

THE CASTLE AND THE SEASONS:  
LORIS JACOPO BONONI AND THE  
*GEOMETAPHORS* IN CASTIGLIONE DEL TERZIERE

*Ilaria Serra*

The medieval tower of Castiglione del Terziere perches in tranquil repose, its countenance turned away from the thoroughfare, gazing upon the Magra Valley. It is an arresting sight for those who ascend the road from Villafranca, meandering through the dense oak and chestnut forest at the confluence of Tuscany, Liguria, and Emilia. This article embarks on an exploration of the poetic landscape of this region, delving into the oeuvre of Loris Jacopo Bononi (1929-2012), a contemporary poet who has not only made this castle his home but has also imbued it with metaphorical significance. Bononi was a living anachronism: rarely since the eras of Emperor Frederick II or Lorenzo de Medici has a poet assumed the mantle of a feudal lord, concurrently presiding over a castle while exhibiting profound interests in philology, philosophy, history, and literature. This is the first article to propose Bononi's poetic production in English, offering translations of some of his poems composed in the first decade of the 21st century. The first part of the article concentrates on a poetic reading of the physical reality of Castiglione, followed by a choice of verses that point to the poetry contained in physical reality. This double lens proves instrumental in comprehending the interplay between the poet and the landscape, where each entity assumes prominence, mutually enriching the other. Bononi's poetry evinces a singular communion between space and verse, affording a fertile ground for geocritical contemplation of his work. It is the perfect context to develop a new conceptual framework: the *geometaphor*.

*What is a Geometaphor?*

The concept of geometaphor has been recently developed, grafted into the fabric of recent geocritical and ecocritical theories.<sup>1</sup> This critical figure marks an

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<sup>1</sup> See the recent articles: Ilaria Serra, *Eugenia Bulat's Poetry: Geometaphors among the Stones of Venice*, in «The Italianist – Special Issue, “Cross-Cultural Approaches to Italian Ecocriticism”»,

evolution in the discourse surrounding spatial considerations, invoking the allure and efficacy inherent in metaphors, while introducing an element of heightened geographical precision.<sup>2</sup> While in the realm of pure symbolism, poetic metaphors assert dominance, veiling their tangible origins, and conversely, in the domain of realism, the physical realm subdues the poetic, in the geometaphorical mode, the two facets coexist: corporeal and lyrical landscapes harmoniously converge, creating a reciprocal sheltering effect. It was important to start the article by walking through the woods towards the castle, because it is imperative that the physical world take precedence in the analysis: the geometaphor enriches the world we see by adding an additional layer, making our vision thicker and in a certain way, double.

In simple terms, the geometaphor is a metaphor deeply rooted in its terrestrial context, a metaphor with a specific location on the map. The most illustrious example is the border of infinity in Giacomo Leopardi's poem *L'infinito*, which is quite rooted as the verdant hedge enveloping the residence of the poet in Recanati. In that exact location, the way to infinity opens. Leopardi himself theorized the existence of a «double gaze», a perceptual duality that, according to him, elevates life to a more appealing dimension. He maintained that life is sad when devoid of the ability to perceive, hear, and feel beyond the mundane objects of the senses, and lamented the limitations of such most common form of existence.

All'uomo sensibile e immaginoso, che viva, come io sono vissuto gran tempo, sentendo di continuo ed immaginando, il mondo e gli oggetti sono in certo modo doppi. Egli vedrà cogli occhi una torre, una campagna; udrà cogli orecchi un suono d'una campana; e nel tempo stesso coll'immaginazione vedrà un'altra torre, un'altra campagna, udrà un altro suono. In questo secondo genere di obbietti sta tutto il bello e il piacevole delle cose. Trista quella vita (ed è pur tale la vita comunemente) che non vede, non ode, non

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42 (2022-2023); and Ead., *The Poetic Geography of Italy: Coastal Geometaphors*, in «Italian Culture», 41.1 (2023), pp. 80-102.

<sup>2</sup> In Italy, Serenella Iovino's studies on ecocriticism recently attracted attention to the relation between texts and geography giving them an ecological urgency. As for geocriticism, besides the Italian translations of Bertrand Westphal's work, see also Alberto Comparini's *Geocritica e poesia dell'esistenza* (Milano, Mimesis, 2018) which stresses the novelty of an approach that combines geocriticism and existentialism or phenomenology («senso dell'essere dell'ente») and existentialism («senso dell'essere dell'uomo», p. 115) in Italy. He recognizes the echo of Edward Soja's «spatial turn» theorized in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) and of the 2008 collection *The Spatial Turn* edited by Barney Warf and Santa Arias (New York, Routledge, 2008). For Umberto Eco, the metaphor, the most «luminous» of all tropes, is a scandal because it is the sum of all tropes and hardly separable from them. Umberto Eco, *The Scandal of Metaphor. Metaphorology and Semiotics*, transl. Christopher Paci, in «Poetics Today», 4 (1983), 2, pp. 217-257. Cristina Cacciari's edited volume *Teorie della metafora. L'acquisizione, la comprensione e l'uso del linguaggio figurato*, Milano, Cortina Editore, 1991, is a valid attempt to point out the rich valence of the metaphor in different fields.

sente se non che oggetti semplici, quelli soli di cui gli occhi, gli orecchi e gli altri sentimenti ricevono la sensazione (30 novembre 1a Domenica dell'Avvento).

For the sensitive and imaginative man/woman who lives – as I have always lived – continuously feeling and imagining, the world and the objects are in a certain way double. They will see with their eyes a tower, a field; they will hear with their ears the chime of a bell; and at the same time, they will see another tower, another field, another chime in their imagination. In this second type of objects is everything beautiful and pleasant. Sad is that life (and such is commonly life) that does not see, does not hear, does not feel anything other than the simple objects, only those felt by eyes, ears and other feelings. (November 30th, 1a Sunday of Advent)<sup>3</sup>

Thanks to the double gaze, travelers may experience an enhanced comprehension when beholding a locality through the lens of the metaphors it has inspired. At the same time, readers find unparalleled satisfaction in engaging with metaphorical language when endowed with the precise knowledge of the tangible element literature has transmuted into an evocative image. This seems to be particularly true in Italy, where – according to poet Diego Valeri – poets have always entertained an amicable relationship with their surroundings: «The Italian landscape, as it is perceived by writers, is a human landscape», he writes. «To be clearer: in Italian writers the sentiment of landscapes is so simple and deep as the sentiment of love and death».<sup>4</sup> Writer Marco Lodoli reinforces this perspective, asserting that, dating back to the origins of Italian art and literature, a profound and harmonious relationship has prevailed between nature and humanity: «They are complementary».<sup>5</sup> This symbiotic connection, for Lodoli, serves as a potent antidote to the contemporary proliferation of non-lieux or non-places. Quoting Lodoli, «One word, and a place burns in the fire of eternity. No word, and every place fades into distraction».<sup>6</sup> Loris Bononi's words stem from this very tight love affair of the man with his landscape, the area of Lunigiana, which becomes a privileged place of resistance against a perceived meaninglessness.

This article's critical methodology forges its own metaphors, or geometaphors, achieved through the deliberate isolation of two discrete elements within the topographical expanse of Lunigiana: one, the fortress and its contents, symbolizing a yearning for perpetuity, and two, the transience of the seasons in the adjacent woodland, serving as an evocative metaphor for the ephemeral. Needless to say, not every castle possesses the capacity to encapsulate the essence of Loris Bononi's

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<sup>3</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Pensieri di varia filosofia e di bella letteratura*, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1900, VII, p. 352. In this article, all translations from Italian are the author's unless otherwise noted.

<sup>4</sup> Diego Valeri, *Tempo e poesia*, Milano, Mondadori, 1962, p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> Marco Lodoli, *Quasi in lieto giardino. Civiltà dei luoghi letterari*, Roma, Ecrà, 2010, p. 144.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, p. 20.

poetics. Solely this specific castle, situated in the region of Lunigiana, transforms into a metaphorical locus his creative expression.

### *The castle: a poetic reading*

Loris Bononi, a figure both obscure and deserving of attention, has been aptly characterized as «vivente prisma umano», a living human prism, given his multifaceted roles as a poet, doctor, collector, and inventor endowed with a visionary and eccentric personality.<sup>7</sup> Born in 1929 in Fivizzano, a town nestled at the base of Castiglione del Terziere, into a landowning family, Bononi initially pursued classical studies at Liceo and subsequently delved into medicine at the University of Parma. Despite working as a local physician in his hometown post-graduation, he found himself unfulfilled and moved to Rome, where he earned three degrees in Pharmacology, Microbiology, and Chemotherapy. Bononi's intellectual pursuits extended globally as he directed research centers in New York for Pfizer, in Milan for Zamberletti, and in Florence for Manetti & Roberts. Simultaneously, he served as a professor of Chemotherapy at the University of Turin. His research efforts culminated in a significant contribution to cancer medicine, that allowed him to amass considerable wealth in the process.

Bononi dedicated this fortune to the revival of his region's history by purchasing and restoring important *lieux de memoir*: the castle of Gavedo on the hill of Gropoli, the seventeenth-century Fantoni Palace in Fivizzano, that was the home of arcadic poet Labinto Arsinoetico and now is a Printing Museum, and the castle of Castiglione del Terziere. The ownership lineage of Castiglione traces back to the Corbellari family, subsequently transitioning into being a «terziere» or third part of Alberto Malaspina da Filattiera's inheritance. From the year 1451 onward, the castle served as the seat for various Florentine judges, «capitani di giustizia». Abandoned since 1750, Castiglione fell into a state of abandonment – its trifora windows sealed, roofs collapsed, and frescoes faded. When Bononi bought it in 1969, it was a poignant testament to centuries of disregard, seismic disturbances, and the deleterious impact of World War II. At the time of Bononi's death, on November 12, 2012, the castle had undergone a complete restoration and had been transformed into his primary residence. His partner Raffaella Paoletti, who was 26 years his junior and whom he had met in 1982, continued to administer his inheritance, until she unexpectedly passed away during the revisions of this article, adding a layer of melancholy to its narrative.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Vittorio Vettori quoted in Stefano Milano; Carlo Cantini, *Il Castello di Castiglione del Terziere*, Milano, Silvana editoriale, 1992, p. 72.

<sup>8</sup> Raffaella Paoletti sudden death occurred on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

Today, Loris Bononi's essence has become inseparable from Castiglione.<sup>9</sup> The elegance of Castiglione, with its marble trifora, robust stone walls, and dual terraces commanding views of surrounding village and the valley, mirrors the lifestyle of a man who spent his final years within its confines. This architectural structure is emblematic of his character – steadfast, proud of his town's traditions and history, deeply rooted in the soil and the historical tapestry of Lunigiana. The commanding fortress encapsulates the vanity and self-centeredness of a man who purportedly crafted his own destiny.<sup>10</sup> The cluster of modest residences enveloping the castle, nestled within the ancient walls, seems to echo the centralizing influence of Bononi. He charmed visitors with his profound knowledge and commanding voice.<sup>11</sup>

The Castle of Castiglione was more than a building from the beginning. When Bononi saw it the first time, his double gaze showed him more than a ruin: he saw a «castle-idea», a «castle-stronghold» against death. The castle was a physical and metaphorical vantage point to gaze into the passage of time, as Bononi remembers: «I had come to Castiglione del Terziere to observe and examine up-close the history of Lunigiana. In no other place would I have been able to look backward to the past, and ahead, to the future, of this Land. [...] From its terraces, that once were ramparts, one can see hundreds of years back».<sup>12</sup> Bononi's reacted strongly to the decadence of the place and resolutely committed to the castle restoration: «Had we to accept this abandonment? No. This syllable, No, was multiplied, magnified in the cavity of my chest».<sup>13</sup> Repairing the building meant much more than fixing stone and mortar, it amounted to repairing the dignity of the land. Each infusion of cement, an infusion of pride:

<sup>9</sup> Valentino Bompiani wrote in a 1988 letter: «I hope to come to visit the Castle of Terziere one day, also because I understood that all your life has to be read [there]» (quoted in Emerico Giachery, *Afterwards*, in Loris J. Bononi, *Le stagioni a Castiglione del Terziere*, La Spezia, Comitato Omnia Vanitas-Amici, 2018, p. 29). Emerico Giachery also recognized that «it is hard to imagine a historical building more intensely lived in, in our times, by someone who inhabited it as a poet, humanist and *mecenate*, and passed there his last years often tormented by a disease bravely endured» (ivi, p. 28).

<sup>10</sup> Author Martha Cooley dedicates interesting pages to Bononi, her unusual neighbor with a strong sense of self, in her memoir *Guesswork. A Reckoning with Loss*, New York, Catapult, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> «We fell straightaway under the spell of Bononi's speech – sometimes alluring, sometimes comic, sometimes nearly brutal, sometimes baffling, but never insincere» write Antonio Romano and Martha Cooley in their *Introduction*, in Loris J. Bononi, *Il migrante ferito. Poesie scelte / The Wounded Migrant. Selected Poems*, with a translation and introduction by Antonio Romano; Martha Cooley, Aulla, Grafiche Conti, 2017, p. x.

<sup>12</sup> Milano; Cantini, *Il castello di Castiglione del Terziere*, n.p.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

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So, this syllable, No, became water (blessed, spring water), plaster (blessed, furnace plaster), iron (blessed, foundry round wall nails), wood (blessed, chestnut, oak, walnut for beams, boards, doors, shutters, windows), clay (blessed, floor bricks), stone (blessed, sandstone for architraves, jambs, steps, platelets), marble (blessed, in my maternal family, for arches, capitals, columns, bases), paper (blessed, for white sheets to fill with memories projects daring sadness, and so much happiness), paper (blessed, for blessed books written in ancient languages by the people of this Land). Let there remain - beyond the meaning of the vanity of everything - the testimonial proof of so much civilization, past and present. [...] That far away snowy day, I would like to live it again. [...] This is how love does not die. I feel unmovable as if I had already died: a phoenix that everyday lives again with the same thought and the same obstinate happiness.<sup>14</sup>

This chateau serves as a testament to Bononi's relentless pursuit of immortality, a palpable and obsessive desire that echoes through its very stones and find a way into his verses.

### *The castle contents: a poetic reading*

We may enter the castle. Bononi filled it with antiquities and valuable books meticulously curated to align with the historical narrative of Lunigiana. Only artifacts intricately linked to the geographical area found a place within these walls. He loved this land intensely: «Ever since my mother gathered my first smile at the beginning, then, all my other smiles have been given to my land», he writes.<sup>15</sup> In the main bedroom, several elements contribute to the overarching narrative of the struggle the poet waged against temporal constraints. Foremost among these is the incorporation of oak wood – a poignant symbol of strength. Drawing an intertextual parallel with Ulysses' bed, Bononi elected to repose in an oakwood bed that used to belong to Cardinal Julius II della Rovere – the pontiff who commissioned Michelangelo the Sistine Chapel. The family crest della Rovere, prominently engraved on the bed's headboard, features the emblematic oak tree. Raffaella recollects Loris's predilection for awakening to the majestic oak tree visible through the window. The etymological derivation of «oak» further underscores this symbolism, with its Latin roots *vis-roboris* connoting active strength (*vis*, from which «virile» emanates, denoting the strength of man), and *roboris*, signifying unwavering strength akin to the robustness of the oak tree itself.

Flanking the bed, a marble sculpture depicting a slumbering child, a funerary monument attributed to the school of Sansovino, serves to remind the occupants of the inevitability of mortality. Finally, a Byzantine crucifix occupies a central place in the room and holds personal significance as Loris Bononi would

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Giachery, *Afterwards*, p. 27.

ritualistically kiss it each morning with the express purpose of «lighting up the sun» («per accendere il sole», says Raffaella). This Christ exudes a dark wood severity that bears witness to the ravages of time: the arms are broken, leaving only the upright trunk intact. Symbolical is its provenance: Bononi discovered it in the castle's attic where it functioned as a makeshift support for a fractured roof beam. In venerating this Christ icon, Bononi seems to concurrently pay homage to his own work of reconstruction and salvation.<sup>16</sup> The double gaze allows for this metaphorical reading of the bedroom and its contents, reminders of death and the human struggle against its sting.

In the adjacent library, antique cabinets adorned with painted doors serve as custodians of a trove of ancient books – a particular fascination and intellectual sustenance for Bononi, humorously described by Raffaella, as his weakness and «drug».<sup>17</sup> Bononi's bibliophilic passion pushed him to reevaluate the obscured legacy of Jacopo da Fivizzano – a fifteenth-century cleric who acquired printing expertise in Venice under Clemente da Padova, during the early stages of the diffusion of Gutenberg's printing technology. Jacopo, his eponymous, established a printing press in Fivizzano where he engaged in movable character printing for four years (1470-1474) – nine years before London, seven before Oxford, and five before Bruxelles. Loris Bononi especially treasured *incunabula*, books printed before 1500, which not only symbolized the immortality of the written word, but also its wide availability. They are reflections of Bononi's plan to make the castle and its content a gift to the people of Lunigiana. Demonstrating a profound commitment to public engagement, Bononi opened the castle's doors for tours and events, and he assigned Raffaella to continue this tradition.<sup>18</sup> This ethos of generosity mirrors the spirit that ignited the hearts of the pioneering printmakers. Jacopo and Raffaella make this symbolic connection by highlighting the colophon of the first book printed by Jacopo da Fivizzano in their possession – the *Satires* of Juvenal. The Latin colophon, a printer's closing remark on the last page of the book expresses gratitude to God for making books accessible and affordable, particularly for those of limited means: «Thank God you who love books because your prayers have been answered and thank Him even more if you are poor».<sup>19</sup> Bononi perceived himself as perpetuating the tradition started with printmaking: making culture widely available. Ancient books served as his own form of salvation: «They are the best part of me. They represent me better than who I am and make me look

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<sup>16</sup> Bononi's interesting relationship with the human Christ is developed in his novel *Miserere Dei*.

<sup>17</sup> «Books are the love of his life, after me; no, before me». Interview during my June 2022 visit to the Castle.

<sup>18</sup> Videos of these visits are available on YouTube.

<sup>19</sup> «Solve preces solve quicunque volumina cernis: Maxime qui pauper porridge vota deo» (last page of the incunabulum).

like the man my mother desired me to be».<sup>20</sup> They will outlive him: «Books are the multitude of the heart, the solitude of the word that we have not said, the evidence of our thought, the treasure that we have lost, the voice we have muted, the hearing and sign that we haven't used. They are out posthumous, our testimony against or in our favor».<sup>21</sup> Books provided solace and companionship within the confines of the castle, even when the atmosphere was dense with desolation («today the fog in the sky makes us blind. I remain on the ramparts, like a flagpole without a flag»)<sup>22</sup> They are a powerful antidote to depression and suicidal contemplations: «If we love a book, [...] the book will be our breath, fogging the sad glass of the winter window of our rainy prison. The book will be the light of day in the sun, and the moon and the northern star in the night».<sup>23</sup> The written word has an enduring nature, captured in the Latin adage *scripta manent* (what is written remains).<sup>24</sup> Much like the steadfast castle counters the flux of seasons, the bound book serves as a stabilizing force, mitigating the capricious movements of the winds. «There have always been in my life: winds and books. [...] We both found a home in this castle to testify to the *vanity of everything*, but also to the *pervasiveness of vanity*.»<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Loris J. Bononi, *Museo Jacopo da Fivizzano dedicato alle arti del libro*», Fivizzano, Palazzo Fantoni-Bononi, 2008, n.p.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Within this article it is worth mentioning the origins of *Miserere Dei* because it underscores the author's enchanted relationship with destiny and books. The first edition of the *Gospels, Esposizione sopra evangelii*, annotated by Frate Simone da Cassia, printed in Venice in 1486 by Annibale Fosio from Solignano (Parma), was the first book in Bononi's collection, and he bought it in 1938, when he was a 9-year-old boy! Sent to Florence in the company of his unmarried aunt to procure a gift for his mother, the boy ventured into an antique shop with a modest sum of 8 liras, intending to purchase a print. The bookseller, in a gesture of goodwill, sought out a postcard in the back of the shop as an alternative. Upon his return, he saw the boy holding the first edition of the Gospels, boldly declaring, «I want this for my mother; she would love it». The antiquarian asked him several questions, then gave him the book. «All these things I heard from the bookseller many years later», writes Bononi (*Itinerari*, p. 106). At his mother's death, Loris discovered a written note instructing him to return to the same bookshop to settle a debt incurred in his boyhood. Remarkably, the shop persisted, and though the bookseller failed to recognize him, the sight of the note prompted him to retrieve a document from the safe—a written commitment from young Loris pledging to repay a considerable sum for the acquisition of the old book: «I promise that when I am older, I will pay many liras (really many!) for this old book. Signed with my name» (*Ibid.*). The bookseller explained that the unusual situation had pushed him to «bet on the future». True to his word, the bookseller declined to accept more than the agreed-upon amount.

<sup>25</sup> Loris J. Bononi, *Itinerari. La biblioteca di Castiglione del Terziere*, in «Rara Volumina. Rivista di storia sull'editoria di pregio e il libro illustrato», I (1996), pp. 103-118, at p. 109, italics in the original.



### *The poems and the seasons*

Loris Jacopo Bononi's literary oeuvre encompasses two historical volumes focusing on Jacopo da Fivizzano and the Lunigiana,<sup>26</sup> as well as the fictional trilogy: *Diario postumo* (1969), *Miserere Dei* (1970) and *Il poeta non muore* (1973).<sup>27</sup> The three novels garnered the commendation of Pier Paolo Pasolini, who acclaimed *Diario Postumo* as «libro dell'anno»,<sup>28</sup> and have been extensively examined in Giuseppe Fontanelli's 1996 critical volume, *Il solo segno. La Trilogia di Loris Jacopo Bononi*.<sup>29</sup> An extensive collection of poems remains unpublished, locked in a chest within the castle. A preliminary scrutiny of this material, conducted by Giuseppe Fontanelli, culminated in three detailed articles.<sup>30</sup> A small selection of these poems has been published posthumously in two slim booklets: *Il migrante ferito. Poesie scelte / The Wounded Migrant. Selected Poems* (2017), and *Le Stagioni a Castiglione del Terziere* (2018).<sup>31</sup> A few more poems chosen by Raffaella were «published» on the walls of the castle village, following a tradition that Bononi started: «Ours is a unique village, with many flowers both rooted and in hanging baskets, and so many poems attached to the doors of the little old houses» (*Il migrante*, 3).<sup>32</sup> Within this article, we allude to a selection of these poems. From the perspective of the geometaphor, there exists no more compelling affirmation of their distinct geographical origin than their literal affixation to the stone bricks of the castle village.

Bononi's poems predominantly emanate a pervasive sense of mortality, reflective of the culmination of his life's journey. Their style is traditional: free verses, irregular length, only a few rhymes, sometimes internal. They seem written

<sup>26</sup> Loris J. Bononi, *Jacopo da Fivizzano, stampatore*, Brescia, Sardini, 1971, and Id., *Libri & destini. La cultura del libro in Lunigiana nel Secondo Millennio. Stampatori, editori, libri, librai in Lunigiana attraverso i secoli nel mondo*, Lucca, Pacini Fazzi, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Loris J. Bononi, *Diario postumo*, Bologna, Cappelli, 1969; Id., *Miserere Dei*, Bologna, Cappelli, 1970 and Id., *Il poeta non muore*, Bologna, Cappelli, 1973.

<sup>28</sup> With a peculiar style: «senza radici, cioè senza prosa. Potrebbe essere stato scritto sulla Luna» (Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Fasti autobiografici*, in «Tempo», 30, 1969, quoted in Giuseppe Fontanelli, *Nell'Archivio di Castiglione del Terziere. La poesia inedita di Loris Jacopo Bononi*, in «Rivista di letteratura italiana», XXXV (2017), 2, p. 126.

<sup>29</sup> Giuseppe Fontanelli, *Il solo segno. La Trilogia di Loris Jacopo Bononi*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1996. The three novels have a unique format: they are mosaics of memories (his youth, the war, the Resistance), surreal images and visions (Lady Death). They can be read in any order, and in fact *Diario postumo* has no page numbers.

<sup>30</sup> See also Giuseppe Fontanelli, *Verso le sillogi 'postere'. Tensioni elaborative della poesia inedita di Loris Jacopo Bononi*, in «La modernità letteraria», X (2017), pp. 115-132, where the critic underscores the mythological content of Bononi's last poems.

<sup>31</sup> Bononi, *Il migrante ferito*, and Id., *Le Stagioni a Castiglione del Terziere*. Cooley, an award-winning *New York Times* author, and her husband, Antonio Romano, now live in the village of Castiglione.

<sup>32</sup> From a letter he wrote welcoming the new neighbors, Martha and Antonio (*Il migrante*, 2).

on the spur of the moment, with urgency, not polished over time. In fact, in his final years, Bononi succumbed to a relentless compulsion for writing, engrossed in a frenzy that spanned day and night, an insatiable appetite for filling pages. This fervor reached such intensity that he would rouse Raffaella from her sleep in the dead of night to seek her input on a poem. Any available piece of paper served as a canvas for his urgent poetic expressions, emphasizing the imperative nature that poetry assumed later in his life. These compositions distinguish themselves from earlier works for their intensity, akin to the disparity between perfumed water and drops of essence – an apt simile evoked by Raffaella during our 2022 visit.

Opening the *Wounded Migrant* is the translation of one of Bononi's most poignant poems bearing the title *Dusted with light is the valley* (*E' impolverata di luce la valle*). This composition vividly elucidates the fusion of the poet with the landscape, who undergoes a profound metamorphosis within the surrounding scenery during the enchanting hour of sunset. The Magra Valley offers an interesting geometaphorical aspect by losing its defined terrestrial aspect and becoming a charming silvery place, in which the poem unspools a tangle of lunar rays. The valley becomes one with the moonlight, reminding the reader of some folk legends.<sup>33</sup> The verses are silverplated by locutions such as «dusted with light», «filigreed silver», «lunar wells», «smoked with incense», «silk veil», «green-gray ash». In this metamorphosing landscape the first-person singular is threatened and decomposed, dissolving in the same lunar dust. The metaphor of Leopardi's hedge frequently reverberates in Bononi's literary expressions. But his «naufragar» is interestingly hindered by his same strong personality: the resistant repetition of the personal pronouns «me» and «myself» in fact betray the difficulty of the subject in detaching from his own self.

Dusted with light is the valley  
 the hills' profiles  
 filigreed silver  
 and huge voids of shadow  
 lunar wells  
 The line  
 of the highest peaks weakens  
 softened by the brightness of a sunset  
 from which it seems impossible  
 a new day smoked with incense  
 could arise

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<sup>33</sup> I am thinking about the legends of the Pale Mountain, the Dolomites, in the collection by Carlo Wolff, *I Monti Pallidi. Leggende delle Dolomiti*, Verona, Mondadori, 1931.

Towards the sea  
the sea-breeze is a silk veil  
I too vibrate  
like the green-gray ash  
of birches  
and replicate and confuse myself  
and make myself  
now infinite now immortal  
and sometimes I recognize myself

But it's not me  
me myself

To myself I seem  
Another.<sup>34</sup>

Bononi sees the end of the day as the moment in which mortals find themselves able to conceive the possibility of transitioning into a state that is «now infinite now immortal». The breathtaking panorama visible from the castle – a locale that served as Bononi's exclusive writing space for all his poems – represents a borderland with infinity. In the passage below, the castle frames the poet against the backdrop of a summer day, while simultaneously opening avenues for spiritual contemplation and introspection:

I walk on the ramparts almost always in the morning, early before the day warms up. Then, I stop in the darker lower rooms: the quiet noise of the outside, filtered, wanders through the walls, and is broken into its compositions: river, bird, human voice, voices, far away memories (because memories have a voice). Sometimes I reach the sea. But more often, I delve into the infinity of things that are close by. Or, if I have already gone too far, and it is already late night, I return backward, absorbed in my dominion of the things that have dominated me... In the meantime, in the lower lands, the work in the field continues slowly. The figs, the plums, the pears are ripe, and the grapes are swelling.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Bononi, *Il migrante*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Bononi, *Il poeta muore*, p. 45. In this novel, the narrative unfolds to reveal a panorama meticulously depicted, capturing the landscape's vibrant sounds, seasonal agricultural activities in the fields and woods, diverse fauna, an array of avian species and specific flora referred to by their precise nomenclature. The four seasons seamlessly weave through the storyline, offering glimpses into agrarian tasks and providing month-by-month descriptions, effectively constructing a poetic calendar akin to an agricultural almanac (a *lunario*). Furthermore, the temporal progression in nature parallels the temporal passage reflected in the narrator's corporeal experience, whose palpable decay is delineated with precision by Bononi, a medical doctor by profession. Even the

Bononi's poetic persona experiences a fusion with his land and landscape not only through its twilight but also through its aural dimension. A short unpublished poem titled *The wind's greeting* (*Il saluto del vento*) seals the conversation between the poet and the breeze that blows on the castle terrace. Within this grammar construct, the human assumes the role of a passive entity subjected to the dynamics of the landscape (the wind breathes *me*). This reversal, where the landscape becomes the subject and the poet the object, aligns with the conceptual tenets inherent in some of the most poignant geometaphorical poetry. Here, the wind, in concert with rustling leaves, accompanied by the sibilant alliteration (often impure in its «sp», «st», «sb», «st», «st»), undergoes a transcendence of terrestrial qualities, metamorphosing into echoes of historical voices or murmurs of imaginative realms.<sup>36</sup> In six verses, the wind of the Magra Valley bears a whiff of imagination.

Il saluto del vento	The wind's greeting
a volte mi respira	sometimes breathes me
E se stormiscono le foglie	And he if the leaves rustle
avverto un bisbiglio	I hear a murmur
che mi racconta le storie	that tells me stories
che non sono mai state	that have never been <sup>37</sup>

The observation of the seasons from the bastions of the castle is one of Bononi's cherished themes.<sup>38</sup> As the title suggest, the collection *Le stagioni a Castiglione del Terziere* is entirely dedicated to the seasons seen as reminders of impermanence: an oxymoron, an eternal impermanence. In a self-diegetic note, with an antithetic chiasmus, Bononi declares: «Always the seasons, and their appearing and becoming by changing and their changing by becoming has been lovingly connatural to me» (*Le stagioni*, 31).<sup>39</sup> The poems from *Le Stagioni* are translated here for the first time. They were chosen from two collections, *Profumo d'oblio e Lettere a una sconosciuta*, that Bononi was gathering for a future publication when death called him. They all lack punctuation, and capital letters are the only signs of a sentence's beginning. Periods, commas, and all signs that may have given a rhythm and rhyme to the flow of time have been erased: here time ticks away on its irregular, inhuman path. The temporal sequencing within these poems is also quite

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language employed is inherently organic, swelling through Bononi's neologisms and inventive grafting that mirror natural growth.

<sup>36</sup> The poems translated here for the first time have frontal translation.

<sup>37</sup> Unpublished poem, contained in a trunk at the castle.

<sup>38</sup> Emerico Giachery defined Bononi «poeta di stagioni» (poet of seasons) (Giachery, *Afterwards*, p. 30).

<sup>39</sup> Ivi, p. 31; quoting a letter by Bononi.

intriguing. *Spring* delineates a period characterized by anticipation, manifested through its utilization of future tenses. In *Summer*, a stark stillness prevails, accompanied by the imposition of brutal present tenses. *Autumn* unfolds as a temporal conundrum in the realm of implausible past perfect tense, epitomizing a season marked by aspirational longing. *Winter*, by contrast, assumes a state of timeless stasis, where no progression is possible thanks to frozen future tenses and their sense of finality.

First, *Spring*: this poem seems to burst forth from the secluded corners of Castiglione village, where expansive hydrangea branches out in a profusion of pink and purple hues. The poetic composition incorporates references to music, evoking the melodious undulations of a *barcarole* within the profound silence that accompanies blossoming. Delicate roses patiently anticipate what will be the explosive display of summer colors, the vivid eruption of poppies. The terminology evokes the medieval ambiance of the castle, such as the archaic form *perfumo* in lieu of the contemporary *profumo* and the introduction of the refined French term *parterre*, denoting both the garden floor and the stage floor of a theater. The poet participates in the expectancy, utilizing a verse link anchored by the pronoun «I» («io») that endeavors to reconcile the temporal cadence of nature with that of human experience.

Primavera

La barcarola della primavera  
ondeggia sui prati  
mossi dal vento  
e la musica muta nel silenzio  
colma l'ascolto del cuore  
Trepitanti  
le corolle delle ortensie  
recingono di profumo chi le sfiora  
mentre siepi di rose  
sono in attesa che i papaveri  
compongano un parterre rosso sangue  
Ti aspetterò  
io  
fin oltre la fine del tutto  
e sarà niente il tutto  
a fronte all'attesa

## Spring

The barcarole of spring  
undulates over the meadows  
moved by the wind  
and the music changes into silence  
filling the listening heart  
Trembling  
the hydrangea's corollas  
encircle with perfume those who touch them  
while hedges of roses  
await for the poppies  
to build a blood red parterre  
I will wait for you  
I  
beyond the end of everything  
and everything will be nothing  
in the face of anticipation<sup>40</sup>

The poem *Summer* describes a violent season, seen from an aerial perspective, suspended above the wooded expanse. In this instance, the familiar theme of anticipation, which had lent a refreshing quality in the preceding spring months, concludes. The diurnal canvas shifts to a violet palette, emblematic of the sweltering heat. Amidst this oppressive ambiance, predators, dogs, and a solitary seagull – a maritime memory – appear over the airless terrain. It is hard to imagine Lunigiana mountains as scorching hot as the poet describes them. It must be a metaphysical heat that desiccates the poet's mouth and intellect, evoking a sentiment of disdain through the declarative statement, «I do not love you». The participation of the poet transforms him into a pile of dust, dried up by the lack of water, crackling and thirsty («you have dried my breath in me»).

## Estate

Una giornata viola  
Armeggiano i falchi roteando  
e gli altri predatori  
Solo un gabbiano recita  
rauco il suo verso  
Portami con te  
Giuro

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<sup>40</sup> Bononi, *Le Stagioni*, p. 13. The capital letters suggesting the start of a new sentence are in the original.

che ti sarò fedele  
L'estate si smorza come una candela che scotta le dita  
Anche i pensieri consumati nella calura senza remissione si sono sciolti  
Qualche abbaio lontano rauco e stracco  
Ogni anima ha ricevuto il dovuto  
Presto rifletterà sul dono nei lunghi giorni ciechi dell'inverno  
Estate  
come sempre ancora  
hai arso di me il mio respiro

Io non ti amo

Summer

A purple day  
the hawks swirl, maneuvering  
and the other predators  
Only one seagull recites  
his hoarse verse  
Take me with you  
I swear  
I will be faithful to you  
Summer fades like a candle burning fingers  
Even worn-out thoughts  
in relentless heat have melted  
A distant hoarse tired barking  
Every soul has received its due  
Soon it will reflect on its gift  
in the long blind days of winter  
Summer  
as always once more  
you have dried my breath in me

I do not love you<sup>41</sup>

*Autumn* opens a window of possibilities in the seasonal calendar: the silence is broken, infused with a festive musicality characterized by the resonant notes of the modern flute, the antique Baroque *traversier* flute and the chiming melodies of bells. Bononi's extensive collection of antique musical instruments succeed in making their way into his verses.<sup>42</sup> As the earth regains warm colors, human

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<sup>41</sup> Ivi, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> In reality, the musical instrument collection was stolen from the castle one faithful night.

thoughts seem like withered leaves descending akin to diminutive kites. An exciting breakthrough in the poem is the notable temporal shift, specifically, a regression towards the conditional tense, signifying a prospect of potentiality (would be), or even an exploration of the realm of implausibility through the past conditional tense (would have been). This nuanced application of the pluperfect grammatical structure leads into a dimension of unreality as «the fifth season» emerges. It is an immutable and unalterable epoch, effectively, the season of eternity. The poet's feeling of approaching mortality takes a romantic turn as it engenders hope for a timeless covenant with his beloved Raffaella, in the fifth, eternal season.<sup>43</sup>

#### Autunno

Sarebbe venuto l'autunno  
 e le foglie ormai secche dei miei pensieri  
 consunte da un'estate rovente  
 avrebbero infine cercato il cielo  
 e di lassù sarebbero ridiscese  
 minuscoli aquiloni  
 a posarsi  
 sulle policromie della terra  
 Gli uccelli di passo  
 avrebbero sostato per ascoltarti  
 caso non si sa che tu avessi intonato  
 Soffi di flauti lievi e traversieri allegri e clarinetti e tocchi di campane  
 Ci saremmo baciati sugli occhi

Ti amerò comunque e d'estate e d'inverno  
 di primavera e d'autunno e forse  
 forgerò inalterabile una quinta stagione  
 che piacerà a Vivaldi  
 ma sarà tua soltanto

#### Autumn

Autumn would have come  
 and the now dry leaves of my thoughts  
 worn out by a scorching summer  
 would finally have sought the sky  
 and from up there would have descended

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<sup>43</sup> Raffaella's voice was always filled with deep tenderness as she read Bononi's poems aloud. This poem in particular was read with love and pride.



tiny kites  
to settle  
on the polychrome earth  
Migrating birds  
would have paused to listen to you  
just in case you had started a tune  
Whispers of light flutes and joyful traverse flutes and clarinets and bell chimes  
We would have kissed each other's eyes

I will love you anyway both in summer and in winter  
in spring and autumn and perhaps  
I will forge an unchangeable fifth season  
that will please Vivaldi  
but that will be only yours alone<sup>44</sup>

The cold season barges in with all its cruelty in *Winter*. In the restored Castiglione, modern heating provisions extend solely to a confined upper apartment, while the lower areas rely on the ancient chimneys to warm the cold stones. Winter assumes the guise of a season synonymous with mortality, a perspective swiftly embraced by Bononi, who transforms the absence of vitality into a promise of eternity and enduring love. The color palette turns to a frigid white, contrasted by the glowing warmth of love: «my throat ablaze» and «turn myself into fire to warm you». Amidst the candid expanse of Castiglione's snowy winter, the poet pledges to persist resolute and steady. His unwavering devotion to Raffaella is likened to a castle atop a hill – steadfast and immovable amidst the seasonal vicissitudes, startling the migratory birds in their passage.

Inverno

Lo so che l'inverno sarà di gelo  
per il mio respiro  
ma per parlarti  
m'infiammerò la gola  
con le braci di un fuoco  
Larghe distese di neve  
profonde e lunghe fino  
all'infinito del visus  
mi assorbiranno con il tremito dei rami  
rattrappiti  
Io starò saldo

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<sup>44</sup>Ivi, p. 15.

sopra  
a bufera di neve  
caso mai vedessi punto bianco su bianco  
e lontana  
la tua figura  
Allora  
ordinerei all'inverno di ritirarsi  
e mi farei di fuoco per riscaldarti  
Rapidi tagli in volo di uccelli imbalsamati  
si poseranno a guardarci  
sperduti nel nostro amore

Winter

I know that winter will be icy  
for my breath  
but to speak to you  
I will set my throat ablaze  
With the embers of fire  
Wide stretches of snow  
Deep and long until  
the infinite of vision  
will absorb me with the shiver of shriveled branches  
I will stand firm  
above  
the snowstorm  
just in case I could discern white on white  
and in the distance  
your figure  
Then  
I would order winter to retreat  
and I would turn myself into fire to warm you  
Quick frozen birds will slice the air  
perching to watch us  
lost in our love<sup>45</sup>

As we have seen, in *The Seasons*, the temporal cycle paves the way for the inception of a fifth season, emblematic of immortality. This theme is underscored in the prose dedication of the booklet to Raffaella that starts with «My fifth season

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<sup>45</sup> Ivi, p. 16.

is immortality» and that makes this posthumous collection a real testament.<sup>46</sup> In this paragraph, the convergence between the poet and the surrounding landscape attains culmination. The protracted struggle against the inexorable passage of time becomes near complete, both as a declaration of war and a gesture of surrender. The voice belongs to Don Quixote, but the signature is Sancho's: the idealistic knight meets the resilient servant. As in the other compositions, in consonance with the thematic content, graphical punctuation is deliberately eschewed, allowing the temporal continuum to unfold without interruption, reflecting the seamless flux of time, but also adding an element of creative chaos as a necessary destruction. Verses seem to fold one on top of the other in the confusion of death through antithesis («in death I will be alive»; «we are nothing and nobody but that this is everything»), repetitions («the things I loved until I died of love for love itself»), several negative constructions («the things I left unfinished»; «infinity of vision»; «immortality of the heart»; «impossibility of going beyond»; «the endless desert of our having been»; the final «I will never die»), and short syncopated segments that suggest dissolution of the body («my arteries burn my heart is mad my head dreams my legs run and my arms hold you tight»). The fifth season has nothing to do with nature. It is unknown to the rows of birch trees that traverse this poem in the middle part, with their white rarefied elegance. If there is a tree, in Bononi's immortal vision, it must be the birch tree that mostly resembles a lean purified soul, filled with the musicality of its triangular small leaves, shimmering and trembling. «Intremare» is one of Bononi's neologisms. And if there is a natural element in this fifth season, it must be the wind that gusts from the Appennini peaks to the Tirrenian sea and encompasses the universe of Castiglione del Terziere.

La mia quinta stagione è l'immortalità  
 Io non morirò perché da morto sarò vivente nelle cose che ho lasciato  
 incompiute e le cose che ho amato fino a morire d'amore per l'amore stesso  
 saranno la mia testimonianza che noi SI' siamo niente e nessuno ma che il tutto  
 è questo.  
 Essere fusto di betulla e sbiancare di macchie la propria scorza pulita la musica  
 dei rami innamorati dal vento in lunghe file non sanno eseguono non sanno  
 Questa è la quinta stagione  
 L'infinito del *visus* l'immortale del cuore l'impossibile del fare oltre e ancora  
 Trabocca un fiero sentiero di vento penninico dall'Orsaro e arriccia il mare a  
 rovescio e le onde vanno lontano e resta il deserto senza fine del nostro essere  
 stati  
 Sono la quinta stagione di me stesso e ti dono oggi ogni mio pensiero

<sup>46</sup> The epitaph preceding the dedication says «A Raffaella per il suo libricino sulle stagioni che presto Le donerò», in Bononi, *Le Stagioni*, n.p.

Un brivido primaverile mi intrema le vene e le arterie bruciano il cuore è pazzo  
 la testa sogna le gambe corrono e le mie braccia ti stringono forte  
 Lasciami andare oltre  
 Io non morirò mai  
*Sancho*

My fifth season is immortality  
 I will not die, for in death, I will be alive in the things I left unfinished  
 and the things I loved until I died of love for love itself  
 will be my testimony that YES we are nothing and nobody but that this is  
 everything  
 To be a beech trunk and to blanche the clean bark the music of branches in love  
 with the wind in long rows they do not know they do they do not know  
 This is the fifth season  
 The infinity of vision the immortality of the heart the impossibility of going  
 beyond and still more  
 A proud mountain wind makes its way overflowing from Mount Orsaro and  
 furrows the sea against the current and the waves go far leaving the endless desert  
 of our having been  
 I am the fifth season of myself and today I give you every thought of mine  
 A spring shiver makes my veins tremble my arteries burn my heart is mad my  
 head dreams my legs run and my arms hold you tight  
 Let me go beyond  
 I will never die  
*Sancho*<sup>47</sup>

### *Conclusions: Castiglione poetic geography*

The objective of this article was dual in nature. Primarily, the presentation aimed to introduce a hitherto unfamiliar Italian poet through the inaugural translation of his poetic works. Loris Jacopo Bononi is situated on the periphery of the literary landscape, but his poetic production has multiple merits. His verses come as the conclusive manifestation of an extraordinary life, a medieval vestige in a modern world, a unique figure in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Italy. The resolute Bononi fabricated both a physical and an ideal realm through thoughtful use of his resources – be it financial, architectural, or literary. Furthermore, Bononi's verses intricately intertwined with an extraordinary location, perfect to experiment with a novel critical tool. This article proposed a novel way to look at the landscape of Lunigiana and at one of the numerous castles gracing the summits of its mountains. Beyond their historical roles as watchtowers, defensive structures, and administrative outposts, Castiglione conceals a geometaphor, as a resilient bastion against the temporal flux of seasons.

<sup>47</sup> Bononi, *Le Stagioni*, p. 10.

Because of his unwavering loyalty to his ancestral territory, Bononi foregrounded his own «adherence of the truth of the self to the truth of the places» («l'aderire della verità dell'io alla verità dei luoghi»)<sup>48</sup>

The «truth of the places» is evident in one more poem worthy of consideration on the way to our conclusion. The poem titled *There is a door* (*C'è una porta*) was affixed to the door of the Dimora del Bargello, one of the restored houses within the castle village. Since the summer of 2021, that door has indelibly etched itself in my memory as a powerful geometaphor, complete with its weathered wood, substantial bolts, and rusty creaking hinges. The poem makes this interstitial space the very juncture where earthly time converges with eternity. In the fissure between the door and its jamb, the forces of time and eternity meet. Their duality offers no solution: the threshold separating the two dimensions remains persistently ajar, in a perpetual state of oscillation. The untranslatable verse «un uscio che fa corrente d'anima» (a doorway that lets in drafts of the soul) renders the idea of the liminal space between the physical and the spiritual, embodied in that very creaking door in Castiglione. Giacomo Leopardi's verses offer the perfect echo to describe a door opening on the infinite.

C'è una porta  
in una stanza del mio cuore  
che non si chiude bene  
e spiffera  
La visione mentale di questa porta  
mi lascia immaginare  
l'immortalità

E' un uscio che fa corrente d'anima

Per questo un giorno o l'altro  
o in una notte pleniluna  
mi avvierò per comparare  
la mia voce  
all'infinito silenzio  
e avvertirò in me  
interminati spazi  
e abatterò la siepe  
che l'ultimo orizzonte  
al guardo esclude

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<sup>48</sup> Fontanelli, *Nell'Archivio di Castiglione del Terziere*, p. 127.

There is a door  
in a room of my heart  
that doesn't close well  
and lets in a whiff  
The mental vision of this door  
allows me to imagine  
immortality

It is a doorway that lets in drafts of the soul

So, one day or another,  
perhaps on a full-moon night  
I will set out to compare  
my voice  
to the infinite silence  
and I will sense within me  
the interminable space  
and I will tear down the hedgerow  
that cuts off the view of  
the last horizon<sup>49</sup>

In conclusion, returning to the serpentine path that leads to Castiglione del Terziere, let us appreciate one last time Loris Bononi's vision, intrinsically linked to the act of creation (*poiesis*).<sup>50</sup> Both seasons and fortress speak of his presence and timeless legacy, as it is declared in the closing of a second poem titled *Autumn* in *Le Stagioni*: «Un destino insensibile esegue la morte delle cose create | ma noi | l'autunno e me non potrà dominarci | e dopo e noi e silenziosamente e soli | saremo la nostra fortezza nell'inverno dell'anima» (A callous fate carries out the demise of created things | but Autumn and I cannot be mastered | and afterward just us and silent and alone | we shall be our fortress in the winter of the soul).<sup>51</sup> Now endowed with the «double gaze», look up one more time towards the hilltop where a steadfast fortress is shrouded in a tapestry of seasonal hues: let us not solely appreciate a grandiose castle but also discern the aspirations of an individual who sought to transcend death. Traversing the forest, let us not merely admire the

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<sup>49</sup> I incorporate Galassi's translation of Leopardi's *The Infinite* to translate Bononi's embedded quotation (Jonathan Galassi, *Canti / Poems. A Bilingual Edition*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> In an unpublished poem, Bononi confesses his grand project: «I built a life of Chinese boxes, and I invented a fantasy to better love every path I walked on this world» (quoted in Giuseppe Fontanelli, *Tra gli inediti di Loris Jacopo Bononi*. I Drammi intimi, in «Esperienze letterarie», XLII (2017), 2, pp. 107-126: 125.

<sup>51</sup> Bononi, *Le Stagioni*, p. 22.

foliage, but recognize the siege imposed by the relentless passage of time. In this corner of Lunigiana, let us acknowledge the presence of a geometaphor.

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