

## LETTURE

ROBERT J. CLEMENTS, *Berni and Michelangelo's Bernesque verse*  
in «Italica», XLI, 3 (september 1964), pp. 277-279

Michelangelo practised the *sonetto caudato* form dear to Berni as well as the capitolo. [Both of the extended sonnets to Giovanni da Pistoia are Bernesque](#). The sonnet on the pains and discomforts of painting the Sistine Ceiling (“I’ ho gia facto un gozzo in questo tento” [*sic*]) dwelled on the unpleasant anatomical features of Bernesque verse: goiter, belly, backsides, leathery skin, rump, and so on, with the same complementary admission of mental anguish and twisted thinking. It corroborates passages in [Vasari](#), [Condivi](#), and Bernini on these hardships, and especially Vasari’s statement that Michelangelo’s neck became so arched

and his vision so impaired that he had to read books by holding them over his head. The sonnet adopts the coarse, physiological vocabulary of the artist's other Bernesque verse:

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.	4
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.	8
E' lombi entrati mi son nella peccia, e fo del cul per contrapeso groppa, e ' passi senza gli occhi muovo invano.	11
Dinanzi mi s'allunga la corteccia, e per piegarsi adietro si ragroppa, e tendomi com'arco soriano.	14

The theme of the Syrian bow (not at some have interpreted, bow of Soria, Spain) is found in Berni and occurs later in another of the artist's Bernesque pieces, “Tu ha' 'l uiso”, to ex-

press the exaggerated “twist” of a woman’s eyebrows. The poet now turns from his physical disabilities to the mental derangement which is in his view linked with them. The idea that mental disturbance complements physical maladjustment will be repeated in “Io rinchiuso come la midolla” [*sic*].

Però fallace e strano	
surge il iudizio che la mente porta,	
ché mal si tra’ per cerbottana torta.	17
La mia pittura morta	
difendi orma’, Giovanni, e ’l mio onore,	
non sendo in loco bon, né io pittore.	20

This final verse is the first of a long series of disclaimers found in his letters and poems, especially denials that Michelangelo is a painter, architect, or a poet, but also disclaimers of competence in making daggers (XLVIII), writing business letters (XCVIII), other letters (CDLXXXII), and shopkeeping (CLXXXII and CXCIV). The evidence here of injured feelings about having to work in fresco was amusingly repeated on the earlier-written receipt: “I, Michelangelo Buonarroto, *sculptor*, have received five hundred ducats on account,

for the paintings in the Sistine Chapel.” Condivi, Vasari, and Piero Rosselli all noted that Michelangelo worked unwillingly in “terra.”

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