



“Solo et pensoso” in the Latin poetry of the Italian Fifteenth Century

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Abstract: The reception of Petrarch’s *Rvf* seems to have been very extensive even in the so-called “century without poetry” (Croce 209-238), above all in humanist Latin literature which wisely mixes the *topoi* of classical elegy with the ones of Romance poetry. The recent studies by Pantani, Landi and Tonelli have only opened the way towards a field which could be really interesting to explore. In particular, “Solo et pensoso” seems to have enjoyed a great fortune: even if it has not been translated by humanists (as on the contrary has happened with other poems from the *Rvf*) it has a revival in the neo-Latin poetry of humanists, both in evident rewritings, such as those by Strozzi and Landino, and in the echoes, the allusions, and even the parodical overturnings that can be found in Folengo. However, after careful scrutiny we can realise that humanists did not absorb the melancholic elements which make this poem closer to our modern sensibility. They just extracted some tesseræ (above all the promenade through the natural elements) to insert in an amatory context which sometimes shows traits of classical sufferance, sometimes of stilnovistic hope.

Scholars trained in classics often have been, and still are today, called upon to edit critical editions of humanist poets. Such scholars often miss, due to professional bias, possible medieval and humanist sources of the *carmina* they edit, especially if these sources are written in the vernacular. As a result, their comments risk mirroring the admirable classical erudition of the philologist rather than the poet that they are examining. In addition, between the end of the fourteenth century and the first decades of the fifteenth there was such an infatuation with rediscovered Latin classics and Greek classics translated into Latin that the vulgar productions of the founding fathers of the Italian language were set aside by humanists, or even openly held in contempt by the more radical and intolerant fringes.

The *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum* by Leonardo Bruni, the treatise that begins the humanist treatise writing of the Italian fifteenth century, confirms the prevalence of Latin sources; but that brief dialogue also proves how, already at that nascent phase of Italian humanist classicism, there were intellectuals ready to fight in order not to lose *all* the vast legacy of the so-called “three crowns,” including both their vernacular and Latin works. Leonardo Bruni who, as is well known, wrote a life of Dante and a life of Petrarch was certainly the standard bearer of this opposition and minority current in the first half of the fifteenth century. Wiser intellectuals, as he was, had probably already realised that both the *Canzoniere*, despite the definition of “nugae,” and the *Triumph* were not superfetations of

the humanist Petrarch, but works that could perfectly be included in the Petrarchan design for a classicist re-founding of literature that included two linguistic tracks. However, even some of the humanists who did not share that linguistic approach, which was adopted by Bruni and in a different way by Leon Battisti Alberti, contributed during the fifteenth century to creating what we could call Latin Petrarchism (an area whose investigation has only just begun), especially through translations, to perpetuate the life and the truth of the *Canzoniere*, or rather of some of its *fragmenta*, in what was for them “incorruptible” forms of the Latin language. Suffice here to quote the canzone *Alla Vergine* translated into Latin by Filippo Beroaldo (Viti 444-448), the canzone *Italia mia* by Achille Bocchi (Chines 110), the sonnet 102 dedicated to Caesar (“Cesare, poi che’l traditor d’Egitto”), the sonnet 132 (“S’amor non è, che dunque è quel ch’io sento?”) by Alessandro Braccesi in his *carmina* XI e XII (*Alexandri Bracii carmina* 21-22), and the sonnet 327 (“L’aura et l’odore e ‘l refrigerio et l’ombra”) by Naldo Naldi in the 35th epigram of his book (12).

The reception of “Solo et pensoso” in fifteenth-century humanistic poetry reveals a different feature from what will happen in the following century. It seems to concentrate—rather than on the hypertrophic ego of the poet—on the relation with the other two subjects of the Petrarchan sonnet: the explicit one, Love, and the implicit one, the beloved woman. In this way, the great importance of the romance substratum becomes clear under the purely classical linguistic surface.

Even though “Solo et pensoso” is not part of that group of poems of the *Canzoniere* on which the humanist poets of the fifteenth century experimented and refined their translating art, its influence on humanist poetry appears, upon close scrutiny, anything but irrelevant. Limiting our analysis to the production of the main interpreters such as Cristoforo Landino we can say that the cases of intertextuality appear all the more interesting because they reveal only a partial rewriting of the sonnet, thus helping us to understand where the attention of humanist readers was focused.

One aspect is immediately apparent: the “pre-Romantic” themes of the sonnet (melancholy, search for solitude, empathy with nature) that are obviously the most striking to our modern sensibilities did not exercise the same attraction for the fifteenth-century poets. The way in which the poets included clear allusions to the famous sonnet, rejecting however some distinctive elements, was functional to the interweaving of Petrarchan poetry and classical poetry, in line with the extremely calculated poetics of the *emulatio* and the *variatio*.

I do not think that it is an accident that we can find evident rewritings of “Solo et pensoso” in works by the mid-fifteenth-century poets who, in Florence and Ferrara, can be considered the leaders of a new strand of Latin elegiac poetry, which mixed the teachings of the canonical *auctores* of the genre (Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid) with the maestro of the *Canzoniere*. The poem II 9 of the *Xandra* by Cristoforo Landino is a lament against love which, far from being blind as the tradition teaches, has more eyes than the guardian Argus and chases the Florentine poet wherever he goes:

Sunt ripae et ripas praetercurrentia curvas
 Flumina, sunt testes frondea rura mihi,
 In quibus indignas cupiens deponere flammās,
 Nequicquam dominae iurgia saeva queror.
 Me vos in vestris vidistis montibus olim
 Errantem frustra saepe latere, ferae.
 Nam quid profeci? Sequitur deus ille nec usquam
 Improbis a nostro pectore flectit iter.
 (*Xandra*, II 9 6-13)

Banks and rivers running over the round banks are my witnesses, and the leafy fields where, wanting to rest from the shameful flames, I uselessly complain for the lashes my lady is giving to me. You, wild beasts, saw me once on your mountains, while I wandered and tried to hide in vain. What was the profit? That cruel God follows me and never turns his way from the object of my heart.

This is not a mere echo or simple allusion. It is an elegy clearly inspired by our sonnet, with the shared mediation of Propertius I 18 who has undoubtedly influenced at least the incipit of *Rvf* 35. The natural elements are in fact witnesses (“testes”) of the poet’s sorrows of love—the literal refrain of Prop. I 18, 19-20 (“vos eritis *testes*, si quos habet arbor amores, / Fagus et Arcadio pinus amica deo”)—but the natural locations (“monti et piagge / et fiumi et selve”) that the poet has visited (“ripae...flumina...frondea... rura...montibus”) to try to escape from love are obviously Petrarchan. It is precisely in this disastrous attempt to flee from love that Landino’s poem betrays a clear fascination with lines 12-13 of the Petrarchan sonnet (Landi 133): escape is futile (“frustra” transposes the Petrarchan “cercar non so”) because love arrives everywhere. However, once again, the analogy between the text and its main source is intermittent. On the one hand, Petrarch finally accepts, against his will, the company of a non-belligerent love with which he communicates; it seems almost like a friend of his, following a practice that was already found in the thirteenth century (feeling intensified by the closing hemistich of the last verse: “ragionando con meco, et io co-llui”). On the other hand, Landino is far from accepting the presence of love, because it keeps teasingly using him as the sole target of its darts (“Scilicet et solus quo tela cruenta fatiges / Nunc resto; solum me tuus arcus habet”). This is soon followed by the poet’s brief invective and the final request aimed at the “armed enemy” that he should practice his archer’s activity also on the poet’s beloved Sandra.

Another genuine rewriting of the *Rvf* 35 appears in the elegy II 5 (lines 1-8) of the *Eroticon* collection of the poet from Ferrara Tito Vespasiano Strozzi, uncle of Boiardo. The poem is called *Ad Amorem* and love here becomes, more than in the Landino poem, the real protagonist of the scene, with the poet relegated to a walk-on part. It is love in fact that wanders everywhere across the world:

A demens, quisquis sylvas latebrosaque rura
 credit Amor, telis non adeunda tuis.
 Tu nemus umbrosum, tu ripas fluminis alti

et liquidos fonteis et iuga montis adis.
 Quae nitidi primum radiantia lumina solis,
 quae videt occasum, subiacet ora tibi.
 Quasque tenent sedes Boreas et nubilus Auster
 Indevitatas sustinuerunt faces.
 (*Poeti latini del Quattrocento* 266-69)

Oh Love, foolish is the one who believes that you can't reach with your darts the woods and the hidden fields. You go into the dark wood, over the banks of a deep river, near the clear founts and over the mountain tops. Every land is obedient to you, both the one who sees the rising sun and the one who watches the sunset. And the lands governed by Boreas and by the cloudy Austro couldn't avoid your torches.

Here too, undoubtedly, the sequence “nemus...ripas...liquidus...iuga” reflects the influence of the *Rvf* 35. The part that more clearly reveals its Petrarchan origin, before the ending of the poem—which, here too, is a prayer to love to turn its darts to the beloved—is the central one (lines 9-14), in which the poet hints at the vain attempts to flee from love. The suspicion of a close relationship between the two texts is reinforced if we compare the progress of line 9 “... gravibus *cupiens* me solvere curis” with line 8 of the aforementioned Landino poem “... indignas *cupiens* deponere flammis.”

Ah, quotiens, gravibus cupiens me solvere curis,
 desertos saltus et loca sola peto!
 Sive urbeis adeam, nemorum seu devia lustrem,
 sive ego coeruleum per mare puppe vehar,
 tu mea furtivo sequeris vestigia passu,
 et iacis immiti spicula certa manu.

How many times, wanting to get rid of my sad torments, I went wandering through the desert woods and solitary places! But whether I go to the city, to hidden forests, or I sail over the blue sea, you follow me with your furtive step and with your cruel hands you throw your infallible arrows at me.

On a micro-textual level, the Petrarchan imitation seems here even closer if we consider not only the translation of the content (“desertos saltus et loca sola peto”), but also the other levels of analysis of the poetical text (at least the sound and timbre): line 13 (“tu mea *furtivo sequeris vestigia passu*”) seems in fact to refrain, on a phonosymbolic level, lines 3-4 of *Rvf* 35 (“et gli occhi *porto per fuggire intenti / ove vestigio human la rena stampi*”). One has the impression, inside the vortex of this intertextual tension, that love is really following the tracks of a solitary and wandering Petrarch.

Moreover, the Mantuan poet Marcantonio Aldegati, in whose first book of elegies various lyric poems are laments against love, wrote an ode (XV, *Scribit ad Faustum tentasse saepius ab Amore discedere, sed minime potuisse, cum fuga nihil prosit amanti*) that is, at least in its opening, forcefully Petrarchan, a sort of “mise en abyme” of “Solo et pensoso”:

Saepe ego tentavi duris me solvere nodis,
 Implicuit collo quos mihi saevus Amor.
 Saepe per umbrosas sylvas, per devia rura
 Fugi ego flammigeri tela cruenta dei.
 Ast ego si peterem Gangem Scythiamque nivosam,
 Ad Gangem, ad Scythiam, Fauste, veniret Amor.
 (*Poeti d'Italia in lingua Latina*)

Many times I have tried to get free from the tight bonds with which cruel Love had clenched my neck. I tried to escape the terrible arrows of the flaming god, running through shady fields, through solitary woods. But if I ever went to the Ganges, or to the snowy Scizia, Love - oh Fausto - would follow me to the Ganges, to Scizia.

Deprived of its fundamental melancholic elements, of the profound desire for isolation and to flee the civilised world, and of the special empathy that Petrarch established with the rural world, the incipit of Aldegati's elegy maintains, nonetheless, the same structure of the sonnet. While the first four verses present the poet's intention, the conclusion shows the impediment to that intention due to love that chases the poet to the ends of the world. It is worth noting the strong pause produced by "*Ast* ego," the "*Ma* pur sì aspre vie..." of *Rvf* 35, 12, after which Aldegati translates the Petrarchan generic exoticism into concrete locations, "sì aspre vie né sì selvagge"; and note, again, the inclusion of "ch'Amor non venga" in the translation "veniret Amor."

"Solo et pensoso" lives on in humanist poetry also in simple echoes, traces and impressions, separated therefore in passages and sequences in which it is not always clear where the perpetuation of elegiac *topoi* ends and the brilliance of their Petrarchan representation begins. Apart from this, it seems at times that the image of the lover wandering through wild landscapes is used by humanist poets in an allegorical horizon and is therefore "dated" compared to the modern character that Petrarch was able to impart to his sonnet. If in Petrarch, for example, wandering along solitary roads, wild and dangerous, is functional to the introspection, in Enea Silvio Piccolomini the theme of wandering through deserted locations is used metaphorically to describe one's condition as lover before the providential intervention of the beloved Cinzia, who shows the poet the way with her "night time lamp":

Nunc ego per tenebras et per stabula alta ferarum
 cogebar longas nescius ire vias.
 Forsitan abruptas cecidissem pronus in alpes,
 aut ego iam rapidi praeda leonis eram.
 At tu, que nostros miserata es, Cinthia, casus,
 obvia noctivage lampadis igne venis
 (*Carm.* I 6, 3-6, *Poeti latini del Quattrocento* 128-29)

I was forced to go through the darkness, where wild animals live,
 and to walk a long unknown path.
 I could have fallen in a mountain gully

or I may have been the prey of a cruel lion.
 But you, Cinzia, moved by my terrible destiny,
 come to me with the light of your nocturnal lamp.

Also in Giovanni Marrasio the theme of penetrating nature along unsafe and difficult roads is far from an all-absorbing experience aimed at introspection—quite the opposite. Here too it is used to highlight the beneficial potential of the beloved, in this case the rescuing effects of Angelina’s smile, which owes more to the *stil novo* style:

Per salebras ego tutus eode nocte timendas,
 clarus eo in latebras aspera perque iuga.
 Non timor est mundo[...] Quando die nitidis mihi rides, Angela, ocellis,
 non est splendidior sol, neque luna prior
 (*Ang. I 2, 7-9, 11-12, Poeti latini del Quattrocento 106-107*).

I go safe in the night through uneasy and dangerous streets,
 I go freely through hidden places and on hard mountains: the world needn't be
 afraid.

When, Angela, in the daytime, you laugh with your beautiful eyes,
 the sun doesn't shine like you, and the moon isn't brighter

Rather than an authentic penetration by man into nature’s intimate womb—creating therefore a dialogue in which nature’s elements participate in poet’s *spleen*, as in *Rvf* 35—here we see a clear break between the natural setting and the lover all wrapped up in the beloved, as it happens in *Rvf* 176: “Per mezz’i boschi inhospiti e selvaggi, / .../ vo sicuro io” that appears to be the closest source. Marrasio wants to stress that, thanks to the eyes-stars of his beloved, he walks “safe” (“tutus”) at night through roads that he should fear (“per salebras ...timendas”) and, he reasserts in the next verse, “calmly,” through “secluded locations” (“latebras”) (*Poeti latini del Quattrocento 107*). It is interesting to note, as Ilaria Landi stresses (*I Rerum vulgarium fragmenta di Petrarca nell’elegia latina del Quattrocento 40*), how the substantive “salebras,” gathered from a Propertius context, different in nature from love (*III 16, 15*), is invested with new meaning and included in the vocabulary of the sorrows of love thanks to Petrarch.

Amongst the references to *Rvf* 35 in fourteenth-century Latin poetry we can also include a passage from the Eclogue III of the bucolic collection *Adolescentia* (1498) by Battista Spagnoli Mantovano. The shepherd Aminta, completely out of his mind with love, wanders solitarily among mountains and lairs of wild beasts, in a manner dramatically melancholic (“solivagum”) and desperate, that will push him to a dramatic end (*Adol. III 143-44*: “me rapit impatiens furor et iuvat ire per altos / solivagum montes, per lustra ignota ferarum,” Spagnoli 264). Someone who perhaps was a pupil of the Carmelite friar Spagnoli, and certainly a fellow citizen, the Mantuan Teofilo Folengo writes a parody in his *Zanitonella* (red. T., 37-50) of the Petrarchan circumstances of love narrated by *Rvf* 2 and 3 and in doing so uses an opening that is probably a wink and a comic reversal of the famous incipit of *Rvf* 35: “Solus solettus stabam colegatus in umbra / pascebamque...” (Folengo 62). This is rather interesting because it reveals that for the “canonical” texts of the *Canzoniere* the allusion

technique is similar to the one that the humanist poets used for the ancient texts, that is, the inclusion of quotations-cameos in the significant parts of the verse, even if in completely different contexts, mimicked and parodied. In conclusion, we can see here yet a further demonstration of the classical quality of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and of the various and multifaceted nature of the reception of the sonnet "Solo et pensoso."

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