain of one, and the other looms over me.
Neither painting nor sculpture will be able any longer
to calm my soul, now turned toward that divine love
that opened his arms on the cross to take us in.

Sonnet, among M's best-known poems, which underwent numerous drafts between October 1552 and September 1554. One version is written on a draft of a letter to his nephew Lionardo from April 1554 (C. MCXCIV; R. 388), another on TC no. 423v (see nos. 281–84). The final version was sent to Giorgio Vasari in a letter of September 1554 (C. MCXCVII; R. 390); Vasari replied with a sonnet in matching rhymes and later reprinted and discussed the poem in the

Gli occhi mie vaghi delle cose belle
e l'alma insieme della suo salute
non hanno altra virtute
c'ascenda al ciel, che mirar tutte quelle.
Dalle più alte stelle
discende uno splendore
che 'l desir tira a quelle,
e qui si chiama amore.
Né altro ha il gentil core
che l'innamori e arda, e che 'l consigli,
c'un volto che negli occhi lor somigli.

My eyes, desirous of beautiful things,
and my soul, likewise, of its salvation,
have no other means to rise
to heaven but to gaze at all such things.
For from the highest stars
descends a brilliant light
that pulls desire toward them,
and down here is called love.
Nor has the noble heart aught
that can make it burn and love, and that can guide it,
but a face that in its eyes resembles them.

Madrigal of uncertain date, ca. 1534–42, perhaps for Cavalieri; on the same sheet as no. 108. The theme has a long tradition in Italian lyric poetry, from Guinicelli onward, and also recalls Plato's theory of love and beauty descending from above and the mind ascending to them.

11. *resembles them:* resembles the stars in their brightness. A common image since the *dolce stil nuovo* of Dante (e.g., *Purgatorio* 12:90) and Petrarch (no. 72, "a sweet light that shows me the way that leads to heaven"). Cf. nos. 83, 89.