

An Assembly of Self and State: The *Impossibile Congiunzione* of Lorenzo de' Medici's Poetry

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This dissertation investigates the political aspects of Lorenzo de' Medici's poetry with a focus on *Nencia da Barberino*, the *Raccolta Aragonese*, and *Comento de' miei sonetti*. Lorenzo de' Medici demonstrated a propensity for appropriating poetic traditions and models and reshaping them in his own image. By doing so, he recast the trajectories of those traditions and models within a Medicean brand. Lorenzo employed his poetry to reinforce Florentine cultural prestige and, consequently, to bolster his own political influence; also, with great subtlety, he created a poetic image of himself as a private citizen, no more prominent than his peers in the governing of the city.

I offer a new perspective on Niccolò Machiavelli's 1526 characterization of Lorenzo de' Medici as an *impossible congiunzione* of poetic and political personas. I analyze discordant combinations in Lorenzo's poetic production and argue that he utilized dissonance to construct his poetic authority. In Chapter One, I investigate a confluence of trends in literature, philosophy, language, and artistic patronage by which Lorenzo tied Florence's cultural preeminence to his own dynastic impulse. In Chapter Two, I explore Lorenzo's naturalistic portrayal of rustic life, which he combined with a parody of courtly love poetry in *Nencia da Barberino* (c. 1470). The poet invites his audience either to sympathize with an enamored shepherd or to scorn his lack of sophistication. The *Nencia* affirms Florentine cultural hegemony – the same authority on which Lorenzo capitalizes in the *Raccolta Aragonese*, which I discuss in Chapter Three. In this collection, Lorenzo de' Medici offered a dynamic blend of Dantean and Petrarchan poetic paradigms within his Ficinian love poems. By inserting his own poems in the *Raccolta Aragonese* (1476-77), Lorenzo legitimized his own poetic endeavor within a cultural artifact that he exported beyond the boundaries of Tuscany. This study concludes (Chapter Four) with an analysis of Lorenzo's integration of Petrarchan themes and forms with Dantean exegesis in his *Comento de' miei sonetti* (1473-1490). In his sonnets and commentary, Lorenzo developed his own exegetical poetics. The leader of Renaissance Florence turned the poetry of personal experience and a hermeneutics of self into domestic politics.

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Introduction

In November of 1520, twenty-eight years after Lorenzo de' Medici's death, Niccolò Machiavelli received the commission from Giulio di Giuliano de' Medici to write the *Istorie fiorentine* (1525).¹ Machiavelli concluded his history with a section devoted to Lorenzo as Florence's great ruler in the latter years of the fifteenth century. In his closing remarks, Machiavelli offered this judgment of Lorenzo: “Tantoché, a considerare in quello e la vita leggera e la grave, si vedeva in lui essere due persone diverse quasi con impossibile congiunzione congiunte.”² With this statement, Machiavelli emphasizes the tension between Lorenzo's dichotomous roles as politician and poet. His value-laden expression – *impossibile congiunzione* – underscores the difficulty of Lorenzo's simultaneous pursuits and the difficulty of their reconciliation. Machiavelli's insight captured the discord between *Lorenzo politico* and

¹ Machiavelli acknowledges the convention of praising his sponsor, Giulio de' Medici, but he attempts to demonstrate that his history will not consist of an idealized encomium of the Medici family. He writes to Giulio that he will not flatter him with feigned praise for his ancestors: “E perché dalla V. S. Beatitudine mi fu imposto particolarmente e comandato che io scrivessi in modo le cose fatte da' Suoi maggiori, che si vedessi che io fossi da ogni adulazione discosto (perché quanto vi piace di udire degli uomini le vere lodi, tanto le finte e a grazia descritte le discritte le dispiacciono).” *Istorie fiorentine* in *Istorie Fiorentine e altre opere storiche e politiche*, ed. Alessandro Monteverchi (Torino: UTET Libreria, 2007) 278. Similarly, Machiavelli would not gloss over Florence's history of civil discord, though he did try to spin it as a positive as he claimed that having survived so much factious infighting was a testament to Florence's greatness. Felix Gilbert, though, believes Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine* presents a near anti-encomium of the Medici family. Instead of praising Florence for overcoming its many factions, Gilbert intuits Machiavelli's disgust at the state of affairs under Medici rule and the rise of the family due to their private wealth: “Machiavelli's entire account of this period is meant to demonstrate the abasement of Florentine political life under the Medici.” Gilbert, “Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*: An Essay in Interpretation,” *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 86. Gilbert notes that Machiavelli was cognizant of the necessity of veiling his true feelings but that they shine through any ostensible praise. One indication of Machiavelli's disapproval appears in the speeches of various figures within the text, the most damning of which was issued by Piero de' Medici himself. Gilbert, “Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*,” 80-87. I mention Machiavelli's stance of anti-flattery with respect to his patron and Gilbert's perception of Medici disdain within the text because I also detect a hint of derision in Machiavelli's statement about the dual personas that Lorenzo almost succeeds in combining. As Gilbert suggests, Machiavelli considered a cultivation of the arts to be incompatible with heroic military virtues. “Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*,” 86. Thus Machiavelli's statement on Lorenzo's dual personas might be read as a lament of the impossibility that Lorenzo would lead Florence to enduring glory.

Lorenzo poetico and describes the approach of Laurentian criticism that has tended to concentrate on Lorenzo's literary production or on his political career with little integration of the two.³

Machiavelli's curious pronouncement leads me to consider other questions related to Lorenzo's cultural role and poetic production: What are the impossible conjunctions *within* Lorenzo's poetry? What impact does Lorenzo's political persona have on his poetic production? How do attempts at impossible conjunctions within his poetry inform the political aspects of Lorenzo's poetic works? How does Lorenzo build his poetic authority in a manner that yields cultural-political capital? These questions form the basis of my analysis of Lorenzo's *Nencia da Barberino* (pre 1470), Lorenzo's own sonnets in his *Raccolta Aragonese* (1476-77), and his combination of Dantean and Petrarchan poetic modes in *Comento de' miei sonetti* (1473-90).

In the middle of the twentieth century, Laurentian critical studies turned to more detailed investigations of Lorenzo's acts of patronage, which diminished the exaggerated view of Lorenzo's involvement and expertise in all Florentine artistic production.⁴ By 1992, the 500th

² *Istorie fiorentine*, 758-59.

³ Machiavelli's insightful characterization of Lorenzo's dual personas set the tenor of Laurentian criticism in the twentieth century. Vittorio Rossi adopted Machiavelli's viewpoint in this description of Lorenzo in his compendium of *Quattrocento* literature: "a lato visse in lui il poeta, non armonizzato con l'uomo di stato, né subordinato, ma semplicemente, come disse il Machiavelli [...] 'congiunto.'" Rossi, *Il Quattrocento in Storia letteraria d'Italia* (Milano: Vallardi, 1973 [1932]) 505. Rossi stands out because focused on Lorenzo's disparate roles rather than an integration of the two and he specifically cited Machiavelli for providing that binary frame. Similarly, Paolo Orvieto, reflecting on the trends of twentieth-century Laurentian scholarship, states: "Siamo di nuovo alla teoria formulata dal Machiavelli: il Lorenzo politico andrà rigorosamente tenuto distinto dal Lorenzo poeta," *Lorenzo De' Medici* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1976) 108. In an evaluation of the heightened attention devoted to Laurentian studies in 1992 for the quincentennial of Lorenzo's death, Evelyn Welch noted a continued fragmentation of the image of Lorenzo, rather than a new synthesis. Welch, "The Year of Lorenzo," *Art History* 17.4 (1994) 658-61.

⁴ Martin Wackernagel, André Chastel, and Ernst Hans Gombrich were interdisciplinary cultural historians of the Warburg school whose methodology emphasized the interpretation of art works based on a rigorous fact-minded scholarly approach. They claimed that Lorenzo's contemporaries lauded his taste and expertise in order to gain patronage or for political status, resulting in *amplificatio* of Lorenzo's actual role in many artistic projects. Their consensus view was that Lorenzo did not build like his grandfather, Cosimo the Elder, who had personally funded the construction of the Medici Palace, several villas, the church of San Lorenzo, and the convent of San Marco. These scholars claimed that Lorenzo did not commission many grand works, preferring instead to dedicate his

anniversary of Lorenzo's death, however, the myth of Lorenzo's pervasive influence and involvement in artistic patronage regained momentum.⁵ At the onset of the twenty-first century, renewed critical favor designated Lorenzo de' Medici as supreme patron and arbiter of taste in Florence as scholars again assumed Lorenzo's involvement in nearly all cultural matters.⁶ Over the centuries and even within the twentieth century, the critical opinion of Lorenzo's position as patron and overseer of Florentine arts has oscillated between voices that view him alternately as a cultural icon, as a tyrant, or as a timely and capable heir who profited from the dynasty his predecessors had built.

As much as assessments of Lorenzo de' Medici's role as patron and director of Florentine artistic production have fluctuated, the critical reception of his own literary production may be even more unsettled. Historically, there has been no collective agreement on how his works should be viewed against or within the Italian literary canon; this elusiveness renders his works intriguing and still worthy of our attention. The lack of critical consensus appears to stem from the diversity of themes and genres in Lorenzo de' Medici's literary production, which resulted in

artistic interests and energy to collecting small antiquities. Wackernagel, *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist: Projects and Patrons, Workshop and Art Market*, trans. Alison Luchs (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981 [1938]). Chastel, *Art et Humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique; études sur la Renaissance et l'humanisme platonicien* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1982 [1959]). Gombrich, "The Early Medici as Patrons of Art," *Italian Renaissance Studies: A Tribute to the late Cecilia M. Ady*, ed. E. F. Jacob (London: Faber and Faber, 1960) 279-311.

⁵ Evelyn Welch reviewed the swell of scholarly attention focused on Lorenzo in 1992. Regarding the general eagerness to identify Lorenzo's contributions in Florentine artistic production, she divided the majority of the works into two fields: those which follow documentary evidence to reveal Lorenzo's (and his circle's) political and artistic interests and those who refer to an "Age of Lorenzo" in which nearly every topic is managed with the assumption of Medicean influence. She noted that questions of visual arts tended to fall into the latter category. Welch, "The Year of Lorenzo," 658-61.

⁶ F. W. Kent, one of the premier scholars of Laurentian history, in his 2004 monograph claimed that it was precisely the myth of Lorenzo that had attracted so much critical attention to the fifteenth-century leader of Florence. He summarized the general sentiment surrounding the 1992 celebration of the Florentine's passing: "his omnipresence and preeminence in all matters cultural are assumed without question." F.W. Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) 4.

a fragmented corpus.⁷ The divergent lines of Lorenzo's production invite differing critical opinions and the eclectic nature of his works has led critics to undervalue Lorenzo's literary persona, judging him to be merely a dabbler or dilettante and his imitation of previous poets as derivative. Such a diverse poetic production demonstrates expressive versatility, but also raises questions about his sincerity and intellectual depth as a poet.⁸ Lorenzo's varied literary production drew on heterogeneous sources, and embraced both *leggero* and *grave* subject matter. Lorenzo's resulting eclectic oeuvre yields no apparent overarching paradigm; the presence of multiple redactions and some unfinished works complicates this critical dilemma.

In the nineteenth century, literary critics viewed Lorenzo de' Medici as a despotic ruler; they did not hold his poetic production in high regard either. Francesco De Sanctis reproached Lorenzo as just one of many blasé rhyme makers of the *Quattrocento*, reducing his *canzoniere* to a collection of empty details and images. Yet we can perceive a valorizing shift in twentieth-century criticism when some critics interpreted his literary works as a kind of *divertissement* or refuge from his political activities. Though no longer dismissing Lorenzo's poetry, this new label still undervalued it. Accepting the label of *divertissement* proves difficult when one considers how often Lorenzo revisited and reworked his corpus. Furthermore, considering his poetry as an escape from political life no longer seems possible when we read the *Comento de' miei sonetti* or consider the development of the *Raccolta Aragonesa* – projects which indicate a

⁷ Paolo Orvieto specifically ascribes the lack of a cohesive critical view to the eclectic nature of Lorenzo's works: "Il problema centrale della critica intorno a Lorenzo sembra essere stato ed essere tuttora la valutazione (ora positiva ora negativa) delle innumerevoli linee divergenti in cui si frantuma la sua produzione letteraria." Paolo Orvieto, *Lorenzo de' Medici*, 87.

⁸ Natalino Sapegno, the influential historian of Italian literature whose encyclopedic coverage of Italian literature included a question of Lorenzo de' Medici's commitment to serious poetry because of the variety of his eclectic oeuvre, stated: "[...] nel campo letterario, le sue opere numerose testimoniano di questa versatilità, ma, appunto, per la varietà discorde dei loro motivi ispiratori e dei loro caratteri artistici, lasciano il critico perplesso e dubbioso della sincerità e della profondità di una vera poetica autentica." Sapegno, *Compendio di storia della letteratura italiana*

fusion of political and poetic preoccupations, as we shall see in Chapters Three and Four of this study.

Over the first half of the twentieth century, criticism of Lorenzo de' Medici's poetry began to shift and a more positive view of his poetic oeuvre gained traction.⁹ Lorenzo's once-denounced eclecticism became a marker of sincere and creative spontaneity.¹⁰ Laurentian studies received a wave of attention in 1992, five hundred years after Lorenzo's death, but much of it regards Lorenzo's political affairs or cultural interests as arbiter and manager of artists and patrons.¹¹ This latest round of studies maintained a fragmented image of Lorenzo *poeta*. The difficulty of dating Lorenzo de' Medici's works, and thus the difficulty of identifying an evolutionary line (stylistically or spiritually) that links them, gives rise to a scholarly tendency to characterize Lorenzo's poetry as a mix of dilettantism and eclecticism, contributing to the fragmentation of the image of Lorenzo the poet.

(Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1948) 351.

⁹ Edmondo Rho's monograph *Lorenzo il Magnifico* began a favorable turn in Laurentian criticism. Rho regarded the diversity of Lorenzo's corpus as an indication of versatility, depth, and spontaneity instead of dilettantism. (Bari: Laterza, 1926). While Rho still disparaged Lorenzo's poetry for being too derivative, he also praised its realism, sincerity, and originality. Vittorio Rossi seems to have captured these competing notions of older opinions and a new valorization of Lorenzo's work in his description of Lorenzo: "spirito pratico di grande profondità, egli fu un magnifico dilettante della vita del pensiero." Rossi, *Il Quattrocento*, 505. Rossi includes a common pejorative refrain – "dilettante" – but softens it with the qualifying "magnificent." Still underscoring the fragmented nature of Lorenzo's work, Rossi highlighted its pleasing and delightful nature.

¹⁰ Bruno Cicognani identified Lorenzo's eclecticism as serious, reflecting the artistic personality of the poet's soul. The once-denounced eclecticism thus became sincere and creative spontaneity. *La poesia di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1950). Emilio Cecchi even promoted the fresh view of Lorenzo's eclecticism as (paradoxically) a unifying element of his works. Cecchi, *Lorenzo Il Magnifico: Commemorazione Tenuta Nel V Anniversario Della Nascita* (Roma: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1949) 1-12. Despite what he called the "obvious limits" of eclecticism, Carlo Oliva deemed Lorenzo's poetic personality "forse la maggiore, e certo la più equilibrata, del secolo." Oliva, *Poesia italiana del Quattrocento* (Milano: Garzanti, 1978) xvii.

¹¹ I turn once again to Welch, who had captured the trends of the outpouring of critical attention of Lorenzo's works and roles in 1992. She suggested that the many conferences and exhibits provided detailed minute examples of Lorenzo's direct engagement with particular works or were "stretched thinly to cover almost every major art commission where he offered advice." Welch, "The Year of Lorenzo," 663.

Philosophical elements in his later works indicate Lorenzo's shift from the comic poems of his youth, like *Nencia da Barberino* that I analyze in Chapter Two, to more cultivated verses, such as his lyric poems included in the *Raccolta Aragonese* and *Comento de' miei sonetti* that I address in Chapters Three and Four. The personal influence of Marsilio Ficino manifests itself in the gradual incorporation of Neoplatonic philosophy into Lorenzo's lyric offerings. This philosophical shift combines with Lorenzo's adoption of Dante Alighieri as a poetic model to account for Lorenzo's move from popular themes to the gravity and subtlety of his love sonnets. In this study I do not attempt to forge a coherent arc across the entirety of Lorenzo de' Medici's oeuvre, nor do I highlight a lack of coherence as the defining feature of his poetic production.¹² Instead, in this study I examine closely some elements heretofore overlooked of Lorenzo's *contaminatio* of various poetic modes and traditions that exhibit various ways in which Lorenzo de' Medici's poems from his earliest parody to his philosophical love sonnets demonstrate his simultaneous cultivation of *impossibile congiunzione* and the integration of heterogeneous models.

My first chapter – *A Lifetime in the Public Eye: Lorenzo de' Medici's Political, Artistic, and Intellectual Culture* – provides the background of the Medicean succession of power from Cosimo to Piero to Lorenzo and specifies how political expediency necessitated a more public leadership role for Lorenzo than it did for his grandfather. I also describe how Lorenzo's formal

¹² Emilio Bigi developed a categorical division of Lorenzo's poems and suggested that Luigi Pulci provided the greatest influence on Lorenzo's comic phase (1476-1478), Marsilio Ficino influenced his philosophical phase (1478-1484), and Angelo Poliziano influenced his erudite/philological phase (1484-1492). Bigi, *Dal Petrarca al Leopardi: Studi di stilistica storica* (Milano: Ricciardi, 1954). Mario Martelli proposed a fourth phase of theological and religious influence (1486/1488-1492) in which Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Girolamo Savonarola influenced Lorenzo's literary productions, such as *Rappresentazione di San Giovanni e Paolo* (1491). Martelli, *Studi Laurenziani* (Firenze: Olschki, 1965). Perhaps Lorenzo's *Comento de' miei sonetti* might fit into a fourth category for theologically influenced works considering that Paolo Orvieto has suggested that Lorenzo may have suppressed some aspects of Ficinian Neoplatonic philosophy and imagery due to the rise of Savonarolan Christian orthodoxy at the end of his life. Orvieto, "Nota introduttiva," *Comento de' miei sonetti in Lorenzo de' Medici Tutte le opere* Vol. 1. (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1992) 325-352. In this study, I explore Lorenzo's *contaminatio* of poetic modes and

experiences on works committees at an early age gave Lorenzo first-hand experience in artistic patronage, an avenue he exploited to extend Florence's reputation as the artistic center of Europe and, correspondingly, to increase his own reputation as a connoisseur. Lorenzo directed his energy on fashioning himself as an embodiment of Florence's famed cultural patrimony in order to build the esteem in which contemporary Italian rulers viewed him and to mitigate his lack of noble title. I also describe the literary landscape in the latter half of the fifteenth century and demonstrate how the major trends in literary production mirror Lorenzo's own poetic production in the same time period.

Lorenzo vociferously defended the Tuscan vernacular; he countered the idea that Italian might be unworthy as a common tongue by upholding universality as its source of dignity. For Lorenzo, four elements shaped the *dignità* of a language: abundant expressive capacity, sweetness and harmony, exemplary literary texts, and circumstances that grant universal appeal to a regional vernacular. Lorenzo pointed to Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Cavalcanti, and others as demonstrations of these elements of *dignità* in Tuscan vernacular, but Lorenzo's championing of the Tuscan vernacular was more of a political act than a poetic affirmation. Florence's cultural patrimony had erected itself around the authority of her great poets. Lorenzo's promotion and diffusion of the Tuscan vernacular and its corresponding prestigious literary culture demonstrated his attempt to grow the universal appeal of *his* regional vernacular. He had so well intertwined his own image with the reputation of Florence's cultural patrimony that his dissemination of the Tuscan vernacular was a manifestation of his own dynastic impulse.

Chapter One also treats the comparison of the active and contemplative ways of life and how it relates to the roles of scholars and statesmen in Florentine affairs through a brief

traditions across his comic and philosophical phases.

investigation of Cristoforo Landino's *Disputationes camaldulenses* (1472-74), a fictive dialogue in which Lorenzo's character overtly encourages the combination of active and contemplative pursuits. The idea of combining active and contemplative lives informs Lorenzo's usage of Marsilio Ficino's variety of Neoplatonism. Later, in Chapters Three and Four, I explore how Lorenzo's Ficinian philosophical framework – based on contemplation and the metaphysical realm of "true" knowledge and beauty – permits him to evoke seemingly incongruent concepts and poetic modes within a single sonnet. For Lorenzo, this reconciliation was not a philosophical exercise but a political maneuver to connect himself with Florence's cultural fame.

In Chapter Two – *Contradictions on the Surface: Literary Heritage and Naturalism in Nencia da Barberino* – I analyze Lorenzo's proclivity for combining incongruent concepts within his poetry even in one of his earliest literary works: *Nencia da Barberino* (pre 1470). Though in the guise of love poetry, *Nencia da Barberino* constitutes an altogether different genre from his later sonnets. While not philosophically charged like his later lyric poems, *Nencia* does reveal difficult conceptual combinations as a common aspect of Lorenzo's poetic style.

Lorenzo's naturalistic portrayal of rustic life through the use of *linguaggio rusticale* and descriptions of a shepherd's preoccupations and responsibilities stands in tension with the expressly literary act of parodying courtly poetry. The comic tone of Lorenzo's poem elicits sympathy for its affable, love-struck protagonist, while its subversive nature invites contempt from Florentine readers claiming hegemonic cultural superiority. Within this chapter I also analyze the image of the shepherd's beloved Nencia that Lorenzo presents to the reader not only to indicate combinations of naturalism and literariness or sympathy and derisive parody, but also to track signs of derivation and innovation in Lorenzo's *descriptio feminae*. Lorenzo's instigation of a new poetic genre – *rime nenciali* – that stems from the tradition of pastoral poetry typifies

his appropriation of the tradition of Tuscan love poetry and the new philosophical trajectory he initiates for it in the *Raccolta Aragonesa*.

In Chapter Three – *Assembling Authority: Stilnovism, Neoplatonism, and Petrarchism in the Raccolta Aragonesa* – I situate the *Raccolta Aragonesa*, a collection of Tuscan vernacular lyric poetry from the end of the *Duecento* up to Lorenzo's own compositions, as Lorenzo de' Medici's political use of his own sonnets for foreign relations. Lorenzo assembled the collection as a gift to Federico d'Aragona, son of the king of Naples, in 1476-77.

Lorenzo inserted some of his own poems into *Raccolta Aragonesa*, including the first four sonnets of his *Comento de' miei sonetti*. By including his own poetry Lorenzo legitimized his poetic production and incorporated himself into the Tuscan vernacular tradition. One must therefore consider Lorenzo's works in relationship to his poetic models and with respect to a dynamic blend of philosophical love, political engagement, and his own poetic self-legitimization.

I analyze Lorenzo's own poems in the *Raccolta Aragonesa* with an eye toward the *impossibile congiunzione* of Dantean and Petrarchan paradigms. In his poems, Lorenzo combined Petrarchan tone and style with stilnovistic images within a framework of Ficinian Neoplatonism. Much of the third chapter is devoted to the analysis and interpretation of "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti" – one of Lorenzo's sonnets that has received little critical attention. This sonnet, grounded in Ficinian contemplation and harmony, merges a Dantean conceit of an image of a lady within the heart of the poet and Petrarch's style of sonnets on portraiture of his beloved lady.

In Chapter Four – *Dante, Petrarch, Ficino, and Lorenzo: Negotiating Florentinity and Empathy in Lorenzo de' Medici's Comento de' miei sonetti* – I analyze Lorenzo's integration of

Petrarchan stylistics, themes, and form and Dantean exegesis within Lorenzo's *Comento de' miei sonetti*. I also analyze Lorenzo's development of his own exegetical poetics, which turns the poetry of personal experience into a hermeneutics of self as a means of seeking domestic political alliances.

Within the proem of *Comento de' miei sonetti*, Lorenzo defended the Tuscan vernacular as a dignified language, but his defensive posturing in the proem actually began with a preemptive justification for commenting on his own sonnets. He doubted whether he should pursue this poetic venture: he attempted to diminish his own presumption and the potential reproof he might have faced for his auto-commentary, not to mention for spending his time on "frivolous" poetry. Moreover, commenting on intimate thoughts may have been even more condemnable than versifying them since exegesis was typically reserved for works of theology and philosophy. In defending his auto-commentary, Lorenzo argues that he is a *poeta grave* and not just a ruler-dilettante; Lorenzo reminded his readers that "Dante lui medesimo" commented on some of his own canzoni and other poems. One must note, though, that Lorenzo did not adopt an exclusively Dantean lexicon or stylistics; indeed, Petrarch remained his guide in this regard.

As a political center as well as the heart of the humanist and Neoplatonist movements, Florence enjoyed a broad European prestige. Whether Lorenzo internalized the impact of this intellectual vogue or was merely influenced by his friends, literary critics note a shift towards philosophical content in Lorenzo's later poetic production. I examine examples of Neoplatonic metaphysics and theories of love as evidence of Lorenzo's contemplative orientation *and* practical political engagement.

Lorenzo's return to stilnovistic themes through the lens of Ficinian Neoplatonism did not generate a new course for lyric poetry; Petrarchism dominated the scene through the next century. Beyond this "failure," Lorenzo's attempt to meld such disparate poetic models rendered his own production somewhat derivative. However, rather than cast Lorenzo's struggle to naturalize his sources and the disorienting results thereof as the failure of a middling poet, I focus on Lorenzo's endeavor in the *Comento de' miei sonetti* as an earnest attempt to realize difficult poetic conjunctions for political purposes.

After a war that had begun with his brother's murder and an attempt on his own life, Lorenzo assumed more official political control than ever before.¹³ However, considering the Florentine disposition toward republican representative government, it became imperative for Lorenzo not to exalt himself as superior to his fellow citizens. Through a close reading of the sonnets and commentary in *Comento de' miei sonetti*, I compare Lorenzo's expressions of personal experience in his lyric poetry to the way he universalizes that experience in his exegetical commentary in an attempt to create an image of himself as a common Florentine citizen. This process affords a discrete political use of his metaphysical poetry in a period of domestic affairs in which he needed to nullify any perceptions of autocratic control.

Lorenzo's political and poetic personae meet in his works, the *Raccolta Aragonesa* (1476-77) and *Comento de' miei sonetti* (1473-90). These texts provide an exceptional locus for a certain conjunction: Lorenzo's own lyrics and the canon of Tuscan poetry. While acknowledging the scholarship that has settled on the political overtones of Lorenzo's defense of the Italian vernacular in the proem of his *Comento de' miei sonetti* and in his epistle accompanying his *Raccolta Aragonesa*, a collection of Tuscan poetry that Lorenzo curated

himself, I also illuminate the political implications of his *poetic* choices – and their difficult combinations – that shape my analysis in the chapters that follow.

We can characterize Lorenzo's early works as neither the offerings of a neophyte nor those of a poetic master. Lorenzo's linguistic experimentation in *Nencia da Barberino* demonstrates an understanding and engagement of pastoral poetic traditions that he combines with a naturalistic view of life in the countryside outside of Florence. The contribution of Lorenzo's poetic production lies not only in innovation within rustic poetry, but in a determined combination of incongruent poetic models and traditions.

Offering a new perspective on what Machiavelli called Lorenzo's *impossibile congiunzione*, this study highlights difficult and apparently discordant combinations in Lorenzo de' Medici's poetic production. This discord arises out of merging naturalistic descriptions within literary parody, a combination of Dantean and Petrarchan poetic modes, language, and themes, and metaphysical contemplation with political application. By focusing on dissonance, I do not intend to expose deficiencies in Lorenzo's poetry; instead, I suggest how discord functions as part of Lorenzo's attempt to construct his poetic authority. Furthermore, I aim at showing how Lorenzo turns to Ficinian Neoplatonism as a way to reconcile the incongruities in his poetic models and the competing drives of creating a public persona and maintaining political authority.

¹³ Lorenzo's creation of the *Consiglio dei settanta* significantly weakened the elected officials of the *Signoria* and concentrated more power into his own hands and those of his sympathizers. I explore the impact of gaining more political influence on Lorenzo's poetic production in Chapter Four.

Chapter 1 – A Lifetime in the Public Eye: Lorenzo de' Medici's Political, Artistic, and Intellectual Culture

Lorenzo spent his entire life on Florence's stage, always in the public eye; he did not enjoy the same luxury as his father and grandfather who could manage to pull political strings from behind the scenes. Underlying my analysis in this dissertation are the political circumstances and cultural trends that provoke Lorenzo de' Medici to employ his own love poetry for political posturing, whether to impress the rulers of various Italian courts or to make public his personal anguishes to appear more understandable to his fellow Florentines. In this chapter I establish the cultural and political scenario within which Lorenzo operates, beginning with the politics of Medicean succession.

As founder of the Medici bank, Lorenzo's great grandfather, Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici (1360-1429), set the family on a course to wealth and its associated influence in Florence and beyond. Memoirs indicate that on his deathbed Giovanni imparted sage advice to his sons Cosimo and Lorenzo, admonishing them to act with graciousness and mercy and to expend their capacity to aid their fellow citizens. Regarding the exercise of power, Giovanni stated: "[...] Non parlate con modo di consiglio, ma sì di mansueto e amorevole ragionamento. Ancora il palagio non essercitate in farne bottega; anzi aspettate dal palagio essere chiamati; e allora siate ubbidienti, e non insuperbite delle eccelse voci." Historians have frequently repeated this account as an indication of Giovanni's own nature and *modus operandi*. Giovanni, thus, has been portrayed as content to remain out of the limelight in order to focus on banking without much pretense for political aspiration.¹⁴

¹⁴ This quotation of Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici's advice to his sons is a citation of the chronicler Giovanni Cavalcanti (1381-1451) in *Istorie fiorentine*, vol. 1 (Firenze: Tipografia all'insegna di Dante, 1838 [1440-1447]) 263. This story first appeared in print with the title *Memorie di Giovanni di Averardo detto Bicci de' Medici, alla morte sua nel 1428*. Giovanni's recommendation likely appears so often today as a characterization of his own

Insofar as it would be possible for anyone upon whom the honorific *Pater patriae* has been bestowed, Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464) sought the guise of a private citizen as well. Like his father, Cosimo operated behind the scenes, but with a much more ambitious role in the destiny of his family and of his native land. Seldom in elevated roles of public office, Cosimo instead cultivated his influence and utilized his immense wealth as a patron of arts and humanist scholarship as he helped shape Florence as the intellectual and artistic capital of Europe.

He also constructed the Medici palace; although it set a trend for urban palaces and became a veritable museum of art, the palace's unassuming rusticated façade gave the impression of little pretense. From within his palace, Cosimo directed most of the affairs of the state. As a private citizen hosting foreign ambassadors as well as representatives of the Florentine regime, Cosimo succeeded in swaying governmental decisions while avoiding the exhibition and attention of elected officials in the *Signoria*.

Cosimo's son, Piero the Gouty (1416-69), perhaps conducted even more government business in the Palazzo Medici than his father because he was so often bedridden. As a politician, Piero was a relative neophyte. In a republic that demanded negotiation and curation of relationships, Piero was a private man and a connoisseur who preferred to give attention to his library, collection of precious gems, portraits of noble leaders, and other *objets d'art* within his own palace.¹⁵

The circumstances of Cosimo's birth hardly seemed to portend the fame and power that lay in store. Cosimo was born before Giovanni had amassed his fortune; the Medici family held

disposition because of its contrast in light of the ambition and political maneuvering of his posterity.

¹⁵ Machiavelli dismissively noted that other leading citizens among Florence's factions had very little confidence in Piero as a leader because he was sickly and relatively inexperienced in political administration. *Istorie fiorentine*, VII.5.

a nondescript position on the fringes of the ruling class, barely removed from their origins in the countryside and their working-class ancestor, Salvestro, who had participated in the Ciompi revolt of 1378. At Lorenzo's birth (1449), the Medici had risen to become the leading family of Florence's ruling class. Lorenzo was born to lead his native city and to fulfill the Medici's dynastic aims. Cosimo's building projects on behalf of the city emerged as the public legacy of his many years of pulling the political strings of the state, but Lorenzo's very life was a spectacle. He was thrust into the public eye from the very beginning.¹⁶

With Lorenzo's baptism, a continuous stream of deliberate Medici promotion and propaganda had begun. The Medici signaled their own grandeur by the company they kept. Several dignitaries were present at the baptistery of San Giovanni: Florence's archbishop Antoninus, who presided over the sacred rite and served as the boy's godfather, the entirety of the outgoing *Signoria* and Agnolo Acciaiuoli, the current *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*, and Federico da Montefeltro, ruler of Urbino. Piero had waited beyond the traditional three days

¹⁶ This historical overview of Medici succession derives from various accounts by Renaissance and modern historians. Miles Unger's popular history provides an accessible biographical account of Lorenzo's life that proves more in-depth than Christopher Hibbert's history for a similarly wide audience. Hibbert's title suggests an investigation of the forces that led to the rise and fall of the Medici family, but instead it focuses on biographies of individuals from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Unger, *Magnifico: The Brilliant Life and Violent Times of Lorenzo de' Medici*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008). Hibbert, *The House of Medici, its Rise and Fall* (New York: Morrow Quill, 1974). Nicolai Rubinstein explores how the Medici utilized institutions of Florence's government to their advantage within the limitations of a constitutional republican system. He demonstrates the immense complexities that the Medici had to navigate to have any sway over the direction of the state, contrasting starkly the lordships and principates throughout Italy. Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici, 1434-1494* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966). Niccolò Valori's *Vita di Lorenzo (1492-1494, 1517-1521)* eulogizes Lorenzo's achievements and virtues in a comprehensive survey of his life. *Vita di Lorenzo de' Medici* (Vicenza: Accademia Olimpica, 1991). Niccolò Machiavelli's section on Lorenzo in *Istorie Fiorentine* (1525) eulogizes his significant political actions, but it also includes some veiled criticisms within the speeches of Lorenzo's contemporaries in his account. *Istorie Fiorentine in Istorie Fiorentine e altre opere storiche e politiche*, ed. Alessandro Monteverchi (Torino: UTET Libreria, 2007). Francesco Guicciardini provides a critical evaluation of Lorenzo's "reign" in *Storie fiorentine dal 1378 al 1509* (1509) but a more favorable view of Lorenzo in his *Dialogo del Reggimento di Firenze* (1521-1526). *Storie fiorentine dal 1378 al 1509*, ed. Roberto Palmarocchi (Bari: Laterza, 1931). *Dialogo e discorsi del reggimento di Firenze*, ed. Roberto Palmarocchi (Bari: Laterza, 1932). Felix Gilbert has noted how each of these works from Valori, Machiavelli, and Guicciardini indicates an idealized view of Lorenzo based on political posturing because they were each written for one of his descendants. Gilbert, "Guicciardini, Machiavelli, Valori on Lorenzo Magnifico," *Renaissance News* 11.2 (1958) 107-14. In my brief account, I focus on the political and dynastic circumstances that thrust Lorenzo de' Medici into

after birth for Lorenzo's ceremony so that it coincided with the celebration of the Epiphany. Through portraiture and pageantry, the Medici often sought to align themselves in the minds of the people with the Magi, perhaps the most glamorous and wealthy among the righteous figures of the Christian tradition.¹⁷

Lorenzo's appearances in pageantry and spectacle were calculated to place him at the center of attention as the consummate Florentine citizen. As a type of public relations representative, Lorenzo stood as an accessible bridge between the Medici and their fellow citizens while simultaneously demonstrating the prestige of the city's leading family. The pomp, spectacle, and civic entertainment of the joust that Lorenzo organized for February 1469 represents his zenith as the zestful, youthful face of the Medici family. Lorenzo focused so intently on preparing the exhibition that he did not even bother to maintain correspondence with his promised wife-to-be, Clarice, of the powerful Orsini family of Rome. From his birth, Lorenzo had been presented as an heir destined to lead Florence; he was the "hope of the city."¹⁸

The Medici were not fully prepared for the death of Cosimo, *pater familias* and Cosimo, *pater patriae*. The already problematic task of transition or succession from father to son as de facto ruler of a proud republic proved even more difficult since the general consensus was that Piero was too weak to replace his revered father. In book seven of *Istorie fiorentine*, Machiavelli reported Piero's dismay at the lack of support from prominent citizens whom he believed to be

the public eye from his very birth through his entire life.

¹⁷ An example of a visual representation of the Medici family as Magi is Benozzo Gozzoli's fresco cycle that includes his *Procession of the Magi* (1459-1461) in the Chapel of the Magi in the Palazzo Medici in which members of the Medici family are portrayed as participants in the procession. The *Compagnia de' Magi*, a lay confraternity that produced pageants and other devotional activities, was a "major interest of the young Lorenzo de' Medici." Rab Hatfield, "The Compagnia de' Magi," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970) 107.

¹⁸ Alison Brown notes that at Cosimo's death, Medici sympathizers dubbed Lorenzo, not his sickly and aloof father, the "hope of the city." Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala, 1430-1497, Chancellor of Florence: The Humanist as*

his associates. Those loyal Medici partisans, however, were contemporaries of Cosimo who sought to exercise their own ambition after the death of their friend. Luca Pitti, Agnolo Acciaiuoli, and Dietisalvi Neroni sought to undermine any semblance of Medicean dynasticism in order to restore power to their ancient families of Florence's ruling class. They plotted their seizure of power while Piero tended to his dying father outside the city at the family villa in Careggi. With no alternative scheme at the ready, their attempted coup disintegrated when they failed to capture Piero upon his return to Florence. As a result, influential citizens of the government decisively settled to Piero's side. Even Pitti and Acciaiuoli recognized the risk of family ruin by being on the wrong side of the balance of power; thus they too bolstered Piero's position by quickly reasserting their allegiance to him.

Cosimo's purported dying requests for a funeral void of pomp and a simple tomb demonstrated the prominent role of political expedience in the lives of the Medici. In such a precarious transition, Piero could not risk any air of exceptionalism. Even after successfully squelching his rivals, Piero did not immediately seize power but rather utilized established constitutional processes. He understood the perils of seeking absolute power among a citizenry fiercely dedicated to republican values. Piero's attention to appearance in these circumstances anticipates Lorenzo's poetic ethos of an ordinary citizen in his *Comento de' miei sonetti*, that I investigate in Chapter Four of this dissertation, in a period in which Lorenzo too navigated similar waters as he pursued greater control of Florentine affairs.

Through the thorny process of the succession of power, Piero's relative political weakness required Lorenzo, more than ever, to be the exuberant face of the family. After his grandfather's death in 1466, Lorenzo, still a teenager, began to exercise the duties of a bona fide politician.

Bureaucrat, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979) 41. Cosimo's colleagues may have also seen the boy as a more malleable ally than his father for their own political ends.

Lorenzo, who had been hounded for political favors since he was ten years old, often substituted for his father at meetings of the *Consiglio dei cento*, a governmental body created by Cosimo that at the time was comprised of the most influential political participants of the city, and he began to serve on various works committees and confraternities.¹⁹ He also traveled throughout Italy as he learned more about Italian court society.²⁰ While in Milan in 1465, Lorenzo reaffirmed Florence's vital alliances with Milan and Naples that Cosimo had established years prior and he quickly developed friendships with Galeazzo Maria Sforza and Federico Ferrante. Cultivating these relationships would later prove instrumental in promoting peace for Florence and the rest of Italy and they also helped to shape Lorenzo's collection of Tuscan vernacular love poetry that he gifted to Federico that I analyze in Chapter Three of this study.

Like Cosimo, Piero had a conventional funeral of a Florentine citizen. Upon Piero's death in December of 1469, however, there was no struggle for power – all officials looked to Lorenzo as their leader. The interrelationship of dependence between Lorenzo and leaders of the republic was crucial. Elected officials had effectively yielded power to Lorenzo, but he simultaneously sought to maintain their good faith; thus, any policies and direction needed to

¹⁹ F.W. Kent notes that Lorenzo's earliest extant letters (from 1460 and 1461) represent responses to requests for political favors. F.W. Kent, "The Young Lorenzo, 1449-1469," *Lorenzo the Magnificent: Culture and Politics*, ed. Michael Mallet and Nicholas Mann (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1996) 20-22. In a later summative work of decades of his scholarship on Lorenzo, F.W. Kent mentions that he considers Lorenzo's opportunities on works committees as his first experiences in civic affairs and in how to operate effectively in a republican government. F.W. Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004) 21-28. Later in this chapter I return to Kent's consideration of Lorenzo's early governmental experiences in relation to his artistic patronage.

²⁰ Early letters indicate that while still a teenager Lorenzo had traveled to Bologna, Padova, Vicenza, Verona, Modena, Ferrara, Roma, Napoli, Milano, Lucca, and Pisa. These letters include both the impetuous pleas of youth, such as Lorenzo's cries for permission to travel with friends to Pisa when fourteen, and Piero's persistent reminders to comport himself with modesty and to honor and serve the households of the lordships he visited. *Lettere*, vol. 1, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (Firenze: Giunti, 1977). See especially 11 May 1465, Piero to Lorenzo, for Piero's advice to his son to behave properly and to spare no expense in bringing himself honor during his stay in Milan as a guest of the Sforzas for the celebration of the wedding of Ippolita Maria Sforza and Alfonso d'Aragona, Duke of Calabria. *Lettere*, vol. 1, 15.

represent their interests. Their reciprocal relationship functioned well until a new ambitious player in peninsular politics threatened Italy's stability.

Francesco della Rovere (1414-84), who became Pope Sixtus IV in 1471, sought to strengthen and expand the Papal States and to advance the careers of family members that he had appointed to various positions within the papal court and beyond. As an example, Pope Sixtus IV wanted to purchase control of Imola from Milan and turn it over to his nephew as a wedding gift. Imola was a small but strategically situated city on Florence's northern border that served as a gateway to Romagna and a path to Florence's northern trade routes. In order to secure the strategic post for Florence, Lorenzo had moved swiftly to establish an agreement with Galeazzo Maria Sforza for Imola's purchase ahead of the pope.

Lorenzo and Sixtus IV were already at odds over episcopal appointments in Tuscany and Lorenzo's move to purchase Imola exacerbated their strained relationship. Sixtus made an offer to the Sforza at a much lower price, coupled with the threat of interdict that would nullify all existing treaties and contracts between the two states. Since an interdict would practically ruin Milan economically, Galeazzo Maria withdrew his agreement with Lorenzo and sold Imola to the pope. Antagonizing Lorenzo even further, Sixtus then turned to the Medici bank for a loan to make the purchase. Lorenzo was caught between personal gain – the papal account was perhaps the most beneficial component of the Medici business – and the interest of the state. He chose the latter and became the most significant impediment to the aspirations of Sixtus and his family.

Lorenzo's decision not to fund the pope created an opportunity for the Pazzi family. Though Lorenzo advised him not to do so, Francesco Pazzi advanced a loan to the pope. He sought to take advantage of the scenario in order to return his proud family to prominence in the Florentine ruling class. Ultimately, Francesco Pazzi and close associates of the pope, Girolamo

Riario and Francesco Salviati, determined that their political ascension depended upon the complete demise of the Medici family. Their scheming ended in Giuliano's murder and Lorenzo's severe wounding at high mass in the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore on Sunday, April 26, 1478. The resultant frenzied retaliation of the Florentine people on the conspirators propelled Florence and the Papal States to an inevitable war.

Florence's triple alliance with Milan and Naples had been eroding as the Sforza family was entangled in internal strife with problems of succession and as the pope stoked King Ferrante's expansionist desires. In July of 1478, Alfonso Ferrante, Duke of Calabria, took up arms with Siena and the pope's army, led by Federico da Montefeltro; they destroyed various Florentine holdings in the Tuscan countryside as Florence manifested its customary military weakness. By constitutional statute, no Florentine citizen could command troops – an ardently democratic measure that ensured no hostile takeovers from within that conversely left Florence dependent upon allies and fickle mercenaries. Florence's forces were in disarray: Milan was distracted, old ally Venice offered only tentative support due to threats of Turkish invasions, Ercole d'Este, who had been approached to lead the allied forces, remained at home, quibbling over his fee, and mercenary troops had to be reorganized because of excessive infighting.

By the summer of 1479 Florence and the Medici had approached desperation. The pope had nearly bankrupted the Medici by taking hold of the assets of the Roman branch of the bank. All fighting occurred in Florentine territories and as it continued, food became scarce inside of Florence. To make matters worse, instances of the plague appeared in neighborhoods along the Arno.

Lorenzo knew he could not placate Sixtus, so he traveled to King Ferdinando Ferrante's court in Naples to sue for peace. He willingly singled himself out as the chief target of the

opposition and as the citizen most indebted to the state, thus his willingness to make a potentially dangerous mission to Naples and to take all responsibility upon himself to reach an accord.²¹

Lorenzo received a warm welcome in Naples from ambassadors and members of Ferrante's court. Relationships formed and cultivated over discussions of poetry and philosophy with King Ferdinando's younger son Federico and with Ippolita Sforza, wife of the king's older son, Alfonso, appeared to have borne timely political fruit. Lorenzo sought to further ingratiate himself with the court and city by giving parties and through acts of generosity like purchasing the freedom of Christian slaves from pirates and supplying dowries to daughters of the poor. King Ferrante welcomed Lorenzo graciously, but diplomatic negotiations proceeded slowly. Finally, months after his arrival, Lorenzo convinced the King of the need to temper Sixtus IV's growing power by preventing the expansion of the Papal States through central Italy.

With a peace treaty signed, Lorenzo returned to Florence an outright hero. Perhaps the King's need to address the threat of Turkish invasions on the shores of the Adriatic Sea had more impact on Ferrante's decision to sign an accord than any of Lorenzo's persuasion, but the perception throughout Europe of Lorenzo's acumen as a statesman increased exponentially. Lorenzo built his reputation as a statesman on this settlement. He had departed from Florence in a position of weakness, and as he had framed the scenario in his letter to Florence's government, he was the only hope for the city. He returned to Florence to a jubilant citizenry that was eager to place more power into his capable hands.

²¹ Nicolai Rubinstein posits that after the attempt on Lorenzo's life in April 1478, the consensus in Florence was that the defense of Florence and the defense of Lorenzo were one and the same matter. Rubinstein, "Lorenzo de' Medici: The Formation of His Statecraft," *Lorenzo de' Medici Studi*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Firenze: Olschki, 1992) 41-66. Lorenzo strengthened this alignment of self and state when he took upon himself full responsibility to reach an agreement of peace with King Ferrante. His personal interests were intertwined with those of the republic.

As Lorenzo acquired more institutional control, he had to carefully craft his image to avoid signs of despotism. In Chapter Four I explore how he utilizes his love sonnets to address this issue by seeking to demonstrate common bonds with the citizenry. Florence had been governed as a republic since early in the twelfth century. Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540) described the restlessness that Florentines felt regarding anyone who sought to exalt himself above others: "A Firenze, li uomini amano naturalmente la equalità e però si accordano mal volentieri a avere e ricognoscere altri per superiore."²² Guicciardini's reference to "equality" intends equality among the few thousand men who belonged to major or minor guilds, which qualified them for participation in Florence's governing class. Even in Italy, the most urbanized region of Europe at the time, nearly three quarters of the population were peasants. Florence's republic consisted of a democratization of participation instead of wide suffrage. At frequent intervals, typically two months, new representatives were randomly selected to serve in the city's governing body.

Many factions sought to tamper with electoral processes, and the Medici were no different. Cosimo had initiated a temporary system of *Accoppiatori* who sifted the names of all eligible guild members in order to ensure a higher probability of Medici sympathizers who would be selected at random for governing the city. Though created only for times of crisis, Cosimo and Piero frequently utilized the *Accoppiatori* to their advantage. Cosimo also revised the *Consiglio dei cento* so that many governing responsibilities were shifted away from more democratic bodies to this group that consisted mostly of Medici supporters.

²² Guicciardini's expression of republican equality appears in *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze* (1521-1526), 21. Though the tone of *Dialogo* rendered it more supportive of Medici rule, Guicciardini had been critical of the extent of their control in *Storie fiorentine* (1509). See note 16.

After the attempt on his life in 1478, the government and people rallied behind Lorenzo. For this time of war, Lorenzo created an emergency committee of ten men, the *Dieci della guerra*, and placed himself in the lead role. This group assumed the power of organizing and supplying military forces and had the ability to raise revenue. After returning from Naples with an immensely popular agreement of peace, Lorenzo seized the opportunity to solidify his control of the state's affairs. The government created a new executive committee, il *Consiglio dei settanta*, that effectively rendered powerless the *Signoria* of elected priors. Within that *consiglio* were two committees that ran the practical domestic and foreign affairs of the government. Of course, Lorenzo was appointed to one of those committees. He had succeeded in concentrating more power in fewer hands, especially his own.

However, Lorenzo continually found himself on unstable political ground. The Medici had emerged from the merchant class; they were bankers, not aristocrats. They had no titles of nobility or official claims on authority, yet Lorenzo was a political player on the world stage. At home, Lorenzo needed to demonstrate that he was a worthy and distinguished leader among the long established families of Florence's governing class while balancing the necessity of not vaunting himself as superior among Florentines. Lorenzo utilized his own poetry to address these political exigencies.

Lorenzo de' Medici and Florentine literary culture

Florentine literary culture in Lorenzo de' Medici's time looks much like the arc of the various phases of Lorenzo's own poetic activity. First to emerge in Lorenzo's progression is a period of exploration of expression in the vernacular with Francesco d'Altobianco degli Alberti and Luigi Pulci as representative exemplars, followed by a subsequent period of philosophical

poetry influenced by Marsilio Ficino. Then a period of erudite philology follows, exemplified by Angelo Poliziano, and finally, a period of theological and religious interest with noted figures like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Girolamo Savonarola.²³

Lorenzo's mother, Lucrezia Tornabuoni, commissioned Luigi Pulci to pen his mock epic *Morgante*. Lorenzo's humorous expressions in the vulgar tongue mirrored the forms – sonnets, canzoni, *strambotti*, and carnival songs – made popular in Florence at the time by Pulci, his brother Luca, Francesco d'Altobianco degli Alberti and others. Lighthearted poetic production of this sort is often associated with the cheery nature of untroubled youth. As such, Lorenzo's poetry changed as his interests and experiences evolved.

Lorenzo's move away from lighthearted poetry coincided with grave personal and political events: the death of family members, his ascendancy to a leadership position, and revolts in Prato and Volterra. Any one of these events might provoke a more serious tenor, but the literary culture shifted as well with the rising popularity of Marsilio Ficino's brand of Neoplatonic philosophy. Ficino and Lorenzo had been in the same circles since Lorenzo's youth, but Ficino's influence on Lorenzo's literary interests grew with the advent of the Florentine Academy (founded by Ficino) and its Neoplatonic base. I return to the question of Ficino's philosophical influence on Lorenzo later in this chapter and especially in the Ficinian tenets at the foundation of Lorenzo's poetic enterprise in the *Raccolta Aragonese* and *Comento de' miei sonetti* that I analyze in Chapters Three and Four respectively.

²³ Mario Martelli explores the literary culture in Lorenzo's lifetime and establishes the general correspondence to the phases of Lorenzo's production. Martelli, "La cultura letteraria nell'età di Lorenzo," *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo tempo*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Firenze: Olschki Editore, 1992) 39-42. Granted, with any delineations in a realm as fluid as literary culture, we must keep in mind that these phases overlap and that most of these figures that have been cited had influenced both Florentine culture and Lorenzo's own interests over a lifetime. That having been said, Martelli's multiple phases indicate Lorenzo's various literary personalities and their studies surface with poignancy at different times and his categorization aids the discussion of an oeuvre as eclectic as Lorenzo's.

Alongside this philosophical trend, rooted in Florence, but spreading through Europe, is Lorenzo's return to the Florentine poets of the *Trecento*. The appeal of metaphysical love poetry in the *dolce stil novo* coupled with the burgeoning legitimacy of vernacular poetry make the recovery of Florence's previous poetic glory in this period natural and, perhaps, inevitable. In this same period, Lorenzo was not alone in his return to *Trecento* lyric poetry. Cristoforo Landino, renowned humanist scholar and chair at the Florentine Studio, had primarily studied classics at the Florentine Studio but shifted to reading Petrarch's *Canzoniere* in 1467-70. His commentary on Dante's *Commedia* (1481) further underscores the trend of a renewed interest in *Trecento* Florentine poetry.

The literary influence of other personages grows in a period of peace with enemies in Rome and Naples in 1480. Perhaps more of a personal influence on Lorenzo in this wave of erudite inquiry was Angelo Poliziano, the renowned humanist philologist who became Lorenzo's best friend.²⁴ Poliziano transitioned from being the tutor of Lorenzo's children to chaired professor of poetry and rhetoric at the Florentine Studio.

In addition to philological and philosophical inquiry in this period, there was an interest in theological study in the vein of philosophical syncretism. Ficino dedicated himself to reconciling Platonic philosophy with Christianity, while Giovanni Pico della Mirandola sought to syncretize beyond even these two systems of thought. Pico's works like the *Heptaplus* (philosophical exegesis of the first chapter of Genesis) and commentary on the Psalms certainly demonstrated his interest in theology, but they were not received well by orthodox Rome and

²⁴ In this postbellum period, Martelli describes Florence as possessing a post-Ficinian literary culture. Martelli, "Cultura letteraria," 64-65. Martelli does not claim that Ficino's influence disappears, but that other influences grow in this period. My analysis of Lorenzo's *Comento de' miei sonetti*, which Lorenzo composed and revised throughout the 1480s, in Chapter Four does not align with Martelli's judgment as I find Ficinian Neoplatonism to be a significant influence on the overall structure of the collection and in some of the individual sonnets.

they eventually led to his excommunication. Philosophical and theological investigation was of interest to Lorenzo as well, as noted in some of his lyric poetry, e.g. “Lo spirito talora a sé ridotto,” which treats the notions of sin and grace. A theological debate at the *Duomo* in June 1489 by leading Dominicans and Franciscans regarding original sin and the role of God evidence an interest among Florentines in a range of philosophies and theologies. Lorenzo, Poliziano, Pico, and Ficino were all present and the discussion continued the following week at the Medici Palace.²⁵

In the last decade of the fifteenth century, though, Florence (including Lorenzo) exhibited a new cultural direction under the aegis of the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola. Lorenzo wrote his *Sacra rappresentazione di San Pietro e Paolo* in this phase, and all of Florence seemed influenced by Savonarola’s religious fervor. In a matter of only a few years, though, this trend in literary culture vanishes as Lorenzo and other leading figures pass away. The variations in Florence’s literary culture mirrored those of Lorenzo’s own production, yet it remains difficult to determine whether Lorenzo led the way or shrewdly pursued the city’s popular cultural trends.²⁶

²⁵ Jill Kraye proposes this very debate as representative of Florentine philosophical and theological interests in this period as opposed to the apparent predominance of Ficinian Neoplatonism on the Florentine intellectual landscape. Kraye, “Lorenzo and the Philosophers,” *Lorenzo the Magnificent: Culture and Politics*, ed. Michael Mallett and Nicholas Mann (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1996) 151-66. See note 50 for more on questioning the nature of Florence’s philosophical trends in the 1480s.

²⁶ James Cook believes Lorenzo de’ Medici was a true polymath and “not merely an observer, but [...] a full-fledged participant, and often [...] the prime mover” of Florentine intellectual and literary culture. Cook, *The Autobiography of Lorenzo de’ Medici The Magnificent: A Commentary on My Sonnets*, Introduction (Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995) 15. Martelli claims that Lorenzo and Ficino joined forces in Careggi with the express intent to impact Florentine culture and impose the study of Neoplatonic philosophy. Martelli, “Cultura letteraria,” 39-55. James Hankins argues, however, that while we cannot discount the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy in this period, there is little evidence to show that Lorenzo was any more than one of many members of the Platonic Academy and that the academy itself was “much less important than has been thought.” Hankins, “The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence,” *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. 2 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004) 219-22. I will not attempt to authoritatively define Lorenzo’s role in initiating these trends, however, I will demonstrate some instances of intersections of political and cultural influences in Lorenzo’s poetry as Lorenzo situates his own lyric production as an heir of and also a new direction of Florentine cultural history. These topics will be considered especially in Chapters Three and

Questione della lingua nel Quattrocento

Lorenzo de' Medici experimented in many types of poetic production, testing the expressive possibilities of the vernacular tongue. He utilized the regional language to bolster the cultural distinction of Florence and all of Tuscany, and endorsing the vernacular was a literary choice with a long history as well. At the onset of the fifteenth century, all men of letters knew Latin and employed it almost exclusively. For the first half of the *Quattrocento*, the emphasis humanist scholars placed on ancient Latin meant the exclusion of vernaculars among *literati*.²⁷ The efforts of Leon Battista Alberti, Cristoforo Landino, Lorenzo de' Medici, and others granted sufficient dignity to the Italian vernacular that it was often employed for intellectual pursuits in the latter decades of the century. However, for intellectual activity in the first decades of the century, the question of using Latin or Italian vernacular was not really up for debate. Without an understanding of the ideals of humanism, it would appear odd that Italian vernacular (Tuscan/Florentine) would be abandoned for literary purposes after such monumental productions in the *Trecento*.²⁸ From Petrarch's *Canzoniere* to the middle of the fifteenth century, literary production in the vernacular is staggeringly sparse and not considered erudite.

Four.

²⁷ Maurizio Vitale, linguist and historian of Italian language and literature, claims that humanist interests in classical texts essentially killed scholarly interest in vernacular tongues: "L'avvento dell'Umanesimo nel Quattrocento segnò, insieme al trionfo del latino, l'apparente mortificazione del volgare." Vitale, *La questione della lingua* (Palermo: Palumbo, 1984) 20. Lorenzo's recovery of *Trecento* poetry went hand in hand with his interest in resurrecting and spreading the Tuscan vernacular. Bruno Migliorini, former president of the *Accademia della Crusca*, notes the lack of vernacular *literati* in the first half of the century: "Se esaminiamo complessivamente lo stato della lingua italiana durante il Quattrocento, notiamo una differenza notevole fra la prima e l'ultima parte del secolo... Nei primi decenni il volgare è depresso e sminuito nell'opinione generale, di contro al latino esaltato dal trionfante umanesimo: esso è ridotto a funzioni modeste, quasi ancillari. Non manca chi scriva in volgare, in poesia e in prosa; manca chi lo coltivi con cura, con amore, con coscienza d'arte." Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana* (Milano: Bompiani, 1994 [1960]) 230. Migliorini highlights the dearth of artists who truly succeeded in nurturing and developing the vernacular in the first decades of the fifteenth century. While Migliorini does acknowledge the presence of some writers in the vernacular tongue, the lack of writers cultivating the language leads to Vitale's statement of the virtual death of the vernacular for literary pursuits.

²⁸ The Tuscan vernacular developed in the *Trecento* by means of Florence's greatest literary productions from Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Giancarlo Mazzacurati highlights the oddity of the vernacular's disuse in the fifteenth

With a critical awareness of the distance between their day and the classical past, humanists sought out the virtue of the ancients; their zeal included a recovery of classical Latin, which exemplified and bridged the discussion between past and present. Writing in Latin lent temporal universality to their scholarly pursuits and helped humanism move beyond a regional or even national audience. As Dante claimed in his *Convivio* (1304-07), Latin's nobility derives from its resistance to decay; it is *perpetuo* and *incorruttibile* (I, V, 7-8). Although Dante subsequently championed the natural vernacular as more noble than Latin in his *De vulgari eloquentia* (1302-05), he also noted that because they are living and changing, vernacular languages are unstable (I, IX). Thus the elegance and eternalizing qualities of humanists' literary language aptly symbolized the nature and aspirations of their intellectual pursuits.

Choosing to write in classical Latin demonstrates humanists' appreciation and emulation of the ancient writers as well as their contempt for medieval Latin. The resultant Latin of the early fifteenth century represented its elitist usage aimed at intellectual exchange among the erudite. With waning support for medieval Latin and unbound by Latin purists – because the most tenacious adherents of classical form were concerned with letters – the vernacular grew in the more practical spheres of domestic and commercial usages.²⁹ Though ignored in the literary field, the practical aspects of the vernacular greatly increased its value otherwise.

century considering its maturity as a literary language: "L'Italia del XV secolo [è] divisa tra una lingua d'uso esclusivamente letterario (il latino) ed un'altra già pienamente configurata nel suo lessico e nella sua morfologia già ricca di grandi esperienze letterarie relegata quasi d'improvviso al rango di lingua parlata o al massimo al rango di lingua idonea soltanto alle scritture familiari e popolari." Mazzacurati, *Pietro Bembo e la questione del "volgare"* (Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1984) 7. Such was the strength of the admiration and interest of humanist scholars in the language of the ancient texts they discovered and studied.

²⁹ Vitale suggests that the growth of practical usage of the vernacular occurs in this period because classical Latin was limited solely to elite humanist usage: "In Toscana e a Firenze particolarmente, gli interessi e gli ideali letterati dei dotti son rivolti al latino imposto dall'Umanesimo, e gli scrittori più alti sperimentano nel latino le tendenze culturali più vive e raffinate; dal suo canto il volgare, accantonato ma non obliterato negli intenti umanistici, diviene strumento d'espressione di una più vasta cerchia sociale dominata da interessi pratici, domestici e borghesi e conquista addirittura nuove zone di uso, prima riservate al latino scolastico e medievale." Vitale, *Questione della*

Documentation for commercial lawsuits could be found in vernacular early in the century; by midcentury, notaries kept expenditure accounts in vernacular as well. Bilingual sermons became more common as all types of communication, other than scholarly discourse, became more utilitarian. At court, Latin typically enjoyed favor, though some princes openly supported the use of the vernacular. Around 1440, Filippo Maria Sforza sponsored Guiniforte Barizza's and Francesco Filefo's commentaries on vernacular works of Dante and Petrarch while he also supported the use of Italian in the Milanese chancery.³⁰ Correspondence in Ferrara's Estense court was in Italian vernacular and beginning with Nicolò III, the court began to support vernacular literary culture. In Naples, usage of Catalan predominated in the Aragonese court until the Italian vernacular came into use under Ferdinando Ferrante d'Aragona. Emminently logical in hindsight, commercial, religious, and political communication for those that were in contact with and sustained by the *volgo* occurred with increasing frequency and pervasiveness in *volgare*. The language question – regarding letters – became less one-sided as the century unfolded and as scholars began to operate in and defend the usage of the vernacular. The efforts of Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72) to advance the cause of the *volgare* and prepare the way for those who followed and glorified the vulgar tongue stand out as crucial to this transition.

Alberti's versatile genius (with expertise in painting, architecture, poetry, philosophy, public and family life, etc.) garnered the praise of Jacob Burckhardt; thus history remembers him as a "Renaissance man" of many talents. However, by championing the vernacular, he set

lingua, 21. The usage of the vernacular grew even more as it filled popular use cases, e.g. juridical and ecclesiastical language, previously occupied by the newly abandoned medieval Latin.

³⁰ Migliorini emphasizes Filippo Maria Sforza's promotion of the vernacular as an indication of changing perceptions regarding the *volgare* particularly because he was even a capable *speaker* of Latin: "[Sforza] era anche in grado di improvvisare un discreto discorso in latino." Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana*, 226.

himself apart from the highest intellectual circles and the official culture.³¹ His support of the vernacular did not appear to represent a zero-sum mentality that automatically set him at odds with other humanists; though questioning its hegemony, he did not argue against the merits of classical Latin. He advanced the dignity of the vernacular and attempted to diminish the gaps among intellectual, commercial, and political pursuits.

Alberti's *Quattro libri della famiglia* (1437-38, 1441) associated intricately with the *questione della lingua*. He wished to respond to the criticism he received for composing *Teogenio* (1434), a philosophical dialogue, in vernacular. His defense in the preface to the third book of the *Quattro libri della famiglia* illuminates his separation from the tradition of Latin composition because he valued instrumentality in language over the authority of Latin. He stated: "Benché stimo niuno dotto negarà quanto a me pare qui da credere, che tutti gli antichi scrittori scrivessero in modo che da tutti e' suoi molto voleano essere intesi." He continues his utilitarian argument by claiming: "Più tosto forse e' prudenti mi loderanno s'io, scrivendo in modo che ciascuno m'intenda, prima cerco giovare a molti che piacere a pochi, ché sai quanto siano pochissimi a questi di e' literati." Alberti suggested that even the ancients wrote with the intent to be understood and that he prefers to be useful to many – by writing in vernacular in order to be understood – than to please a few intellectuals with perfect Latin. However, it remains important to clarify that Alberti did not attempt to detract from the Latin language itself: "Ben confesso quella antiqua latina lingua essere copiosa molto e ornatissima, ma non però veggo in che sia la nostra oggi toscana tanto d'averla in odio, che in essa qualunque benché

³¹ Mazzacurati suggested that Alberti's choice to endorse the vernacular was a type of "voluntary exile." Mazzacurati, *Pietro Bembo e la questione del "volgare,"* 7. Alberti composed some of his works in Latin, but his promotion of the vernacular led the way for the sea change later in the fifteenth century.

ottima cosa scritta ci dispiaccia.”³² He esteemed the beauty and abundance of Latin and his attempts to promote the same characteristics of the vernacular were not to be at Latin’s expense.

A poetic competition sponsored by Piero de’ Medici, entitled *Certame coronario* (1441), served as another attempt by Alberti to enhance the profile of erudite vernacular usage. The *certame* had a serious theme – *la vera amicizia* – and aimed at eliciting dignified and philosophical poetic experiments in *volgare* to demonstrate its poetic capacity. In practical terms, the *certame* failed – the judges of the competition selected no winner.³³ However, the lack of a winner in the *certame* does not necessarily denote a failure of the program for the advancement of the vernacular. The *certame coronario* was not a challenge to Latin – the Latinized name itself should indicate as much – but an attempt to recognize the capabilities of Italian. A desire to demonstrate and recognize its literary capacities indicated another step in the growing profile of the vernacular. The attitude toward the use of *volgare* for intellectual purposes continued to grow through the century to heights that were not seen in Alberti’s time.

Cristoforo Landino (1424-98), a Florentine humanist, valued Alberti’s drive to increase the stature and usage of the vernacular. Once concentrating solely on ancient literature, Landino boldly read Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* in the *Studio fiorentino* in 1467. The lyrical love tradition in vernacular was more accepted in the humanist culture, though, than a recovery of Dante as Landino had done with his commentary on the *Divina commedia* in 1481. Early-century humanists disparaged Dante for his poor Latin and for not using it more extensively. Landino

³² *I libri della famiglia, Opere volgari*, ed. Cecil Grayson (Bari: Giuseppe Laterza, 1960) 155.

³³ Migliorini attributes the *certame's* failure to crown a champion to the lack of penetration of the vernacular in humanist scholarship: “Il fallimento della gara mostra che nel 1441 la riabilitazione del volgare non era ancora avvenuta nella comune opinione dei dotti.” Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana*, 240-41. The times were not quite yet mature for the flowering of the vernacular later in the century, but Mazzacurati believed the spirit of the event mattered more for advancing the use of the vernacular than establishing a winner. Mazzacurati, *Pietro Bembo e la questione del "volgare,"* 28.

championed the vernacular, but similar to Alberti, not at the expense of Latin.³⁴ His studies of *Trecento* vernacular poets confirmed the transformation – across a half-century – of humanist opinion toward the vernacular. Landino maintained respect for and veneration of Latin, but, similar to Alberti, Landino attempted to bolster the *volgare* and move beyond the dominion that humanists granted to Latin.

Lorenzo de' Medici inserted himself into the tradition of the language question and moved beyond all previous defenders of Italian with his unequivocal promotion of the vernacular. He and his contemporaries with similar views, e.g. Matteo Maria Boiardo, Luigi Pulci, Angelo Poliziano, increased the momentum of support for the vernacular liberating themselves from Latin's shadow.³⁵ Lorenzo's vision of the *volgare* was limitless and not bound to the comparison and deference to the ancient idiom.³⁶

The heightened profile of the *volgare* that Lorenzo catalyzed at the end of the fifteenth century rendered a significant modification in the history of the *questione della lingua*, propelling the question from Latin or vernacular into a new direction: which vernacular?

³⁴ In the *Prolosione* to his readings of Petrarch (between 1467 and 1472), Landino stated: "Torno adunque a proposito e dico che niuno potrà essere nonché eloquente ma pure tollerabile dicitore nella nostra lingua, se prima non arà vera e perfetta cognizione delle lettere latine. [...] Se adunque fa di bisogno l'arte, fa di bisogno la dottrina e queste senza la Latina lingua non s'acquistano, è necessario essere latino chi vuol essere buono toscano." Landino qtd. in Vitale, *La questione della lingua*, 25. By claiming that one cannot be an eloquent speaker of Italian without a perfect knowledge of Latin letters, Landino showed his humanist values. He also exhibits an attitude similar to Alberti in the sense that the merits of the vernacular do not depend on a denigration of Latin.

³⁵ After the work of Alberti and Landino, Lorenzo's touting of the vernacular without a comparison or obeisance to Latin was the next logical step in the vernacular's ascension. Mazzacurati states: "Credere nella lingua nuova, ricostituirla e riattivarne le fonti, affidarle opere di vario impegno non è più ora, dopo l'esempio dell'Alberti e del Landino, un atto di coraggio. Al contrario, si comincia a leggere tra le righe come un orgoglio intellettuale, che deriva da una sempre più precisa coscienza storica, da un riordinamento del passato letterario secondo una linea ascensionale di progresso e di sempre maggior maturità." Mazzacurati, *Pietro Bembo e la questione del "volgare"*, 37. Perhaps a move of "intellectual pride," Lorenzo's wholesale endorsement of the Tuscan vernacular on its own merits demonstrates what Mazzacurati described as a liberation from the "vernacular complex" that confined the previous scholars of the fifteenth century.

³⁶ As the epistle accompanying the *Raccolta Aragonese* and the proem to his *Comento de' miei sonetti* indicate, Lorenzo tipped the balance to the *volgare* in comparisons with Latin. I will address Lorenzo's promotion of the Tuscan vernacular found within these texts in Chapter Three.

Lorenzo, undoubtedly, touted the Tuscan tongue, but did not seem to focus on a particular variety. In *Nencia da Barberino*, Lorenzo explored the expressivity of rustic language, the *Raccolta Aragonesa* recovered the stilnovist style and language of the *Trecento*, and Lorenzo's *Comento de' miei sonetti* combined two great poetic models of the *Trecento*: Dante and Petrarch. Lorenzo's push for the *Tuscan* vernacular was not as nuanced as the *questione* became at the beginning of the sixteenth century when Pietro Bembo codified the use of particular versions of Tuscan vernacular for poetry (Petrarchan) and prose (Boccaccian).

Although certainly defined within the literary tradition, cultural-political motivations and implications also shaped Lorenzo's vernacular thrust. The validation and spread of the Tuscan vernacular meant a spread of Florentine and Medicean cultural influence. Lorenzo's drive to extol the *volgare* mirrors his desire to distribute his *Raccolta Aragonesa*, a collection of *Trecento* Tuscan lyric poetry with his own poems included, outside of the region. He tied his own political influence in the eyes of contemporary Italian rulers to Florence's cultural prestige, hence his dogged promotion of the vernacular. The spread of Florence's language meant the spread of Florence's (and Lorenzo's) mighty cultural influence.

Vita attiva and vita contemplativa

The question of whether it is better to live a life of contemplation – theoretical and scholarly pursuits – or a life of action – involvement in civic affairs – is of ancient date. However, the ancient proponents of the active life were few. Aristotle, and most other philosophers, sided with the life of contemplation. Beyond the interest in this question, fifteenth-century humanists also adopted the ancient concentration on the *paragone*. Comparisons between forms of government, arms and letters, professions, and ways of life abounded in

classical times as a rhetorical practice and so a reestablishment of the debate of the contemplative and active lives comes as little surprise in an era which valued so highly the culture and wisdom of antiquity. The medieval question of which life was better was a religious one. The life of contemplation suggested a monastic ideal of learning and communion with God. This impression of the question all changed with Francis Petrarch. His notion of *otium*, or a way of life that allows for study and contemplation, was not one of Christian mysticism, but a decided and cognizant return to ancient wisdom and removal from *negotium*.³⁷

Early in the fifteenth century, there was a shift away from the notions of isolated religious devotion and away from Petrarch's norm of the solitary scholar and toward the active life of civic engagement. Civic humanism placed great emphasis on involvement in public life, political affairs, military action, and in general service to the state. Leonardo Bruni and other civic humanists looked to the Roman Republic, not the empire, as the model form of government – demonstrating the ideal and value of participation in public affairs as part of the active life.

The new prominence of the active life was amplified by the threat of Milanese expansion to the north of Florence. Thus as much as the ideal of a politically engaged scholar may hearken back to the example of Cicero's political activity, it was also an expression of the reality of the Florentine experience at the turn of the century. One must note, though, that the many voices in support of the active life, e.g. Bruni, Coluccio Salutati, Matteo Palmieri, etc., still valued the contemplative life while touting the importance of the active mode of life.

³⁷ Petrarch argued, especially in his *De vita solitaria*, for a removal from the city in order to pursue knowledge, unhindered by other cares. We find echoes of Petrarch's ideal in Machiavelli's letter to Francesco Vettori of December 10, 1513 in which he describes how he rests from the cares of the day and enters into ancient courts to feast (to discourse) with the greats of antiquity. However, at the commencement of the fifteenth century in Florence, such a retreat to pursue knowledge was not valued as much as intellectual engagement in civic affairs.

In the middle of the century, Marsilio Ficino's brand of Neoplatonism, backed by the Medici, became a philosophical vogue. With its rise came praise for the life of contemplation – a valued trait of the philosophy – and an apparent reversal of the civic engagement of humanist scholars observed in the earlier part of the century. The latter half of the century continued the debate of the active and contemplative lives. The most famous document on the topic came from Cristoforo Landino, chancellor of the *Signoria* of Florence, in one of his best-known works, the *Disputationes camaldulenses* (1472-74).³⁸ The *Disputationes* consisted of a fictive dialogue at Camaldoli between Marsilio Ficino, Leon Battista Alberti, Lorenzo de' Medici, Giuliano de' Medici, and Landino himself. The first two books concentrate on the argument of the best life and the highest good respectively; books three and four present an allegorical interpretation of the first six books of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

In the debate, the character of Lorenzo de' Medici argued for the superiority of the life of civic engagement from a social and political perspective. Such a way of life corresponded best with man's nature, helped him overcome vice more easily, and provided a boon to society by serving others. Leon Battista Alberti provided the rebuttal in favor of contemplation: one cannot act without first contemplating, one cannot do what is just without first knowing what is just,

³⁸ The date for the *Disputationes camaldulenses* is often cited as 1472. As Peter Lohe notes, it cannot be later than 1474 since it is addressed to Federico da Montefeltro while he is still prince of Urbino, prior to becoming duke. Lohe also suggests that it is logical to assume that Landino took personal responsibility for the *editio princeps* which came off the press in 1480 while Landino was still alive. Lohe, Introduction, *Disputationes camaldulenses* by Cristoforo Landino (Firenze: Sansoni, 1980) xv-xvii. If Lohe's assumption that Landino was personally responsible for the original printing of the *Disputationes* in 1480 is correct, then the timing poses some interesting questions. Lorenzo de' Medici had just reached a peace accord with Naples at the beginning of the year to end the Pazzi war; he began the process of seizing more constitutional authority through the creation of the *Consiglio dei settanta* that practically rendered the *Signoria* powerless. In the *Disputationes*, Landino stresses the value of scholars shaping law, rather than centering power in ambitious individuals. Might Landino have been courting the oligarchy as Bruce McNair suggests? McNair, "Cristoforo Landino and Coluccio Salutati on the Best Life," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47.4 (1994) 747-69. Such an idea contrasts Arthur Field's hypothesis that *Disputationes* supports Ficinian Neoplatonism and Medici rule. Field argues that through an institutionalization of Platonic studies at the university, Landino sought to discourage his students from any political ambition that ran counter to Medici interests. Field, "Cristoforo Landino and Platonic Poetry," *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988) 231-68.

action without a search for truth is fruitless, and what is good for government is determined by investigation of supreme ideas. The character of Alberti called upon the familiar Biblical example of Mary and Martha – Martha’s hastiness led to corruption, while Jesus praised Mary’s studious leisure. The typical reading of the discussion is that Alberti’s case for contemplation prevails, hence the motive for considering Landino on the contemplative side of the argument.

However, simply conceding the victory to the argument for pursuit of the contemplative life undervalues the entirety of the debate. Landino’s characters suggested that the best way of life combined both the contemplative and active lives.³⁹ The character of Lorenzo de’ Medici referred to Federico da Montefeltro as a modern example of an erudite ruler:

Plurimae sunt ac omnino admirandae in viro excellentissimo virtutes, ingenium accerrimum et ad omnia vehemens, tantum autem litterarum studium, ut nulla unquam a negotiis cessatio detur, quin otium illud ad litteras non transferat, effecitque multa legendo, multa audiendo, plurima disputando ut inter literatissimos iure censeatur.⁴⁰

Even accounting for any amount of flattery of Federico on the part of Landino, and for Lorenzo’s subsequent emphasis on the need for Federico to mind the government and militia as well, the example stands as a combination of both the contemplative and active lives. The character of Lorenzo suggested that it would be dangerous for contemplative types to avoid political affairs:

Nam qui ad res speculandas conversi rei publicae partes deseruerint, ii sunt qui ingenio et consilio reliquos superent; ex qua re maiori afficiatur detrimento civitas necesse est, cum a sapientioribus deserta minus prudentibus relinquatur.⁴¹

³⁹ Bruce McNair refutes the typical casting of the “uncivic” Landino: “While Landino holds that the life of *otium* is superior to *negotium*, he does not advocate a withdrawal from political and social responsibilities for a life of continual *otium*.” McNair, 760. McNair’s main theses point to a distinction in Landino’s discussion of the *lives* of *otium* and *negotium* and the superiority of the *munera* of contemplation and speculation with respect to action. I feel that no significant value is added to our present discussion by such specifics and so will continue to refer to the contemplative and active lives in general terms.

⁴⁰ Landino, *Disputationes*, 32.

⁴¹ Landino, *Disputationes*, 30.

There was a need for those that had gained wisdom through study to apply it, in politics, for the welfare of others.

The character of Leon Battista Alberti lobbied for the superiority of contemplative life, but he agreed that the contemplative and active lives were best when combined:

Verum cum omnia diligentius circumspexi cumque videam hominem ita a sola mente profiscisci, ut corpus tamen minime sit negligendum, cum ita natum, ut et charitatis nodo cum ceteris devinctus sit et rerum cognoscendarum amore flagret, eum denique virum putabo qui utriusque vitae rectam rationem habens, utramque coniungat.⁴²

Alberti added that the two approaches are not so averse that they could not be pursued in agreement. He also returned to the example of Mary and Martha, this time casting them as an example of harmony since the sisters lived in the same house and both pleased God.

Landino followed his own suggestion that the contemplative and active lives be combined with an explanation of how that can occur. He believed that humanists had a responsibility for shaping laws, yet should avoid any ambitions of power. Lost in the quick and perpetual labeling of Landino as a proponent of the contemplative life is this practical suggestion, taking the *Disputationes* beyond a theoretical or rhetorical *paragone*, for the involvement of scholars in political affairs. When the character Lorenzo explained the need to excel in both the contemplative and active aspects of life, he cited ancient examples, but truly extolled Federico da Montefeltro for having demonstrated such unity.

However, Lorenzo could have just as easily suggested himself as the example. For my arguments in this dissertation, even if his character represented the active life in Landino's dialogue, Lorenzo's suggestion of combining the active and contemplative lives ultimately points back to himself. Through his *Raccolta Aragonese* and *Comento de' miei sonetti*, I argue that

⁴² Landino, *Disputationes*, 47.

Lorenzo utilizes the metaphysical contemplation of his love poetry to position himself politically with respect to rulers in Italian courts and to his peers among the oligarchic class in Florence. The contemplative acts in Lorenzo's poems derive directly from Marsilio Ficino's brand of Neoplatonism.

Marsilio Ficino and Neoplatonism

Civic humanism's emphasis on the politically active scholar who was involved in public affairs served as the predominant flavor of Florentine intellectual life until the middle of the fifteenth century. Aristotelian scholasticism had only a minor impact on Florentine thought since private circles of humanists held more sway than the university. This openness to other possible currents and a muted spur for metaphysical speculation in civic humanism created a philosophical gap that Marsilio Ficino filled with Neoplatonism.⁴³

Cosimo de' Medici appointed Marsilio Ficino (1433-99) – a humanist scholar, philosopher, musician, astrologer, physician, and priest – as a tutor for his grandson, Lorenzo. In the intellectual context of mid-fifteenth century, his brand of Neoplatonism served a reconciliatory function between philosophy and religion, which were seen as separate paths in the previous century (e.g. Christianity and Aristotelianism).⁴⁴ This tendency to seek for harmony

⁴³ Hans Baron insists on the civic engagement of humanists in the first half of the fifteenth century. Paul Oskar Kristeller notes a lack of a unifying philosophy among humanists – especially civic humanists – who instead focused on the value of and the role of man and a return to ancient wisdom. See Baron *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*; Kristeller *Renaissance Thought and the Arts* (89-101) and *Renaissance Thought and its Sources* (21-32).

⁴⁴ Even in instances of kinship, a great mind like Francesco Petrarca professed that philosophy was subjugated to religion, where Ficino saw congruence. P.O. Kristeller explained: "As to the relationship between religion and philosophy, Ficino is convinced that true religion, that is, Christianity, and true philosophy, that is, Platonism, are in basic harmony with each other, and he is inclined to treat them as sisters, instead of trying to make one subservient to the other." Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964) 49. In Chapters Three and Four, I note the importance of this harmonizing attitude and approach to understanding the cultural-political import of Lorenzo de' Medici's lyric poems.

that Paul Oskar Kristeller has identified proved popular among Christian humanists seeking to reconcile their faith and intellectual outlook as well as to those seeking tolerance amid pre-Reformation theological debates.

Articulating the tenets of Neoplatonism is a difficult task; it consists of a collection of Plato's theories with different adaptations that began with Plotinus in the third century CE. Subsequent thinkers like Plotinus's student Porphyry and many others among the popular Alexandrian and Athenian academies through the early stages of the sixth century have emphasized varying tenets and adapted their own insights. Hence the importance of identifying those crucial elements readily found within Ficino's *Theologia Platonica* and his celebrated translation of Plato's *Simposio* that characterize *Ficinian* Neoplatonism: the metaphysical role of contemplation, Platonic love, and the immortality and dignity of man.

For Ficino, contemplation is a fundamental philosophical concept and the basis of metaphysical speculation. Contemplation as a process consists of the soul that withdraws from the external world into itself and ascends to the realm of ideas, beyond what is perceptible by the senses.⁴⁵ This process of detachment of the soul from the body begins with an inward gaze because, as Ficino explains in the proem of his *Theologia Platonica*, "[Plato] considers man's soul to be like a mirror in which the image of the divine countenance is readily reflected." Contemplation is the foundation of metaphysical speculation because it leads to a verification of a higher world of "true" ideas, the existence of God and of his attributes, and the existence and divinity of the soul. For Ficino, contemplation's end of sublime interaction is between a soul and a specific god, the Christian God.

⁴⁵ In this dissertation, unless otherwise noted, references to *Ficinian* Neoplatonism refer to this process of contemplation that entails a withdrawal from the perceived world and ascension to the ideal image that emanates from the One. The soul provides a connection between the ideal and the phenomenal world.

Introducing the Christian God into metaphysical ascension is a testament to the reconciliatory power of Ficino's brand of Neoplatonism. It might also imply that this ascension to a higher realm is not solely a process of intellection, but praxis and worship.⁴⁶ As Ficino touted as a matter of utmost importance in the proem of his *Theologia Platonica*, this process is an application of intellection to "worship [...] God with piety and understanding" – *et pium cogniti dei cultum*. For Lorenzo de' Medici's sonnets in the *Raccolta Aragonesa* and his *Comento de' miei sonetti*, though, Ficinian contemplation avoids suggestions of Christian worship. In my analysis of Lorenzo's lyrics, contemplation entails the poet's inward gaze to an image of his lady on his heart that vaults his consciousness to an experience with "true" beauty.

Contemplation is a personal endeavor that leads to the union of an individual and God, but camaraderie binds those who seek contemplative experiences. Thus "Platonic love" unites friends who seek to unite with God. In a similar sense, Ficino considers love for another person as preparatory for or a prelude to love for God; loving another person is an expression of a desire for unity with God as his divinity is reflected in the beauty of the beloved. Ficino established the term and this notion of "Platonic love" from his interpretation of love described in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Paul Blum recognizes Ficino's concept of contemplation as a contribution to philosophical thought with respect to a relationship to religion since Ficino claimed that Plato brought every subject he treated to the "contemplation and worship of God." (emphasis mine) Blum, *Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2010) 9. Blum's suggestion that Ficinian contemplation constitutes a ritual practice lies at the heart of Ficino's reconciliation of philosophy and religion. Blum, 109-12.

⁴⁷ In Kristeller's brief explanations of Platonic love, he suggests that Ficino has combined an interpretation of Plato's love with other concepts of ancient and medieval origins: theories of friendship from Aristotle and Cicero, Christian love or *caritas*, and a trace of courtly love from Tuscan poets of the *Trecento*. Kristeller, *Eight philosophers*, 46-49 and *Renaissance Thought and the Arts* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965) 95-96. In my analysis of Lorenzo's sonnets, I elucidate attributes reminiscent of Dante's notions of ennobling love as well as Lorenzo's desire for a connection with divinity as perceived in the beauty of his lady.

As the full title suggests – *Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animae* – the immortality of the soul is a pillar of Ficino's philosophy and one that squarely contrasted with Aristotelian thought.⁴⁸ Ficino's concept of the immortal soul is central to his view in terms of its position in the universe. The human soul is at the center of the hierarchy of existence. It is the mean among lower and higher beings and it is the confluence of them both, exhibiting attributes of both Creator and creation.⁴⁹

In 1462, Cosimo de' Medici gave his villa in Careggi to Ficino and commissioned him to translate Plato's works. With that foundation, Ficino and his philosophy formed the core around which the Platonic Academy of Florence revolved. The academy was not a formal institution but a circle of scholars, poets, and philosophers whose connection sprang from personal relationships with Ficino. Because of a close tie between Ficino and the Medici family, this circle was not identical to, but had overlap with the intellectuals of the Medici court. Impromptu discussions, banquets, speeches, Platonic readings, and public lectures were common events for the academy. Much of the recent scholarship on the academy focuses on its role and questions surrounding its very existence.⁵⁰ Regardless of whether the origins of the academy were a fabrication and

⁴⁸ Ficino's tenets necessitate the immortality of the soul in order to fulfill the ultimate purposes of his doctrine; without an immortal soul that enjoys complete communion with God, the momentary fragments of contemplative ascension would seem to be an unsatisfying and illusory aim. Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers*, 42-46.

⁴⁹ I concur with Kristeller that the notion of the human soul as center of the universe can be seen as an extension of a celebration of the individual and as a "metaphysical sanction" of the humanist conception of the dignity of man. *Eight philosophers* 42-43, 46.

⁵⁰ In part due to the activity of the academy and Ficino's popularity as a personality, Kristeller claimed that he and his brand of Neoplatonism were a philosophical force that "dominated Florentine intellectual life" from 1464 to 1494. *Thought and Arts*, 100. Though Kristeller's studies are still considered the seminal modern treatments of Ficino's Neoplatonism, a recent scholarly trend led by James Hankins – since about the quincennial celebration of Lorenzo's death in 1992 – has challenged the preeminence of Neoplatonism, and especially the Neoplatonic academy, in this period. Hankins has collected some of his publications that question the evidence of a Platonic Academy and its influence, including "Cosimo de' Medici and the 'Platonic Academy,'" "The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence," "The Invention of the Platonic Academy of Florence" and others in *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance*, vol. 2 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004) 187-218, 219-72, 351-95. Nicolai Rubenstein traces the historiographical tradition of Lorenzo's banquet of the Platonic Academy in

whether it was the sole intellectual current of interest, Ficino's Neoplatonism had a significant cultural effect on Florence and beyond.⁵¹ It appealed to other philosophers and to educated individuals in general especially because of Ficino's reconciliation of religion and philosophy.⁵²

Typically scholars point to *De summo bono* for evidence of Lorenzo's Neoplatonic mindset, but Ficino's intellectual influence manifests itself in Lorenzo's love poetry as well. In Chapters Three and Four I analyze how he utilizes a Neoplatonic approach in his lyric poetry to reconcile divergent poetic modes. Lorenzo employs Ficinian philosophical concepts as a means of enhancing his personal cultural-political capital, much like his approach to artistic patronage in general.

Politics of Magnificence

As we have noted, Lorenzo was born into the leading family of Florence that groomed him from the beginning to become his city's political leader. Having been born into this powerful and affluent family also meant that "opulent beauty was his birthright" as he grew up

Careggi – a fictionalized convocation. Rubinstein, "Lorenzo's image in Europe," *Lorenzo the Magnificent: Culture and Politics*, ed. Michael Mallet and Nicholas Mann (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1996) 297-312. Sebastiano Gentile found that both Lorenzo and Careggi were late additions to Ficino's commentary on Plato's symposium. Gentile, "Per la storia del testo del 'Commentarium in Convivium' di Marsilio Ficino," *Rinascimento* 21 (1981) 3-27. Jill Kraye rejects the idea of Lorenzo heading a banquet of the Platonic Academy as emblematic of intellectual life in late 15th-century Florence and instead proposes a theological debate that began on 23 June 1489 at the *duomo* and continued, at Lorenzo's behest, on the 30th at the Palazzo Medici. Kraye, "Lorenzo and the Philosophers," 151-66. For Kraye this disputation's polyphony of intellectual approaches – Dominican Thomism, Franciscan Scotism, scholastic Aristotelianism, Ficinian Neoplatonism, syncretism, and humanist philology – better represent the pluralism of intellectual life in Lorenzo's day.

⁵¹ Evidence of Ficino's prints and manuscripts and correspondence with pupils and friends demonstrate a reach to Rome, Venice, Bologna, and Ferrara, to France, Germany, Poland, and Hungary, as well as to the Netherlands, Spain, and England. Hankins, "Myth of the Academy," 219. Kristeller, *Thought and Arts*, 100.

⁵² Blum views this reconciliation as more political than philosophical and not merely a Neoplatonic expression of Christian worship: "Rather, talking about praxis, the claim that Platonic claims coincide with Christian claims is politics." He also detects a sense of philosophical policy in Ficino's desire to "convert" nonbelievers, citing an introduction to his translation of Plotinus that he directed toward "corrupt" Aristotelians. Blum, *Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance*, 111.

surrounded by some of the most remarkable works of art of the fifteenth century.⁵³ One can only speculate on the influence of artwork in the palace on his aesthetic education and preferences, but his experience as a precocious *operaio* – participant on works committees – demonstrated his engagement with politics and patronage as just a boy and early adolescent.⁵⁴ Lorenzo truly began the path toward artistic magnificence at an early age.

Lorenzo the Magnificent acquired this honorific title as an esteemed public officer; perhaps it helped to mitigate the lack of a seigniorial or princely title like those of contemporary political rulers throughout Italy. In reference to patronage, magnificence denoted generosity, nobility of spirit, and grandeur and a magnificent person was said to demonstrate fascinating splendor. In a note to his sons, Lorenzo mentioned the enormous sums of money that the Medici had spent on buildings, charities, and taxes, and that he remained very satisfied with the expenditures because of their benefit to the state.⁵⁵ This virtuous notion of generosity implied in

⁵³ Lorenzo was ten years old when the Medici family moved into their new *palazzo*. F.W. Kent recognizes the futility of seeking to determine any specific impact on Lorenzo's aesthetic sensibilities though he suggests that it requires little imaginative license to suggest that his exposure to ancient, medieval, and modern art in the palace spurred an interest in and appreciation of the patronage of his predecessors. F.W. Kent, *Art of Magnificence*, 15-21. Surely his involvement in commissions and works committees at such a young age also fuels this temptation to speculate on the experiences young Lorenzo had with the artwork that surrounded him in his childhood.

⁵⁴ Lorenzo's early experiences with political appointments and client relationships demonstrate his engagement in artistic patronage. He first replaced his uncle, Giovanni, on the works committee for the convent of Santa Brigida at fourteen years old, in 1463. In 1466 he capably replaced his ill father on the works committee that commissioned Andrea del Verrocchio's bronze sculpture, *Christ and St. Thomas*, for the church of Orsanmichele in the center of Florence. A. Butterfield, "Verrocchio's *Christ and St. Thomas*: Chronology, Iconography, and Political Context," *Burlington Magazine* 134 (1992) 225-33. At age nineteen Lorenzo participated in a group of connoisseurs and artisans charged to place a massive bronze ball atop the duomo's cupola, a commission eventually executed by Andrea del Verrocchio. D. A. Covi, "Verrocchio and the Palla of the Duomo," *Art, the Ape of Nature: Studies in Honor of H. W. Janson*, ed. M. Barasch, L. Freeman Sandler, and P. Egan (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Harry N. Abrams/Prentice Hall, 1981) 151-69. In the same year, 1468, Lorenzo began a four-year appointment on the works committee for the Servite church of the Annunziata near the Medici home. B. L. Brown, "The Patronage and Building History of the Tribuna of SS. Annunziata in Florence," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 25 (1981) 59-146.

⁵⁵ The Medici maintained detailed records of their magnificence. In this memo to his sons, Lorenzo claimed: "Come appare per un quadernuccio di quarto di foglio, da detto anno 1434 a tutto 1471 si vede somma incredibile, perché ascende a fiorini 663.775 e ½, tra limosine, muraglie e gravezze, senza l'altre spese." *Opere*, ed. Tiziano Zanato (Torino: Einaudi, 1992) xxxix. Lorenzo's apparent satisfaction with these expenditures because it had brought luster to the state perhaps indicates awareness on his part of the onus to justify such an astronomical sum.

extravagant expenditures on architecture or other art derived from the concept in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* that a civic good common to all men is sacred to God.⁵⁶ It was in this sense that the consuls of the Silk Guild and others responsible for the *Ospedale degli innocenti* claimed that Lorenzo made his sizable land purchase for the hospital for the honor of God. Much like their willful association with the wealthy and righteous Magi of *New Testament* fame, the Medici family depended on an honorable interpretation of their artistic sponsorship in a period in which the church still touted the virtues of poverty and the sinful nature of usury.⁵⁷

On the other side of the scale of magnificence as a civic good and expression of religious piety, though, lies the self-promotional aspect of patronage in this period.⁵⁸ Historians have not ascribed much self-promotion to Lorenzo as a builder though he had initiated plans for urban renewal in his quarter of Florence and he exerted extensive efforts for purchasing land and

⁵⁶ Patricia Rubin traces the meaning of munificence and the tradition of assigning virtue to conspicuous displays of Medicean wealth in the 15th century. She notes: "The message of early Medicean magnificence was one of justified success, of virtue rewarded, and of civic responsibility." Rubin, "Magnificence and the Medici." *The Early Medici and their Artists*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis (East Sussex, UK: Caldra House, 1995) 44. Rubin focused on the Aristotelian roots of magnificence as a civic-minded act of piety, she recognized too the prestige that magnificent spending brought to Lorenzo and his family in the vein of the "fascinating splendor" described by Giovanni Pontano, a member of the Neapolitan court. Giovanni Pontano, *De magnificentia in I trattati delle virtù sociali*, ed. F. Tateo (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1965) 85ff and 272-277. In tracing the meaning of magnificence, Rubin depends on A.D. Frasier Jenkin's seminal article "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970) 162-70. In a recent investigation, Peter Howard traces the origins of magnificence through Dominican theological discourses delivered by Antoninus (1389-1459) in Florence. Howard posits that the virtue of "magnificence" as a culture-shaping concept in the 1450's entered Florentine cultural sensibility via Thomist commentators of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* instead of from direct studies of Aristotle's work spurred by a humanistic interest in Greek and Latin texts. *Creating Magnificence in Renaissance Florence* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012).

⁵⁷ Vespasiano da Bisticci (1421-1498), a Florentine book dealer who advised Cosimo de' Medici and many others on the creation of libraries, suggested that Cosimo's motivation for building San Marco may be attributable to an attempt at restitution due to misgivings over the questionable nature of how he gained portions of his wealth. *Le vite*, ed. Aulo Greco, vol. 2 (Firenze: Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento, 1976).

⁵⁸ Pontano's suggestion of the increased prestige that accompanies the magnificence of a patron pales in comparison to the banker Giovanni Rucellai's blunt egotism when he claimed that his building program honored God, the city, and the "memory of me." *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone*, ed. A. Perosa, vol. 1 (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1960) 121.

building villas outside of the city.⁵⁹ Lorenzo, without dispute, had amassed a significant collection of small antiquities that also had a political significance for impressing visitors to his home.⁶⁰ He also sought to boost his own prestige by sending artists to work in the courts of other Italian cities; such an enterprise appears analogous to his *Raccolta Aragonesa* project in 1476, that I address in Chapter Three, in which Lorenzo enhanced his recognized prominence by exporting a collection of renowned Tuscan love poetry that included his own poems to the Neapolitan court. In 1484 he sent Giuliano da Maiano to Naples to build a villa at Poggio Reale for Alfonso d'Aragona, Duke of Calabria. Not only did such a gesture garner political goodwill, it augmented Lorenzo's reputation as a connoisseur and Florence's reputation as a prestigious artistic center.⁶¹ Similarly, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Cosimo Rosselli, and Sandro Botticelli

⁵⁹ F.W. Kent challenges the idea that Lorenzo was not much of a builder with a chapter dedicated to his role in presiding over a building boom with an improving economy from 1485 until his death in 1492. F.W. Kent, *Art of Magnificence*, 79-111. However, the extent of Lorenzo's influence remains difficult to single out. Though methodically annotated, one must wonder whether F.W. Kent sometimes skirts the line of attributing too much to Lorenzo's influence of which Evelyn Welch warns because some documentation solely indicates Lorenzo as one of many participants on works committees or the Medici bank among the funding sources for a project. Evelyn Welch, "The Year of Lorenzo," *Art History* 17.4 (1994) 658-61. Nonetheless, Lorenzo did sit on works committees and leveraged his aesthetic prestige and political influence as an arbiter, such as in the case of appointing his preferred architect, Giuliano da Sangallo, to the creation of Santa Maria delle Carceri in Prato in 1485 despite the fact that Giuliano da Maiano, a prior favorite of Lorenzo's, had won the modeling competition and had already begun construction. Piero Morselli and Gino Corti, *La chiesa di Santa Maria delle Carceri in Prato* (Firenze: Società Pratese di Storia Patria, 1982) chapter 3. In addition, Lorenzo had made considerable progress on building personal villas in Spedaletto, Agnano, and Poggio a Caiano in this same period. Rubin considers Lorenzo's building program to be considerably advanced, chronologically speaking, for a patron in his thirties. Rubin, "Magnificence and the Medici," 45-6.

⁶⁰ Laurie Fusco and Gino Corti's investigation of Lorenzo's holdings and correspondence reveal Lorenzo as an avid collector of coins, vases, gems, and other antiquities. In an active period of collecting (1484-1492), many letters regarding his activities reveal three contributing factors to amassing his collection: the Medici bank, diplomatic gifts, and his network. Collectors were able to use their antiquities as collateral for loans from the Medici bank and Lorenzo kept those precious objects when debts were left unpaid (usually upon the death of the debtor). He often inscribed his initials in these objects, demonstrating a personal attachment to them as well as a public display of ownership since his collection functioned as a public format for projecting his wealth, power, and knowledge to important visitors. Fusco and Corti, *Lorenzo de' Medici Collector and Antiquarian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), especially chapters 2 and 6.

⁶¹ In a letter dated December 9, 1484, Alfonso sought Lorenzo's recommendation for an architect with expertise in fortifications as well as civilian dwellings. E. Pontieri, "La dinastia aragonese di Napoli e la casa de' Medici di Firenze," *Archivio storico per le provincie napoletane* 65 (1940) 341. Lorenzo would not miss such an opportunity to expand Florence's and his own artistic influence. André Chastel appears to have been the first art historian to suggest that this and similar recommendations and appointments constituted a politics of artistic prestige that

joined Perugino in late spring of 1481 to fresco the walls of the newly erected Sistine Chapel as a part of Lorenzo's reconciliation with Pope Sixtus IV after the Pazzi war.⁶² And Filippino Lippi's contributions, again upon Lorenzo's recommendation, to the Carafa chapel in Santa Maria sopra Minerva (Rome) in 1488 helped amplify Florentine and Medici prestige by easing the process of electing Giovanni, Lorenzo's son, to a cardinalship.⁶³

Lorenzo's acts of piety sometimes strained the balance of magnificence with regards to personal glory and public utility, particularly in the Medici's local parish church of San Lorenzo. The family's many contributions to the ecclesiastical coffers granted them exclusive privileges for burying their dead in the church proper. Lorenzo added a degree of boldness to the traditional practice of constructing sculptural tombs for his father and uncle – Verrocchio displayed Lorenzo's and his brother's names in *all'antica* lettering prominently on the tombs constructed of costly materials.⁶⁴

With so much to gain in prestige and political goodwill, the Medici's blurring of the distinctions between personal glory, public piety, and civic pride were sometimes met with

Lorenzo pursued as Florentine propaganda. Chastel, *Art et Humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique; études sur la Renaissance et l'humanisme platonicien* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1982 [1959]) 14ff. See also Caroline Elam, "Art and Diplomacy in Renaissance Florence," *Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts* 136 (1988) 816-17.

⁶² Herbert Horne suggested that the work of this Florentine team of artists (plus the Umbrian Perugino) may have been directly related to Sixtus's relaxation of the interdict on Florence following the conclusion of the Pazzi war. H.P. Horne, *Botticelli, painter of Florence* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980 [1908]) 74-75.

⁶³ Dominican cardinal Oliviero Carafa had opposed Giovanni's election to the college. Gail Geiger has shown that Lippi's frescoes for the chapel pleased Carafa sufficiently that he decided to support Giovanni's nomination, which proceeded successfully. Geiger, *Filippino Lippi's Carafa Chapel: Renaissance Art in Rome* (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1986).

⁶⁴ Andrew Butterfield describes the inscription of Lorenzo's and Giuliano's names that F.W. Kent considers to be a daring incremental move toward forging a "new vocabulary of magnificence." Butterfield, *The Sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1997) 207-09. F.W. Kent, *Art of Magnificence*, 66. Because of the prominent public display of the tombs of Cosimo and Giovanni de' Medici, the inscriptions of Lorenzo's and Giuliano's names represents a step toward disrupting the balance of personal glory, piety, and civic good more so than Lorenzo's practice of initialing the pieces of his personal collection of antiquities.

opposition. Smearing blood on the entrance when the Palazzo Medici was under construction indicated a protest of Cosimo's brash display of excess and egoism and others criticized the self-aggrandizing appearance of the Medici *palle* even in ecclesiastical buildings that they had supported.⁶⁵ It behooved Lorenzo, as a private citizen in a constitutional republic, to aim his magnificence at the honor of the city and the glory of God.

If he were to have ruled in a lordship or princely state, Lorenzo would have had the license to create a systematic and consistent display of magnificence in a building program and artwork. However, in a republic, Lorenzo's authority depended on the support of the patriciate. Consequently, Lorenzo sought to defuse any suggestion of tyranny even in the realm of aesthetics. To do so he occasionally deferred to the opinions of his peers.⁶⁶ In order to maintain the confidence of Florence's ruling class, in addition to impressing them with magnificent gestures he also sought their empathy for his sacrifices for and devoted service to the state. In Chapter Four of this dissertation I argue that as Lorenzo acquired more power he needed to project an image to find common ground with his fellow citizens all the while he sought their sympathy for his misfortunes resulting from his dedication to Florence. He sought similar ends with devotional imagery of himself with an emphasis on the benefit for the state.

⁶⁵ It is hardly surprising, in a city as factious as Florence, to find people that denounced any action of the Medici. Any tinge of vanity was ripe for disparagement of artistic works allegedly produced for the glory of God and the republic. Indeed, the chronicler Giovanni Cavalcanti reported murmurings regarding the hypocrisy and sacrilege of their arrogance. Cavalcanti, *Nuova opera: chronique florentine inédite du XVe siècle*, ed. Antoine Monti (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne nouvelle, 1989) 120. For a report of blood on the entrance of the Medici Palazzo, see Dale Kent, "The Importance of Being Eccentric: Giovanni Cavalcanti's View of Cosimo de' Medici's Florence," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 9 (1979) 130-31. For general criticisms of the Medici Coat of Arms on display in churches and other ecclesiastical buildings, see Roberto Bizzocchi, *Chiesa e potere nella Toscana del Quattrocento* (Bologna: Società Editrice il Mulino, 1987) 95-96.

⁶⁶ One example appears in the 1488 debates over the design of the new fortress at Sarzana. Lorenzo remained convinced of the suitability of a model from Giuliano and Antonio Sangallo that could be implemented cheaply and quickly, but he conceded to the preferences of the Florentine magistracy for Francione's more expansive design. Franco Buselli, "Fra Sarzana e Sarzanello: Un episodio poco noto fra Giuliano da Sangallo e il suo maestro," *Necropoli* 6-7 (1969-1970) 61-68.

After Lorenzo had survived the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478, Andrea del Verrocchio and the waxworker Orsino Benintendi sculpted votive images of Florence's beleaguered leader and placed them in various churches around the city. Whether placed as a token of gratitude for miraculous delivery or as a supplication for continued grace, one can hardly overlook the call to rally in support of Lorenzo against Pope Sixtus IV and his allies in these figures. An *ex-voto* in the Convent of the Chiarito (Santa Maria Regina Coeli) even donned the bloody garments Lorenzo was wearing when attacked in the cathedral.⁶⁷ Like the memories of the terrible event that Lorenzo recalls in his *Comento de' miei sonetti*, which, I argue, constituted a plea for sympathy from his fellow citizens for his sacrifices for the good of the city, this display of his blood-stained clothes on a wax figure was surely intended to elicit compassion and devotion from all of Florence.

With so much focus on Lorenzo's efforts within and on behalf of the city and its citizens, it seems ironic that, in my estimation, his most novel contribution of magnificence in terms of a building program occurred outside the walls of the city. A companion of Lorenzo's once described him as a fine husbandman – *bonus agricola* – and a recent historian has considered him a "rural improver" and as much a countryman as an urban citizen.⁶⁸ Lorenzo had numerous

⁶⁷ For descriptions of the votive images of Lorenzo distributed through Florence and beyond, see Hugo van der Velden, "Medici Votive Images and the Scope and Limits of Likeness," *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson (London: British Museum Press, 1998) 126-36. John Paoletti mentions the wax effigies of Lorenzo placed in Santissima Annunziata and other churches, including the example in the Convent of the Chiarito that displayed his bloody clothes, as part of a Medici practice of placing signs of their presence throughout the city. Paoletti, "Strategies and Structures of Medici Artistic Patronage in the 15th Century," *The Early Medici and their Artists*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis (London: Department of History of Art, Birbeck College, University of London, 1995) 31-32. It remains difficult to trace any thread of genuine piety in Lorenzo's strategic devotional imagery.

⁶⁸ In the preface to his commentary on Virgil in 1492, just after Lorenzo's death, Cristoforo Landino eulogized his patron by extolling his excellence in letters, music, architecture, and farming: "Multae ut in homine civili, sunt en eo litterae, bonus est musicus, bonus architectus, bonus agricola." Quoted in E.B. Fryde, *Humanism and Renaissance Historiography* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983) 132. Other contemporaries recognized Lorenzo's interest in the countryside, like Bernardo Rucellai who noticed the pleasure that Lorenzo reaped from agricultural pursuits: "Ho inteso el piacere che pigli più ogni dì della agricultura, che è felicità non conosciuta et nihil homine

rural holdings: Cosimo's villa at Careggi, Montepaldi to the south near San Casciano, a hunting lodge and villa southwest of Florence in Spedaletto, Agnano, Poggio a Caiano, and several estates and farmland between Florence and Pisa around Vico Pisano, Buti, Calci, and Fucecchio. In these country estates, Lorenzo was not merely cultivating the countryside, but expressing his aesthetic vision without the concerns for republican decorum and consensus that he might feel within the city.⁶⁹

Lorenzo's villas did not serve solely as an escape from the pressures and demands of the city; they were magnificent buildings where he sometimes hosted important visitors on their way to Florence. They were intended to be seen, and they were also situated in order to see. From his villas, Lorenzo, similar to a lord or a prince, could look over many of his holdings and keep important cities in view. From a tower in Spedaletto, Lorenzo could keep an eye on the rebellious city of Volterra; from Agnano, he had a view of Pisa and the Tyrrhenian sea; from Poggio a Caiano, he could view Pistoia and also Florence.

Lorenzo's villas represented a mixture of traditional and original approaches to a rural building program. Building a villa and maintaining a productive farm on ancestral grounds are practical pursuits of a wealthy patrician, but creating monuments to classical antiquity on newly

libero dignius." *Archivio di Stato, Firenze – Archivio Mediceo avanti il Principato*, XLVIII, 155. In his chapter "Lorenzo, 'Fine Husbandman' and Villa Builder, 1483-1492," F.W. Kent explores Lorenzo's villa building campaign as another example to counter what he had perceived as scholars attempting to denigrate Lorenzo's contributions as a patron of the arts. It is in this context that he referred to Lorenzo as much a countryman as a citizen and as a rural improver because of his many villa-building projects. F.W. Kent, *Art and Magnificence*, 112-51.

⁶⁹ Lorenzo devoted significant funds and energy to the estate at Poggio a Caiano, ten miles west of Florence, that he purchased from Giovanni Rucellai. Lorenzo's aesthetic vision for this villa seems to mirror his approach to poetic tradition, as I address in Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation, in which he evokes a tradition and redirects it in a novel way. David Hemsoll suggests that the architecture and allegorical frieze of the villa at Poggio a Caiano that Giuliano da Sangallo created for Lorenzo was attentive to achievements of the classical world without expressly copying them, producing a transformative design for the modern Florentine world. Hemsoll, "Giuliano da Sangallo and the new Renaissance of Lorenzo de' Medici," *The Early Medici and their Artists*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis (East Sussex, UK: Caldera House, 1995) 169-85. Unger suggests that Lorenzo's villa at Poggio a Caiano served as a model country villa much like Cosimo had established the pattern for urban palaces. Unger, *Magnifico*, 403.

acquired territories recasts the customary pursuits of Florentine landowners in a similar manner to Lorenzo's treatment of the pastoral tradition in the rustic poem *Nencia da Barberino*. In his poem, he evokes the traditional idyllic environs of pastoral poetry, but his emphasis on naturalistic representation of the rhythms and demands of country living, rather than an idealized *locus amoenus*, combine with his parodic treatment of refined love poetry to redefine rustic poetry and to launch a new genre based on his poem.

Chapter 2 – Contradictions on the Surface: Literary Heritage and Naturalism in *Nencia da Barberino*

"e pparrem uno, e ppur saremo dua."
Nencia 16.8

The twenty octaves of *Nencia da Barberino*, one of Lorenzo de' Medici's earliest works, capture the spontaneous praises of a love-struck shepherd from the Mugello region of Tuscany; Vallera sings of his beloved country girl, Nencia. Vallera's first-person celebration of his dear Nencia's beauty presents a collection of evocative images that epitomize the experiences of quotidian life in the countryside. The overwhelming majority of modern critical attention of *Nencia* has focused on questions of authorship and philological debates on which among the surviving manuscripts most closely represents an original version of the text. Despite many different claims and approaches to *Nencia*, the manuscript version in twenty octaves has enjoyed the most enduring privilege as the original (or closest to original) composition.⁷⁰ Lorenzo

⁷⁰ In this dissertation, I quote from this manuscript, Text A, in 20 octaves: Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham 419. The debate over which manuscript represents the original composition of *Nencia*, and who composed it, spans a century of inquiry and constitutes what Paolo Orvieto considers to be one among the greatest enduring debates of Italian literature. Orvieto, "Nota introduttiva," *Nencia da Barberino in Lorenzo de' Medici Tutte le opere*, Vol. 2 (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1992) 673. In his dialogue on the uses of Tuscan vernacular, *Ercolano*, published posthumously in 1570, Benedetto Varchi (1503-65) identified Lorenzo de' Medici as the author of *Nencia da Barberino*. Text V, *la vulgata*, is the longest version of *Nencia* as it consists of 49-51 octaves. This edition of the *Nencia* was the only known version through the nineteenth century. Rosella Bessi traced five manuscripts of the *vulgata* edition of expanded octaves: FL Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham 484, XVI-XVII century; FU Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham approximately 1827; ME Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Campori y K 3 5, XVIII century; PU Pisa, Biblioteca Universitaria, 184, XVII century; RC Rovigo, Biblioteca dell'Accademia dei Concordi, 203, XVIII century. Guglielmo Volpi's Text A persists as the most consistent and organized version of the text: Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham 419. Federico Patetta found Text P, an alternate version in 39 octaves, in 1934: Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, PATETTA 375. And Bessi refers to Messina's partial edition as Text M: Firenze, fondo *Conventi* della Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, codice B 72889. Rosella Bessi, "Introduzione," *La Nencia da Barberino* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1982) 13-33. When Guglielmo Volpi discovered text A in 1907 (published in 1908), he proposed that it was the superior extant text because it appeared to be the oldest and most cohesive version. Volpi argued that text A was the starting point of a chronological and literary line that continued to text V, a version that acquired octaves as it adopted popular additions over time. Critics and anthologists in the twentieth century cite text A almost exclusively. Volpi, *Un nuovo testo della "Nencia da Barberino" di Lorenzo de' Medici* (Firenze: Tipografia Galileiana, 1908). In 1934, Federico Patetta challenged the superiority of text A with text P; he also negated the claim of Lorenzo's authorship. Patetta proposed text P as the original (or a similar lost text) that eventually transformed into text A with intermediate steps like text V. This approach assumes an original loose collection of similarly themed octaves, *rispetti*, or *strambotti* written and improvised by Lorenzo and others until they were later organized into a singular

composed *Nencia* prior to 1470 and it has been considered a masterpiece of his diverse oeuvre, even if he was a teenager at the time of its composition.⁷¹

Lorenzo had been raised to be a political leader of his native city. Though just a teenager in this period prior to 1470, he had already completed some diplomatic missions on behalf of his family: Lorenzo had reassured the Medici's closest allies of the family's political strength within

work. Patetta mounts his campaign to assert this alternative progression of texts and to remove authorship from Lorenzo's hand through a number of articles, including "Un terzo testo della 'Nencia da Barberino,'" *Rendiconti della Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* 10 (1934) 129-163 and "Sulla falsa attribuzione della 'Nencia da Barberino' a Lorenzo de' Medici," *Atti della Reale Accademia delle Scienze* 72 (1937) 168-172. In 1938, Teresa Sala made her original argument for Lorenzo as author of Text A, then Mario Fubini defended her argument subsequent to Patetta's denouncement. Teresa Sala, *La 'Nencia da Barberino' e la questione della sua autenticità* (Palermo: Andò Editori, 1938). Mario Fubini, *Studi sulla letteratura del Rinascimento* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1947). André Rochon, a renowned scholar in the twentieth century of Lorenzo's early works, was clearly convinced by Fubini's and Sala's thesis. He supported Lorenzo as author of *Nencia* in *La Jeunesse de Laurent de Médicis (1449-1478)* (Paris: Société d'édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1968) 665. Bolstered by Rochon's support, Sala's and Fubini's defense of the preeminence of Text A in Lorenzo's hand held sway for the remainder of the century despite additional rebuttals from Patetta and a proposal in 1948 from Italiano Marchetti and Alberto Chiari that Bernardo Giambullari (1450-1520) had authored the text. *L'autore della "Nencia da Barberino"* (Milano: C. Marzorati, 1948). Sala and Fubini claimed that text A was the initial edition while texts like P, V, and CN (M) were popular reworkings of the organic original, perhaps by Lorenzo's hand and by the hands of others in his circle. In his 1992 anthology of Lorenzo's works, Paolo Orvieto agreed that it is easier to argue a degeneration from organic to ill composed than a popularization that proceeded from loose octaves to an integrated whole. Orvieto, "Nota introduttiva," 675-76. Orvieto and Lucia Brestolini also suggested the possibility of a *produzione d'équipe* by Lorenzo and others of his brigade, including Luigi Pulci, Poliziano, and Alessandro Braccesi. *La poesia comico-realistica: dalle origini al Cinquecento* (Roma: Carocci, 2000) 109. In 1982, Rossella Bessi argued for origins in text A – like Sala's and Fubini's well respected thesis – based on the coherence of its rustic language. However, she also elevated the view of all editions of *Nencia*, considering none of them as a complete representation, but all of them as witnesses of the same text. Bessi, 69-119. Orvieto effectively aligned with Bessi – agreeing on the likelihood of the primacy of A, but recognizing the dignity of other editions – when he published all available octaves in his anthology in 1992. For this study, the question of who originally composed *Nencia* maintains its importance. I have chosen to use text A, as authored by Lorenzo de' Medici, for my analysis because of its traditional philological preeminence. Quotations of text A within this chapter come from Bessi's *La Nencia da Barberino* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1982). N.B. Bessi elected to include instances of phonosyntactic gemination in order to maintain consistency among the multiple texts; I have maintained them in my citations as well in order to reflect her presentation of the text.

⁷¹ Domenico De Robertis discovered a previously unknown *Nencia*-like *ballata* from 1470. The existence of the ballad presupposes the available *Nencia* texts, hence the declaration of *Nencia*'s origin sometime before 1470. *Editi e rari: Studi sulla tradizione letteraria tra Tre e Cinquecento* (Milano: Mondadori, 1978) 137-47. In his anthological excerpt on *Nencia da Barberino* originally published in 1932, Vittorio Rossi proclaimed it Lorenzo's *capolavoro*. Rossi, *Il Quattrocento in Storia letteraria d'Italia*, Vol. 6 (Milano: Vallardi, 1992) 506. Without the benefit of the work of philologists that came after him and considering the sophistication of the text, Rossi had assumed that *Nencia* represented an offering from late in Lorenzo's life. Corinna Salvadori empathizes with Rossi's stance because of the level of artistry in *Nencia* and Lorenzo's other early works. Salvadori, *Lorenzo de' Medici Selected Writings* (Dublin: Foundation for Italian Studies, University College, Dublin, 1992) 33-34. In this study I follow the accepted date of composition from before 1470 based on philological evidence already noted.

Florence when he attended a wedding joining the ruling families of Milan and Naples in Milan in 1465. Within Florence, Lorenzo served as the public face of the family, a function that was typified by his role in organizing and performing in the spectacular joust of 1469. When Piero de' Medici died in December of 1469, Lorenzo assumed a more sober position within the Florentine political landscape.

Thus the period in which he composed *Nencia* characterized a time before personal anxieties of political rank among European powers and more careful considerations for relationships of power and equity among his fellow citizens. As such, *Nencia* does not include the same sort of image shaping and political positioning for status and unity as his later poems.⁷² However, *Nencia* does exhibit Lorenzo's proclivity for recasting literary tradition in a way that reveals incongruent combinations of language, genre, idealization, parody, and naturalism – which is to say, combinations of fiction and a depiction of characters in a setting as they would appear in nature. He especially highlights the friction between the literary tradition of the poet-lover and the otherness of rustic life. The socio-political tension oscillates between sympathy for and a connectedness with Vallera the shepherd and a political and moral condemnation of Vallera as an outsider to Florentine culture.

Lorenzo's combinations within *Nencia* demonstrate various types of incongruence. The *descriptio feminae* of *Nencia* consists of an incongruence of form with respect to convention. By the time of *Nencia's* composition, a progression of attributes included in a description of a lady's physical beauty, and the types of comparisons and descriptors employed, had been codified.

⁷² In his later lyric poetry, Lorenzo adopts a blend of Dantean and Petrarchan poetic models as a way to fuse his own reputation with Florence's cultural influence within Italy and the rest of Europe. In this later phase of his poetry, Lorenzo politically charges his intentional combinations of contrasting poetic styles in order to enhance his profile among other Italian heads of state and to seek unity with his fellow citizens based on their cultural heritage. *Nencia*, among his earliest works, lacks this personal political function. *Nencia* contains a more general political message of maintaining the superiority of urban high culture.

Lorenzo created novel descriptions of Nencia that were comedic and subversive of conventions of courtly poetry and were presented in a sequence that also consisted of structural incongruence. Lorenzo describes all of the canonical aspects of Nencia's beauty – head, brow, nose, lips, teeth, cheeks, eyes, hair, and chin – but he disregards the standard order of progression for this description. These combinations of novel comparisons and a unique succession of typical attributes results in a *descriptio feminae* that is simultaneously blandly derivative and originally divergent.

Lorenzo deliberately parodies courtly love poetry by presenting a rustic version of a poet-lover's praise for a lady in the passionate expressions of a bumbling shepherd. He also provides an unfiltered view of country lifestyle through rustic vernacular and descriptions of Vallera's preoccupations and shepherding duties. Lorenzo has not merely created a snapshot of life outside the experiences of his readers, nor has he merely created a literary exercise in canonical distortion, but both, and to great effect. The poem offers an estranged view of Vallera and Nencia that presents the question of how the reader will respond to Vallera and Nencia's lack of sophistication – with sympathy and playful laughter or with scorn. Because of the moment of political or moral judgment that it presents, Lorenzo's portrayal pushes readers further than the typical vulgar innuendos (though also present) and a focus on mundane, rather than ennobling, aspects of amorous relationships found in poems in a comic-realistic style.

This chapter's title refers to these conflicting facets in *Nencia* as "surface contradictions." The case of the order of the *descriptio feminae* remains on the structural level and does not require an interpretation of the poem for the contradictory combination to manifest. The meshing of literary parody and natural representation in Lorenzo's text indicate a "surface contradiction" because it elicits the idea of a lifelike illusion on a two-dimensional plane or

surface, which evokes questions of illusion and realism in Leon Battista Alberti's (1404-72) treatment of perspective in *Della pittura* (1435). Indeed, Lorenzo's portrayal of country life has been described as a photograph.⁷³ I begin my analysis, though, with Lorenzo's treatment of literary tradition in *Nencia* with respect to genre.

Nencia's motifs of unrequited love and cruelty of the beloved, its rustic setting, and the fact that its protagonist, Vallera, is not only a *contadino* in a general sense, but specifically a shepherd, signals its inclusion in a broad tradition of pastoral poetry.⁷⁴ Thus *Nencia's* literary

⁷³ Orvieto refers to the specular representation of rustic life in *Nencia* as a *fotografia campereccia*. He suggests, though, that Lorenzo's parodic allusions to other poems render *Nencia* more than a mere snapshot of the countryside. I agree and argue that the combination of two presentations – one naturalistic, one satiric – and how Lorenzo and the readers respond to them constitute an "impossible conjunction" within the text. Orvieto, *Lorenzo de' Medici: La vita e le opere*, 15.

⁷⁴ Defining the pastoral tradition is a persistent topic of literary debate. Paul Alpers has surveyed the many problems of defining what constitutes pastoral because with no consensus on definitions for pastoral or even for genre or mode, we have as many versions of pastoral as critics who talk about it. Alpers rejects the generous inclusivity of any work that pits a rural ethos against an urban one; instead, he embraces pastoral as a work whose central fiction treats the lives of shepherds. Even with a more narrow and formalist view, he groups different types of pastoral based on a representative element of the text, be it a conventional character, motif, metaphor, etc.. Alpers, *What is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 3-78. Alpers's whittled-down definition intentionally excludes many texts, and even though *Nencia* centers on the life of a shepherd, it does not square well with other representative conventions. However, *Nencia* does fit two types of pastorals that Terry Gifford established a few years after Alpers's tome. Gifford suggested three overarching categories for the many observed usages of "pastoral" in reference to literary texts. The first type is a literary form in an idealized natural setting with common motifs, such as the (love) lives of shepherds or virtues of country life. The second is a broad umbrella of descriptions of the countryside or country lifestyle with an implied or explicit favorable judgment attributed to country life in comparison to urban life. The third broad usage of pastoral is a dismissive or pejorative description of an overidealized vision that does not account for the realities of labor, the nature of agricultural economy, or the environmental costs involved in country living. Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999) 1-13. *Nencia* presents a curious case with regard to these categories. It does center on the life of a shepherd, but I will discuss in this chapter how it breaks from a traditional frame. There are implicit and explicit comparisons between rural and urban life, but the opportunities for scorn that Lorenzo presents to his readers indicate the cultural superiority of urban society over country life. And, finally, it *does* exhibit the necessary work of life in the country when, at the conclusion of the poem, Vallera interrupts his aside to his absent lady because of his duty to gather his livestock and lead them home. A more satisfying description of *Nencia's* place in the pastoral tradition comes from Maria Corti's work on literary semiotics in which she warns against restrictive definitions of genre like the one Alpers has provided. She analyzes what constitutes a genre and how new genres are formed in terms of codifying identifiable characteristics of setting, characters, role of the author, motifs, etc.. She demonstrates how a text like *Nencia* can contain examples of a genre's code as well as unique characteristics that indicate a new sign or genre. In this sense, *Nencia* shares much of the pastoral code but differs significantly because the rustic setting is not idealized, because Vallera is subject to quotidian labors and cares, and because Lorenzo and members of his circle are not included among the characters of the text. *Nencia* also demonstrates some aspects of rustic poems – like *rispetti* and *strambotti* – such as an offering of gifts from lover to beloved, comparisons from rustic life to describe a lady's beauty, and equivocal expressions revealing sexual desire. Because of the overlap of codes in *Nencia* between pastoral and rustic poetry, we note that it belongs to a greater pastoral or bucolic tradition, but is also antithetical to

lineage traces back to Greek and Latin bucolic literature like Theocritus's *Idylls* (3rd century BCE) and Virgil's *Eclogues* (42-39 BCE); however, *Nencia* resists strict compartmentalization as a direct descendent of these ancient models.⁷⁵

Nencia's lack of idealization of rustic themes and composition of vernacular verses in *ottava rima* all denote this poem a work of popular poetry.⁷⁶ While Theocritus composed his *Idylls* in Doric dialect, the meter he employed – dactylic hexameter – was associated with the most prestigious poetry of his age. Unlike Virgil, Lorenzo did not insert himself and other members of high society into the rustic text. *Nencia* does imply a contrast to urban life but it does not address an idealized pastoral lifestyle in Arcadia.⁷⁷ Lorenzo localizes the text

some aspects of that code. As a result, a new genre forms – *rime nenciali* – based on Lorenzo's text. Corti, *An Introduction to Literary Semiotics* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1978) 124-131 and *Nuovi metodi e fantasmi* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2001 [1969]) 281-304. Corti's method of categorizing *Nencia* meshes well with my consideration of *Nencia* in an overall pastoral vein while my analysis focuses on what makes it different from an archetypal pastoral, especially in terms of its specular representation of rustic lifestyle.

⁷⁵ Orvieto labels *Nencia* an *egloga rusticale e parodica*. Orvieto, "Nota introduttiva," *Nencia da Barberino*, 673. However, because of his emphasis on naturalistic representation, I prefer Domenico De Robertis's description of the vivid characters and realistic language in *Nencia* as a "translation" of an eclogue into popular form. De Robertis, "L'esperienza poetica del Quattrocento," *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. Emilio Cecchi and Natalino Sapegno, Vol. 3 (Milano: Garzanti, 1988) 494.

⁷⁶ Instead of a cohesive unit of twenty octaves in *ottava rima*, Patetta has proposed that *Nencia* consists of a loose collection of poems in other popular Tuscan styles: *strambotti* or *rispetti*. See note 70. A *strambotto* consists of eight hendecasyllabic verses on the subject of love in a rhyme scheme of *ababccdd* or in *ottava rima*, *abababcc*. *Strambotti* typically appear as stand-alone compositions consisting solely of eight verses. Similarly, *rispetti* consist of stand-alone love octaves that were sung. Salvadori notes that young men typically composed *rispetti* as part of the *maggiolate* festivals in which they serenaded their beloved ladies as they left a *maio*, a decorated flowering branch, at their doors as a token and celebration of love on the night before *calendimaggio* (the first of May). While both of these poetic formats consist of independent compositions, they might appear loosely grouped in a series referred to as *continuati*. Salvador, *Lorenzo de' Medici Selected Writings*, 255. The longest version of what has been referred to as *Nencia da Barberino* spans fifty-one octaves that lack a consistent narrative arc and that may have been reworkings from various editors. In such a case, judging those octaves to be a loose collection of individual *strambotti* or *rispetti* seems more plausible than in the much more cohesive composition of Text A from Lorenzo's hand.

⁷⁷ Virgil, particularly in Eclogue 1, introduced the comparative context between pastoral and urban life. The implicit contrast to urban life in *Nencia* becomes explicit in octave eight in the first of two direct references to *Firenze* by name. Vallera describes *Nencia* as a ballerina who leaps like a goat and twirls like a mill; he then proclaims that her curtsies are more graceful than any citizen of Florence: "e ffa le più llegendre riverenze / che gnuna cittadina da Firenze" (8.7-8). By naming the city and directly comparing *Nencia* to the women of Florence, Lorenzo makes it abundantly clear that the characters, setting, and lifestyle in *Nencia* are to be compared to those of cultured Florentine citizens.

immediately in the title: Vallera and Nencia reside in Barberino in the Mugello region just outside of Florence. In the second octave, Vallera's inventory of recent travels to other villages surrounding Florence further grounds the poem in the reality of geography familiar to Lorenzo's readers. While *Nencia* does invite comparisons to Florence, Lorenzo eschews the idealization of rustic life as a foil to corruption in the city. Instead of creating a frame removed from the city in order to view high society through a critical lens, *Nencia* presents the opposite. Lorenzo's naturalistic portrayal of life in the Mugello combines with instances of parodic treatment of aulic poetry invites an examination of rustic lifestyle from a culturally hegemonic viewpoint.⁷⁸

In between the ancient models of the purity and idealization of pastoral life and Lorenzo's naturalism and parody lies *Nencia's* diegetical model: Giovanni Boccaccio's novella of Belcolore in *Decameron* VIII.2.⁷⁹ In this tale, a rural priest wooed Belcolore, the wife of a plain countryman, in order to fulfill his sexual desires. The rural setting and characters reflect a formidable tie with the rustic scenario of Vallera and Nencia. The manner in which Vallera proposes many gifts to Nencia hearkens to the same approach adopted by the priest in this novella. Though more veiled in *Nencia*, innuendos within Vallera's praise and laments parallel the gift exchanges of pestle and mortar at the core of the priest's and Belcolore's tryst and cover up. These analogous elements, especially within a rural setting, designate Belcolore's tale as an antecedent text within the rustic tradition that Lorenzo drew upon for thematic components of

⁷⁸ Gifford's analysis of the pastoral tradition suggests that there is a return to the purity of country life or a recovery of truths from pastoral life to be applied to urban audiences. Gifford 45-115. *Nencia* stands out in this regard because no return to simplicity or purity is implied in the text.

⁷⁹ Umberto Bosco regards Boccaccio's tale of Belcolore as a significant antecedent text to *Nencia* because it demonstrates a transition between the Graeco-Roman pastoral tradition and the parodic treatment of love poetry in *Nencia* and the rhymes it inspired in the latter years of the fifteenth century. Bosco, *Saggi sul rinascimento italiano* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1970) 42. Though I focus on *Decameron* VIII.2 as a thematic forerunner to *Nencia*, Bosco also considers it as a pivot point in terms of the pastoral drama writ large because of his "bifrontal" treatment of the noble tradition and popular narrative.

Nencia. Lorenzo adopted the plot of Boccaccio's tale, but the naturalistic and parodic lenses of his poem departed from classical pastoral foundations. His manner of innovating within an inherited framework altered the course of poetry with rustic themes.⁸⁰ *Nencia's* influence shapes rustic poetry and even produces a new genre – *rime nenciali* – that persists for two centuries almost entirely as a derivative of *Nencia*.⁸¹

Lorenzo prepares the parodic foundation of *Nencia* by creating an expectation for the reader of an aulic love poem in the first octave. His poem begins with lexicon and topoi common to Petrarch, early Sicilian poets, and poets of the *dolce stil novo*: "Ardo d'amore, e conviemme cantare, / per una dama che me strugge el cuore" (1.1-2). The greatness of Vallera's burning love, that leads him to sing of his lady, corresponds in direct proportion to the destructive power that she holds over him. This motif of the lady's potentially destructive power evokes the *rime* from Odo delle Colonne, Rinaldo d'Aquino, Guido Guinizzelli, and Guido Cavalcanti;⁸² that his lady's eyes flicker with flames – "Ella non truova de bellezze pare, / cogli

⁸⁰ In her work on the poetic conception of ugly women in comparison to the dominant treatment of beautiful women in Italian lyric poetry from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, Patrizia Bettella dedicates a section to Lorenzo's parodic description of *Nencia's* beauty. She notes the impact of *Nencia* on the trajectory of rustic poetry and surmises that Lorenzo, the epitome of Florentine cultural elitism, sanctioned its new path by force of personality and fame. Bettella, *The Ugly Woman: Transgressive Aesthetic Models in Italian Poetry from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 87-88. Though perhaps a factor in the reception of the poem, accounting for *Nencia's* impact on rustic poetry by means of Lorenzo's political and social status discredits the originality of Lorenzo's treatment of rustic life within the pastoral tradition.

⁸¹ Orvieto considers that all of the manuscript editions of *Nencia* together constitute a genre instead of a single work. He views them collectively as an archetype or script for all subsequent *rime nenciali*. Orvieto, "Nota introduttiva," *Nencia da Barberino*, 673. I, however, focus on the originality and cohesiveness of Lorenzo's text – the twenty octaves of Text A – from which all subsequent rustic poems in the same vein derive.

⁸² Orvieto and Brestolini identify this topos in the initial verses of Odo delle Colonne's "Distretto core e amoroso" – "Distretto core e amoroso / gioioso mi fa cantare" (1-2); in Rinaldo d'Aquino's "Amor, che m'a 'n comando" – "Amor, che m'a 'n comando, / vuol ch'io deggia cantare" (1-2); in Guido Guinizzelli's "Donna, l'amor mi sforza" – "Donna, l'amor mi sforza / ch'eo vi deggia contare / com'eo / so' 'nnamorato [...] che si pres'è 'l meo core [...] ca more di pietate / e consomar lo faite / in gran foch'e 'n ardore" (1-3, 8-12); and in Guido Cavalcanti's "A me stesso di me pietate vene" – "Però che, quand' i' guardo verso lei, / rizzami gli occhi dello su' disdegno / sì feramente, che distrugge 'l core" (9-11). Orvieto and Brestolini 114. Lorenzo alludes to these models of profound love poems to establish an expectation of a cultivated treatment of love.

occhi gitta fiaccole d'amore" (1.5-6) – recalls verses from Cino da Pistoia and from Petrarch.⁸³

This familiar ring of the Tuscan and Sicilian lexicon and topoi in the first octave strategically prepare the reader for estrangement through parody – the most forceful literary quality of *Nencia*.

Inasmuch as Lorenzo's first octave situates his poem among the illustrious Sicilian, stilnovistic, and Petrarchan traditions, the second octave swiftly plants Vallera's laments within the context of life outside of Florence. Lorenzo teases Vallera for his *vanto* of his many travels that have not yet revealed a beauty as great as his *Nencia*:

I' sono stato a Empoli al mercato,
a Prato, a mMonticegli, a sSan Casciano,
a Colle, a pPoggibonzi, e sSan Donato,
a Grieve e quinamonte a dDecomano;
Feggine e Castelfranco ò rricercato,
San Piero, e 'l Borgo e Mangone e Gagliano:
più bel mercato ch'ento 'l mondo sia
è bBarberino, dov'è la Nencia mia. (2.1-8)

Each polysyndetonic verse amplifies the finale of Vallera's enumeratio of locales in which he declares his village's market as the most beautiful market in the world because of *Nencia*'s presence. Lorenzo contextualizes Vallera's sphere of experience through the irony of his numerous journeys since they are restricted to various small towns and villages of Florence's periphery, e.g. Empoli, Prato, Poggibonzi, etc..

In addition to grounding Vallera's travels within the experience of small-town living, this litany of villages serves as a continuation of Lorenzo's allusions to renowned love poetry. The estranging effect of listing these villages depends on the reader's capacity to identify Vallera's tour as a direct parody of Cielo d'Alcamo's voyage in his renowned *contrasto* "Rosa fresca

⁸³ From Cino da Pistoia's "Amore è uno spirito ch'ancide" – "Amore è uno spirito ch'ancide, / che nasce di piacere e ven per sguardo, / e fere 'l cor sì come face un dardo, / che l'altre membra distrugge e conquide" (1-4). All

aulentissima." Cielo d'Alcamo had searched in Calabria, Tuscany, Lombardy, Puglia, Genova, Pisa, and well beyond Italy, to Constantinople, Babylon, and more without finding a parallel beauty to that of his lady. Vallera's boast of his local tour contextualizes the narrative of *Nencia* while simultaneously trivializing his celebration of Nencia's unsurpassable beauty. This account of Vallera's travels signals the commencement of a sophisticated parody that underlies the entire poem and that proves most conspicuous in the comparisons he employs to convey Nencia's beauty.

In his extemporaneous praise of his fair Nencia, Vallera compares her to familiar images in his rustic world; for Lorenzo, this *descriptio feminae* represents a witty blend of naturalism and parody as he intersperses a canonical description with Vallera's quotidian experience. Vallera's passionate intention to put Nencia on a pedestal clashes with his lowbrow account of her beauty, thus rendering Nencia's overall description in octaves III-V, VIII, and X the most comical portions of the poem.

Vallera begins his extolling portrait of Nencia's physical beauty in the third octave:

Non vidi mai fanciulla tanto onesta,
né ttanto saviamente rilevata;
non vidi mai la più leggiadra testa,
né ssi llucente, né ssi bben quadrata;
con quelle ciglia che ppare una festa,
quand'ella l'alza ched ella me guata;
entro quel mezzo è 'l naso tanto bello,
che ppar proprio bucato col succhiello. (3.1-8)

Vallera's praises begin with Nencia's head; he exclaims how he had never seen such a graceful one as hers (3.3). The use of *testa* instead of the favored term *fronte* already suggests that the reader might anticipate an uncharacteristic description of his lady's beauty. To state that he had

quotations of Cino's poetry are found in *Le rime di Cino da Pistoia*, ed. Guido Zaccagnini (Genève: Olschki, 1925). Petrarca's "S'al principio risponde il fine e il mezzo" – "et quella che guardando il cor mi strugge" (11).

never seen such a well-squared head – *si ben quadrata* – is another unusual choice (3.4).⁸⁴ To mention her brow is expected (3.5), but Lorenzo fulfills our anticipation for an atypical description, that Nencia's *testa quadrata* has evoked, in the final verse of the third octave: "che ppar proprio bucato col succhiello" (3.8). The mere mention of her nostrils and the use of *bucato* instead of *forato* or another more delicate term are already unsophisticated, but Vallera extends his rough description by referring to the formation of his lady's exquisite nose with a carpenter's gimlet – *succhiello*. To make this surprising "artistic" instrument even more conspicuous, Lorenzo placed it in the concluding verse of the octave and in rhyme with *bello*. Describing Nencia's beauty as the creation of an artist would seem suitably lyrical; Vallera instead suggests that a carpenter had shaped his lady's beauty, which simultaneously represents an appropriate insertion of the instruments of his quotidian experience in his rustic environment as it reveals the comic nature of such a crude and uncultured "artistic" expression of beauty.⁸⁵

In the fourth octave, Lorenzo continues with a mixture of conventional comparisons and those that a *contadino* like Vallera would make:

Le labbra rosse paion de corallo,
e àvvi dreto duo filar' de denti
che sson più bianchi che quegli del cavallo:
da ogni lato ve n'à ppiù de venti;

⁸⁴ Bessi suggests the possibility that *quadrata* could connote that Nencia's head is properly proportioned. Bessi, *La Nencia da Barberino*, 141. Nevertheless, *quadrata* remains an awkward and inelegant expression for a laudatory description of the shape of Nencia's head.

⁸⁵ Visual arts and poetry have been compared since Horace's famed comparison – *Ut pictura poesis* – at the conclusion of his *Ars poetica* (c. 19 BCE). Though Horace's statement favorably views painting, the visual arts were not on equal footing with poetry because they were viewed as a product of manual skill rather than intellectual creation. This separation in social reception began to change in the fifteenth century as painting too began to be recognized as an intellectual activity. In his treatise *Della pittura* (1435), Leon Battista Alberti boosted the scholarly value of painting by filling the void on painting theory and by writing an edition in Latin with classical models. Twentieth-century art historian Carroll Westfall believes that Alberti's treatment of theory elevated painting to a veritable liberal art. Westfall, "Painting and the Liberal Arts: Alberti's View," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30.4 (1969) 494-95. However, other modes of the visual arts lagged behind painting in this regard, judged a creation of an artisan's technical skills instead of an artist's genius. Thus Vallera's claim that a carpenter had brilliantly formed Nencia's nose reveals a rather inferior and culturally backward expression of beauty.

le gote bianche paion de cristallo,
 sanz'altro liscio, né scorticamenti,
 rosse ento 'l mezzo, quant'è una rosa,
 che non se vide mai sì bella cosa. (4.1-8)

Again, Lorenzo begins with an expected comparison for describing a lady's mouth – Nencia's red lips appear as coral; the next comparison, though, is startlingly atypical for love poetry. Standard descriptions of teeth might include an emphasis on color (white), size (small), and shape (well-ordered). Noting that Nencia has all of her teeth may elicit a smile, but greater humor stems from Vallera's claim that they are whiter than his horse's teeth – "che sson più bianchi che quegli del cavallo" (4.3). Even from a shepherd whose world is replete with animals and even with the presence of animals in pastoral poetry, a comparison of a lady's mouth to that of a horse could only be included for comedic effect.⁸⁶

Immediately following this hilarity, Lorenzo returns to convention as Vallera admires Nencia's white skin with naturally rosy cheeks (4.5-7). He concludes the octave by reemphasizing Nencia's beauty, this time broadening the scope from Vallera's personal experience – "e mmai ne vidi ignuna tanto bella" (1.8) to a generalized statement that no one had seen such beauty: "che non se vide mai sì bella cosa" (4.8). In these descriptions of facial features in the fourth octave, Lorenzo accentuates *corallo* (4.1), *cavallo* (4.3), and *cristallo* (4.5) by placing them in rhyming position in this octave's *abababcc* scheme. By enclosing the unexpected equine dental comparison (*cavallo*) in rhyme with traditional descriptors for lips (*corallo*) and skin (*cristallo*), Lorenzo situates this bestial association in even greater relief and renders it glaringly out of place. This rhyming structure suggests that the parodic function of this

⁸⁶ Bettella notes the atypical nature of this comparison but believes that it is "perfectly legitimate in the context of peasant life" Bettella, *The Ugly Woman*, 88-89. I, however, concur with Sara Sturm's opinion that "not even the rudest of peasants would seriously compare his love's teeth to those of a horse in order to describe her beauty." Sturm, *Lorenzo de' Medici* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974) 51. Bessi notes a somewhat similar example to this startling bestial comparison is found in Leon Battista Alberti's *Tirsi* in which Floro describes the eyes of his

portion of the *descriptio feminae* outweighs any naturalism that the descriptors provide, but it calls our attention to this tension that Lorenzo has created between naturalism and fiction in the poem.

In the fifth octave, Vallera continues to describe his lady, concentrating on her eyes and their effect on him and on other men. Again, Lorenzo utilized a mixture of conventional and unconventional approaches:

Ell'a quegli occhi tanto rubacuori,
che lla trafiggere' con egli un muro;
chiunch'ella guata convien che 'nnamori,
ma ella à 'l cuore com'un ciottol duro,
e ssempre à drieto un migliaio d'amadori,
che da quegli occhi tutti presi furo;
la se rivolge e guata questo e quello:
i', per guatalla, me struggo el cervello. (5.1-8)

Nencia's heartbreaker eyes torment Vallera to the point that it destroys his mind to look upon her. This mental anguish provoked by Vallera's love for Nencia echoes a psychological distress most poignantly demonstrated by Guido Cavalcanti.⁸⁷ In conjunction with Nencia's tormenting eyes, Vallera laments her hardened heart. He employs, though, a rather uninspired comparison of her heart to a *ciottolo duro* – a pebble or cobblestone. Subsequent to *Nencia*, but indicative of a traditional approach, in *Orfeo*, Poliziano describes a beautiful nymph's heart with a series of hard materials: *sasso, ferro, diamante*. Petrarch too described Laura's hard heart as a *diamante*: "Nulla posso levar io per mi' 'ngegno / del bel diamante ond'ell'ha il cor sì duro" (CLXXI, 9-10). While not comically subversive like the description of Nencia's teeth, Lorenzo's subtle

beloved Tirsi as more beautiful than those of his bull. Bessi, *La Nencia da Barberino*, 40.

⁸⁷ Psychological anguish that accompanies love is a recurring motif of Cavalcanti's lyrics; it famously appears in "Perch'i' no spero di tornar giammai." The poet, Love's servant, addresses and gives instructions to his little ballad to seek out his beloved to give a report of painful and fearful sighs that represent his "strutta mente" (40). Lorenzo even adopts the verb form of *struggere* – as Cavalcanti employed the adjectival past participle *strutta* – to emphasize her eyes as the agent of the destroying effect on his mind. Cavalcanti uses this same topos in "O tu, che porti nelli occhi sovente," "L'anima mia vilment' è sbigotita," and "Tu m'hai sì piena di dolor la mente."

adjustment of the elements of comparison from diamond to pebble represents a playful subversion of a literary tradition while simultaneously communicating Vallera's humble sensibility. This comparative mixture continues in a delightful description of Nencia's hair in the seventh octave: "[...] quelle trecce biondelline, / e rricciute le vette de' capegli / che vvi pare attaccati mill'anegli" (6-8). Her blond locks continue the imagery of Provençal, Sicilian, and Tuscan love poetry, but the description of the tips of her hair stands out since *vette* typically refer to treetops or the summit of a mountain as representations of rural terrain.

Octaves eight and ten contain more combinations of poetic tropes common to love poetry and naturalistic representation of Vallera's world. Octave eight begins with a forthright pronouncement of Nencia's dancing prowess:

Ell'è diritta mente ballerina,
che lla se lancia com'una capretta,
girasi come rruota de mulina,
e ddassi della mano nella scarpetta;
quand'ella compie el ballo, ella se 'nchina,
po' se rivolge e dduo colpi iscambietta,
e ffa le più llegendre rivereneze
che gnuna cittadina da Firenze. (8.1-8)

This statement regarding Nencia's dance steps indicates their appropriateness, but that description does not stand alone. We have now come to anticipate a surprising comparison and Lorenzo does not disappoint. Vallera claims his lady hurtles through the air just as a little goat and turns like a mill wheel: "che lla se lancia com'una capretta, / girasi come rruota de mulina" (8.2-3). Caprine imagery certainly represents the reality of Vallera's surroundings, but as neither goats nor mills are renowned for gracefulness, the comparison stands as yet another comic moment in the poem. In his final bestial description, Vallera compares Nencia's white face to pig fat: "morbido e bianco, che ppare un sugnaccio" (10.8). *Morbido* and *bianco* are terms Boccaccio used twice in *Ninfale fiesolano* as the shepherd Africo described the delicate skin of

his beloved Mensola: "morbida e bianca, ed umile e piacente" (CIV.8) and "tu se' vezzosa e se' morbida e bianca" (CCLXXV.7). While borrowing terms from Boccaccio's pastoral tale, Lorenzo has again taken a step further into comical description. *Sugnaccio* undoubtedly highlights Vallera's rustic sensibility, but just as in the previous equine example, comparing his lady's skin to pig fat is a preposterous compliment that Lorenzo includes to elicit laughter from his readers.

These illustrative comparisons to animals overtly undercut Provençal, Petrarchan, Sicilian, and Tuscan poetic standards for describing a lady, but they also demonstrate how Nencia's body serves as Lorenzo's vehicle for conjoining poetic idealism and rural naturalism within his poem. At times, Lorenzo's lexical choices also serve the same purpose. Vallera's reference to his heart that is as hard as a cobblestone – *ciottolo* (5.4) – instead of a *sasso* or *diamante* and the *buco* in Nencia's chin (9.3), rather than a *foro*, *forellino*, or *concavitade*, represent a less grotesque method for Lorenzo to reveal rustic naturalism and to degrade established poetic language. Lorenzo has overturned noble themes and comparisons by changing the courtly lover to a shepherd that relates these motifs of his beloved shepherdess. Descriptions of a *contadino's* burning love, descriptions of his fine lady, and boastings of his provincial travels blatantly distort the original sources from which Lorenzo had drawn. His parody also included more subtle examples of playful jabs at cultivated poetry. The best example of his delicate touch is a description of Nencia's eyes: "Se ttu sapessi, Nencia, el grande amore / ch'i' porto a' tuo begli occhi tralucenti" (11.1-2). That her eyes were luminous is an expected portrayal; but Nencia's eyes are "*tralucenti*." This extra amount of brightness that makes her

eyes beyond brilliant satirizes the usage of a typical prefix (*tra*) exploited by Sicilian exemplar Giacomo da Lentini and subsequently by Guittone d'Arezzo.⁸⁸

Lorenzo's *descriptio feminae* comprises the most captivating section of the poem because of the surprisingly humorous comparisons with which Vallera describes his lady's beauty. The structure within which Lorenzo has embedded these comparisons also appears peculiar because he mixes of the order of the canonical elements of Nencia's description.

At the time when Lorenzo composed *Nencia* (1470), physical descriptions of female beauty had long since been standardized. Depictions of women in the fifteenth century typically belong to one of two categories: *canone breve* or *canone lungo*.⁸⁹ Short-form descriptions focus on the face of the lady, including the brightness and color of the eyes, hair, and mouth. It is also common to find another portion of the body included, such as hands, neck, or breast. The long canon depicts a lady's beauty through an extensive account of her body from head to toe. In these descriptions, the order, form, and proportion of body parts are valued as component parts of the lady's beauty. Petrarch's fragmented descriptions of his beloved Laura in his *Canzoniere* represent a prototype of the short canon, while Boccaccio's extensive descriptions of Emilia in *Teseida* and the nymphs in *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* serve as representatives of the long canon. In Petrarch's case, his descriptions of Laura's physical beauty also indicated her moral or spiritual beauty. In later lyrics, Lorenzo places a premium on physical beauty as an indicator of metaphysical beauty, but it is certainly not the case in *Nencia*.

Lorenzo's description of Nencia includes the exposition of canonical body parts, but in

⁸⁸ Cecco Angiolieri had also parodied this fondness for the prefix *tra*. Orvieto e Brestolini claim this reference as yet another element that demonstrates literary ties between Lorenzo's *Nencia* and the *comico-realistico* tradition. Orvieto and Brestolini 117.

⁸⁹ In his work on depictions of women in the beginning of the *Cinquecento*, Giovanni Pozzi divided the body parts typically described in short-form and long-form poetic descriptions of their beauty. Pozzi, "Il ritratto della donna nella poesia d'inizio Cinquecento e la pittura di Giorgione," *Lettere italiane* 31.1 (1979) 3-30.

homely, comical terms. Beyond the parodic comparisons, though, rest issues of succession in the order of the presentation of her physical beauty.⁹⁰ When a singular work deviates from canonized conventions it can do so in one of two general ways: modify aspects from within the convention or completely subvert and destroy it. The manner in which Lorenzo alters the order of Nencia's description represents the former approach as an innovation within the framework of its literary heritage.⁹¹

In octaves three through nine, Lorenzo, via Vallera's frenzied outpouring, describes Nencia's head, brow, nose, lips, teeth, cheeks, eyes, hair, and chin. Despite Vallera's cravings and the coarse innuendo later in the poem, for this *descriptio feminae* Lorenzo does not indulge in uncouth details or fetishes of unconventional body parts; he remains true to descriptions of body parts within the canon (particularly, the *canone breve*). However, the procession he sets forth within the order of octaves – head (3), brow (3), nose (3), lips (4), teeth (4), cheeks (4), eyes (5, 7), hair (7), chin (9) – does not stay on track. As a favored element of a lady's beauty, the eyes are typically the first or among the first parts described; Vallera does not arrive at Nencia's eyes until the fifth octave. Though he returns to further describe her eyes in the seventh octave in which he pairs them with a description of her hair (another privileged body part), these descriptions are oddly out of place. Furthermore, Lorenzo did not leave Nencia's eyes and hair for last as a culminating moment of her physical description so their placement does not

⁹⁰ In a blanket statement, Orvieto says that Nencia's description follows the canon in succession and aesthetics. However, Bessi takes a much more detailed view that reveals these issues of succession. Orvieto *Opere* 685, Bessi 82-88. I rely heavily on Bessi's analysis but it leads me to conclude that Lorenzo had employed a structural mixture in his poem, whereas Bessi concludes that these irregularities of form indicate multiple edits from any number of authors and editors.

⁹¹ Corti suggests these two modes of diverging from codified norms – changing from within or destruction of the code – in her discussion of how new genres arise. Corti, *Literary Semiotics*, 124-26. I apply this observation to the order in which Lorenzo presents the constituent parts of Nencia's description not in terms of genre but in reference to innovating within the norms of describing a lady's beauty.

highlight them as customary for Sicilian and Tuscan love poetry.

Despite this abnormal overall structure, these descriptions of body parts are ordered canonically on a modular level when we consider them within the octave in which they appear. Pairing the eyes and hair is traditional as is the progression from lips to teeth to cheeks and we find an identical order to the third octave's head-brow-nose succession in Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto*. Thus Lorenzo's *descriptio feminae* both derives from and deviates from canonical models of love poetry. There remains sufficient adherence to the canon within individual octaves to identify the norms that his parodic comparisons mock, but enough variance in the overarching sequence to undermine an allegiance to tradition.⁹² This contradictory structure is a hallmark of Lorenzo's *Nencia*: he has derived *topoi* from traditional models of pastoral and courtly love poetry and innovated within them in order to create a fresh and original poem.

The curious order in which Lorenzo presents Vallera's descriptions of Nencia's body parts adds to the attention already drawn to them because of their parodic and comic nature. But these descriptions of the lovey Nencia omit any virtues of moral character or spirituality; likewise, there are no connotations of Nencia's beauty as an indicator of metaphysical splendor. Instead, Lorenzo's description demonstrates a preoccupation with visual representation. In the third octave, Vallera states twice that he had never seen – *Non vidi mai* – such a fair lady nor a more graceful or shining – *lucente* – head. His observation and description of her nose followed after she had lifted her head and looked upon him – *ella me guata*. In the fourth octave, Vallera's

⁹² After an exhaustive analysis of this scenario, Bessi posits that it is an intentional break from tradition. However, she has difficulty reconciling the idea: "L'operazione risulterebbe però contraddittoria: se si ammette infatti che si persegua il fine della disgregazione del *topos*, come ammettere, o meglio come giustificare, che lo stesso *topos* resti come punto di riferimento evidente all'interno delle singole ottave?" She expected to find either a mirroring of the standard order with simple lexical parodic variations or a wholesale discarding of the model. Bessi 87. Bessi's observations and assumptions lead her to conclude that there must have been some post facto editing of the arrangement in text A. I concur with Bessi's explanations that an intentional (dis)order creates a contradictory structure. I, however, consider the arrangement as another example of how Lorenzo innovated within the framework of literary tradition.

visual descriptions focus on color: *labbra rosse*, *denti bianche*, and *gote bianche e rosse*. In the fifth octave, we find two references to Nencia's eyes, two references to her gaze, and one instance of Vallera's gaze as well. Octave eight includes descriptions of Nencia's dark eyes and blond locks – *occhi neri* and *trece biondelline*. Octave nine has a general reference to Nencia's proportions and that she is *bianca* and *rossa*, an observation that continues in octave ten that praises her white face. In octave eleven we find another reference to Nencia's exceedingly shimmering eyes – *tralucenti*.

Lorenzo's attention to visual representation in Nencia's description includes a specificity of color that mirrors pictorial terminology in Leon Battista Alberti's *Della pittura* (1435), the foundational theoretical treatise of painting and single-point perspective in the fifteenth century.⁹³ In the seventh octave, Lorenzo describes Nencia's hair as *biondelline* instead of merely *bionde*, which mirrors the precision with which Alberti utilized suffixes to distinguish between various hues of particular colors. Another example arises in octave nineteen when Vallera mentions a ribbon or sash of blue silk – *de seta una cordella cilestrina* – among the many gifts he could acquire for Nencia in his upcoming trip to Florence. The specificity of *cilestrina* mirrors Alberti's exactness of its usage when referring to an airy sky.⁹⁴

⁹³ Modern scholars, beginning with art historian Erwin Panofsky, moved beyond Alberti's theoretical and geometric treatment of single-point perspective as a tool for creating naturalistic images, utilizing the concept, instead, as an interpretive tool for cultural expression. Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991 [1927]). More recently, Michael Baxandall has explored perspective as a representation of a moral or spiritual view or a visual metaphor for an avenue toward divine beauty. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988 [1972]). James Elkins produced a catalogue of discussions on and uses of single-point perspective and its various meanings and Charles Carman continued Elkins' pursuit of the symbolic meaning or "poetics of perspective." Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). Carman, *Leon Battista Alberti and Nicholas Cusanus: Towards an Epistemology of Vision for Italian Renaissance Art and Culture* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2014). In this exploration of Lorenzo's text, however, I cite perspective as a method or painting approach that empowers the artist to depict a more faithful imitation of nature, not as an interpretive or epistemological tool.

⁹⁴ Nicoletta Maraschio's analysis of Alberti's language usage in *Della pittura* suggests that his use of diminutives in his language of colors served as a natural way to distinguish between hues of a particular color. Maraschio, "Aspetti del bilinguismo albertiano nel *De Pictura*," *Rinascimento* 12 (1972) 213. Bessi cites Maraschio's study and

In the example of Nencia's hair, though, the color *biondelline* does not comprise the entirety of Lorenzo's description: "[...] quelle trecce biondelline, / e rricciute le vette de' capegli / che vvi pare attaccati mill'anegli." Her tresses are blond and the curly tips appear (again with an emphasis on the visual) to have thousands of ringlets. Lorenzo employs *vette* when referring to the curly tips of her hair, which, as a botanical term, evokes images of "tips" in the sense of treetops. Other instances of heightened visual awareness also include indications of the rural context of the poem: Nencia's teeth are whiter than those of a horse and her face is as soft and white as pig lard. Lorenzo's attempts to create a visual portrayal of Nencia are part of his overall specular or naturalistic representation of rustic life mirror Alberti's attention to imitating nature in painting.

In *Della pittura*, Alberti ascribes the invention of painting to Narcissus, the mythological hunter who was enamored with the beauty of his own reflection on the surface of a pool of water. In the beginning of Book II, Alberti's rhetorical question asserts that the essence of painting is embracing the surface of the pool: *Che dirai tu essere dipingere altra cosa che simile abbracciare con arte quella ivi superficie del fonte?* (II.26). The perspective of planes and surfaces on which an image appears lies at the base of Alberti's geometric theories that focus on the science of representing what is visible to the human eye. His emphasis on perspective highlights the importance of imitation of nature in visual art, which enables the painter to create a realistic image that has the compelling allure of presence. In Lorenzo's poem, Nencia's body is

suggests *cilestrina* as another example by quoting *Della pittura* I.9: "Fia colore di fuoco il rosso, dell'aere celestrino, dell'acqua il verde, e la terra bigia e cenericcia." She proposes that *rilevata* in the third octave – "Non vidi mai fanciulla tanto onesta, / né ttanto saviamente rilevata" – as another example of pictorial technique. *Rilevata* could mean "in relief" as much as it could also mean exalted or uplifted. Bessi, 53-57. I find that all three of these examples demonstrate Lorenzo's preoccupation with presenting a natural visual description of Nencia.

the surface of both specular and fictive imagery.⁹⁵ The descriptions of her body parts consist of a heightened consideration of visual observation with descriptors from the rural setting as well as parody of canonical love poetry.⁹⁶

While Nencia's body represents Lorenzo's commitment to balancing the literary and naturalistic elements of his poem, it does not represent the entirety of Lorenzo's effort to mirror rustic life within the text. Other examples emerge with regard to language, Vallera's believable characterization, and the presence of animals in the poem. Together, these elements challenge the non-mimetic nature of parody as they combine to create a *brioso quadro* of "bucolic reality."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Alberti even refers to "surfaces" as the component parts that comprise bodies in pictorial compositions: "Parte della istoria sono i corpi, parte de' corpi i membri, parte de' membri la superficie. Le prime adunque parti del dipingere sono le superficie. Nasce della composizione delle superficie quella grazia ne' corpi quale dicono bellezza." (II.35) In this sense, Nencia's body parts are the surfaces, or components of the overall composition, that create the global specular representation of rustic life as well as the surfaces or constituent parts of the overall parodic composition of the poem.

⁹⁶ I do not wish to run the risk of making too tight of a connection between *Nencia* and Alberti's text. I do not submit that Lorenzo follows Alberti's exact prescription as if they were collaborators on the concept of surfaces as constituent parts of a composition or for promoting single-point perspective as a means of imitating nature. I do, however, see similarities to an imitation of nature in painting in Lorenzo's naturalistic descriptions. As Charles Carman notes in the preface "Perspectiva ut Poesis" to his exploration of poetics and epistemology of pictorial representation in the Renaissance, naturalism is a salient feature of visual art in this period that distinguishes it from the preceding Medieval era. Carman, *Epistemology of Vision*, xi-xv. I, therefore, see a broad connection between Lorenzo's eschewing of idealization in the pastoral setting and how Baxandall's second chapter describes how the quality of detailed imitation of nature was at the root of a Renaissance painter's skills. Baxandall 30-108. Broadly speaking, Carman seeks to establish a poetics of sight that implies an interpretation of what is seen as a symbolic representation of mental or spiritual vision. I posit that such an approach is more clearly applicable to Lorenzo's treatment of the image of the lady on his heart that I address in Chapters Three and Four. Marco Ruffini explores a phenomenological approach to Albertian surfaces that accentuates a tension between surface and metaphor in early Renaissance thought. Ruffini, "Alberti on the Surface," *California Italian Studies* 2.1 (2011), 1 June 2014 <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3pd1g732>> There is a temptation to apply such a spiritualizing or theological connection to the specular representation observable by the human eye as a metaphor for idealized beauty or truth; however, I do not find evidence *within the poem* that warrants that sort of philosophical reading of the text. Nencia's body does serve as a locus of physical and metaphorical (parodic) interplay that permeates the text, but they are separate representations instead of physical and metaphysical portrayals of a single referent.

⁹⁷ Salvadori deems erroneous any reading of "bucolic reality" in what she considers to be a poem solely based on parody. Salvadori, 30. Bettella too refers to *Nencia* solely in terms of parody and claims that all parodic texts purposefully lack realism: "Parodistic texts are non-mimetic forms of artistic expression because they do not imitate nature but instead distort existing literary models." Bettella, 83. Surely we note the distortion of literary models, but we must also consider the specular representation that creates what Rossi dubbed a "brioso quadro di vita campagnola." Within a distressingly brief entry in the literary history of Italy, Rossi highlights the *elegante rudezza*

Vallera's mode of speaking demonstrates Lorenzo's preoccupation with language in *Nencia*, indicating his predilection for the vernacular. Later, in the *proemio* to his *Comento de' miei sonetti*, Lorenzo would pinpoint the dignity bestowed on a vernacular language when that language is "[...] copiosa e abundante e atta a esprimere bene il senso e concetto della mente." He also identified Dante, Petrarch, and Cavalcanti as exemplars of the dignity of their language. By voicing Vallera's praise and longings, Lorenzo highlighted an abundant range of the Tuscan vernacular that spanned from illustrious poetry to the amorous spontaneity of this simple shepherd.

Vallera's expressions serve less as a literary game or expression of an elite poet and more as an expression of the realities of life in the Mugello region. To this point, Rochon noted:

Mais, dans la *Nencia*, l'emploi du patois n'est pas, comme il le sera dans des textes postérieurs, un de ces jeux littéraires où l'on voit le poète, poussé par une espèce de curiosité folklorique, se divertir à recueillir des mots rares et des expressions pittoresques qui n'ajoutent rien à la réalité humaine de l'œuvre. Il est, au contraire, un moyen artistique de conférer à l'évocation de la vie, du caractère et des sentiments d'un paysan amoureux une vérité qui eût été malaisément atteinte si Vallera avait utilisé une autre langue que celle qu'il parlait tous les jours.⁹⁸

For Rochon, if Lorenzo had elected to utilize a loftier register, esoteric terms, or the more noble language of other great Tuscan poets, *Nencia* would have lost its connection to "human reality."

One instance of Vallera's language that develops his rural character is a phonemic exchange found in multiple occurrences in the poem: *miggghiaio* for *migliaio*, *tagghiare* for *tagliare*, *begghi* for *begli*, among other substitutions. Overall, Lorenzo's use of the vernacular indicates his dedication to the regional tongue and it suggests a level of authenticity in his characterization

– an appropriate oxymoron for this poem of difficult combinations – with which the poet treats a mixture of images, touches, tones, and sounds of a convincing representation of Vallera's rural surroundings. Rossi, *Il Quattrocento*, 503. As noted previously, Orvieto also describes *Nencia* as a *fotografia campereccia*. Orvieto, *La vita e le opere*, 15. I contend that Lorenzo masterfully combines literary distortion and a naturalistic account of country living.

of Vallera. Including these additional indicators of a rustic *langue que celle qu'it parlait tous les jours* exhibits Vallera's difference from citizens within the walls of Florence, but together with his obvious passion for Nencia, they make Vallera an accessible, likeable, and believable character.⁹⁹

Lorenzo's depiction of Vallera comically undercuts the typology of a courtly poet, but Lorenzo presents him so masterfully within his rustic world that he is also a perfectly believable character in that environment. The outlandishness of comparing his lady's teeth to those of a horse or her face to pig lard heightens the comic absurdity of his praise, but Vallera expresses them with such passionate spontaneity that his devotion to Nencia appears to be genuine.

Vallera recounts his forlorn state in Nencia's absence in the fourteenth octave:

Nonn ò potuto stanotte dormire:
 mill'anni me pareva che fusse giorno,
 per poter via con le bestie venire,
 con ell'e insieme col tuo viso addorno;
 e ppur del letto me convenne uscire:
 puosimi sotto 'l portico del forno,
 e llivi stetti più d'un'ora e mezzo,
 finché la luna se ripuose, al rezzo. (14.1-8)

The first verse's rhythmic series of plosives, /t/, creates an abrupt staccato: "Non ho potuto stanotte dormire." This consonance binds the sonorous and semantic elements of the verse as Vallera explains his jittery alertness. The presence of intransitive verbs of motion, *venire* and

⁹⁸ Rochon, 413.

⁹⁹ Orvieto and Brestolini consider the many examples of rustic language throughout all texts of *Nencia* as a type of linguistic "degradation." They group this linguistic degradation together with a thematic degradation found in the innuendos that I address later. They deem both forms of "degradation" as emblematic of comic-realistic style. Orvieto and Brestolini 99-126, especially 117-19. Bessi has argued that these phonetic and morphological "rusticalizations," particularly in Text A, were not part of an original edition of *Nencia*, but subsequently added to the poem as an homage to dialectal language. Bessi 116-18. However, I suggest that the use of the vernacular, rather than a degradation of poetic content, renders Vallera an accessible character for the reader. Ironically, these more specific dialectal cues identify Vallera's rustic nature as a shepherd who clearly exists in a sphere outside of Florence.

uscire in verses three and five, in rhyming position with *dormire* in verse one emphasizes Vallera's fervent insomnia. His hyperbolic expression in verse two of the interminable duration of this night – *mill'anni me pareo che fusse giorno* – demonstrates the despondence of a poet-lover separated from his lady, but Vallera undercuts his despairing exaggeration by claiming he spent more than an hour and a half on the porch. The precision of this detail – *puosimi sotto 'l portico del forno, / e livi stetti più d'un'ora e mezzo* (14.6-7) – demonstrates Vallera's frankness and straightforward sensibility since "a traditional love-poet would hardly refer to such a duration as 'an hour and a half' to define a vigil of love."¹⁰⁰

Readers can empathize with his sleepless night and pained mental state as he longs for Nencia's presence; the believability of his character aids the overall naturalistic complexion of the poem, but the inclusion of animals of octaves fourteen and fifteen truly exemplifies the responsibilities of his way of life:

Nonn ò potuto stanotte dormire:
 mill'anni me pareo che fusse giorno,
 per poter via con *le bestie* venire,
 con ell'e insieme col tuo viso addorno;
 e ppur del letto me convenne uscire:
 puosimi sotto 'l portico del forno,
 e livi stetti più d'un'ora e mezzo,
 finché la luna se ripuose, al rezzo. (14.1-8, emphasis mine)

Quand'i' te vidi uscir della capanna
 col *cane* innanzi e colle *pecorelle*,
 e' me ricrebbe el cuor più d'una spanna
 e lle lagrime vennon pelle pelle;
 e poi me caccia' giù con una canna,

¹⁰⁰ Sturm claims Lorenzo's ability to create a believable character so different than himself as a great achievement of *Nencia* and that it demonstrates an admirable range of experience and understanding. She suggests that the meticulousness in this expression reveals Lorenzo's attention to detail that enables him to present such a believable character. "A traditional love-poet would hardly refer to such a duration as "an hour and a half" to define a vigil of love; in the matter-of-fact mind of Vallera, however, it seems entirely at home, and conveys, more clearly than a more poetic expression, not only the effects of his passion, but also the sense bewilderment which these produce in his unaccustomed thoughts." Sturm 53-54. I agree that this "hour and a half" adds a human touch and matter-of-factness to Vallera's characterization, but the animals in octaves fourteen and fifteen serve as a better specular display of his lifestyle as a shepherd.

dirieto a' mie *giovenchi* e lle *vitelle*,
 e avvia'gli innanzi vie quinentro
 per aspettarti, e ttu tornasti dentro. (15.1-8, emphasis mine)

Vallera announces his sleepless night and how it seems a thousand years will pass before he can let out his animals and come see lovely Nencia's face (14.1-4). Whereas Lorenzo includes *le bestie* almost incidentally in the fourteenth octave – as if it is taken for granted that Vallera would tend to his animals as part of his daily routine – in the fifteenth octave he presents a catalogue of farm animals: *pecorelle* in tandem with *cane* in verse two and *vitelle* together with *giovenchi* in verse six. *Pecorelle* and *vitelle* assume an additional emphasis because they appear in rhyming position. In these two octaves that comprise Vallera's description of the last time he saw his lady and his lament of how much time had since passed, references to animals outnumber mentions of Nencia six to four – those referencing animals: *le bestie* and *ell'e*, for which *bestie* serves as antecedent (14.3-4), *cane* and *pecorelle* (15.2), and *giovenchi* and *vitelle* (15.6); those alluding to Nencia: *tuo viso* (14.4), *te* (15.1), *aspettarti* and *tu* (15.8). Although cattle and especially sheep are common in bucolic verse, they appear here at the homes of Vallera and Nencia. These references to a dog, lambs, cows, calves, and general farm *bestie* emphasize the poem's rural context and they also characterize Vallera's provincial mindset by noting his responsibility to care for them. With allusions to animals outnumbering even the references to Nencia in these octaves addressed to her, the naturalism of the poem's backdrop comes to the fore.

Vallera's yearnings and the details of place, thought, and language are the surfaces that reflect the reality of his rustic world and the emphasis they receive in the poem implies a comparison between rural and urban life. The satire of courtly poetry also implies a comparison as he playfully mocks elite culture. Lorenzo, however, pushes his rustic poem beyond implied

comparison; he explicitly calls for a comparison of Nencia to a thousand beautiful citizens (of Florence) in the seventh octave:

Ella potrebbe andare al paragone
tra un migghiaio de belle cittadine,
che ll'apparisce bene tra lle persone
co' suo begghi atti e dolce paroline. (7.1-4)

Vallera is confident that Nencia's beauty compares well even if judged among thousands of beautiful citizens. Lorenzo again demands a comparison in the eighth octave by means of Nencia's dance and curtsy:

quand'ella compie el ballo, ella se 'nchina,
po' se rivolge e dduo colpi iscambietta,
e ffa le più llegaladre riverenze
che gnuna cittadina da Firenze. (8.5-8)

Before the many comical comparisons he makes to describe his fair lady, Vallera had claimed that no lady could match her beauty (1.5-8). Here he claims that Nencia's beautiful actions and sweet words equal those of any citizen and that she dances, finishes, and bows more gracefully than any Florentine.

Vallera asserts Nencia's beauty in this comparison while he is fully cognizant of his social status.¹⁰¹ In these passages, Nencia becomes a metaphor for rustic life. The seventh octave clearly portrays Nencia as a country girl through rustic language (*migghiaio* and *begghi*) and imagery (*vette de' capegli*). According to Vallera's claims, Nencia and the rustic life fare well in a comparison to Florence on the surface – the privileged sphere in the natural descriptions of the rustic world within this poem. However well country life fares in a surface-level comparison, though, Vallera and Nencia remain outsiders to the culture of Florence.

The manner in which Vallera describes Nencia's beauty indicates that they both exist

¹⁰¹ Sturm argues that Vallera enthusiastically lauds Nencia's beauty even though he knows that she would be scorned by city standards. Sturm 55. I suggest that his eagerness to prove her beauty discloses his awareness of a cultural divide.

outside of cultural norms. As outbursts of love, Vallera's proclamations manifest passion but not a spiritualization of his desire. His description of Nencia and her beauty overwhelmingly focuses on her physical attributes. Though he does mention that she is *onesta* (3.1) and that she has a hard heart (5.4), Vallera does not engage in a psychological description of Nencia. Any presence of inner splendor, moral goodness, or transcendent beauty remains unaccounted for. Furthermore, a realization of sexual contact would constitute a complete degradation of spiritualized love and his thinly veiled sexual innuendos oppose any notion of sublimation. A potential indication of Nencia's *facili costumi* would further demonstrate that Vallera does not extol a moral love within his spontaneous declarations about Nencia.

In a description of Nencia's eyes, Vallera laments the mental torment that comes when Nencia addresses and looks at other men – "la se rivolge e guata questo e quello" (5.7). As a woman who gazes, assuming the role reserved for the male poet-lover, Nencia would already be considered an "other" in relation to the traditional role for the lady in love poetry. More subversively, as a woman who looks upon men (instead of being limited to being the object of their gazes and desires), Nencia may lack the sexual/moral virtue of a lady in courtly poetry.¹⁰² This demeaned love hints at Nencia's otherness in relation to privileged culture as embodied by the city. It simultaneously demonstrates that the specular representation of a country lifestyle in *Nencia*, which we have also described as a surface-level or Narcissan approach, lacks a philosophical core – it is not a manifesto of the rustic lover.

As part of Vallera's otherness in relation to the cultural elite, the sexual innuendos that Lorenzo employs to characterize the nature of Vallera's desires can also invite contempt for

¹⁰² Vallera's sexual desire can be considered among many linguistic and poetic degradations that indicate a popular or *comico-realistico* nature of this text. Orvieto and Brestolini also suggest the possibility of Nencia's sexual escapades because of her active role in gazing upon men. Orvieto and Brestolini, 115-17. A *contadina* who acts

rustic life from an urban cultural perspective. The substance of parody requires a canon to destabilize; understanding parodies like Vallera's travels to local markets and Nencia's extra-luminous eyes require a familiarity with the original poems in order to grasp the humor. The comic moments of bestial comparisons found in the *descriptio feminae* express humor themselves without a reference to another text or standard; they appear sufficiently ridiculous to cultured or popular audiences. Innuendo and double entendre are similarly accessible and in this sense they seem appropriate for popular poetry: nearly anyone can identify the humor in a lowbrow joke. Lorenzo's instances of double entendre, though, fall on both poles of a spectrum – examples of a naturalism that is comical to all audiences and examples that contain literary ties that well versed individuals would comprehend.

As we might expect, Lorenzo's veiled obscenities include sexually suggestive and phallic imagery. In the tenth octave, Vallera proclaims how lucky Nencia's future husband will be:

Ben se potrà chiamare avventurato,
chi fie marito de sí bella moglie;
ben se potrà tenere in buon dí nato,
chi arà quel fioraliso senza foglie. (10.1-4)

Suggesting the luck of one who encounters an unclothed Nencia seems rather benign compared to his coarser references to male genitalia. The first such example can be taken plausibly on face value, but it is hardly a stretch to consider another body part that grew when Vallera's "heart" expanded upon seeing Nencia exit from her hut:

Quand'i' te vidi uscir della capanna,
col cane innanzi e colle pecorelle,
e' mi ricrebbe el cuor più di una spanna,
e lle lagrime vennon pelle pelle, (15.1-4)

Lorenzo employs an even thinner veil to describe the beaded necklace with a swinging pendant

upon her sexual appetite would overturn the typology of the lady in love poetry, especially the role of the lady as spiritual muse and mediator.

that Vallera hopes will adorn Nencia' neck:

Se ttu volessi per portare a collo
 un collarino de que' bottoncin' rossi,
 con un dondol nel mezzo, reherollo:
 ma dimmi se gli vuoi piccini o grossi. (18.1-4)

These obscenities are sufficiently graphic for readers to recognize them. Curiously, Lorenzo's most explicit image proves more salient than these simple examples not solely because of its graphic nature but because of the accompanying intertextual allusion.

Surpassing the reference to genitalia, in the sixteenth octave, Vallera makes even more specific reference to his desire for sexual contact with Nencia:

Che fa' tu entro, ché nnon esci fuora?
 Vientene su per questi valiconi,
 ch'i' cacci le mie bestie nelle tua,
 e pparrem uno, e ppur saremo dua. (16.5-8)

The blatant carnality of this reference to "two that appear as one" represents Lorenzo's most graphic descriptive mode. The *bestie* of these verses ostensibly refer to the animals in the shepherds' purview, but the obvious sexual overtone suggests a representation of genitalia. In yet another interpretive layer, the "beasts" could represent Vallera and Nencia themselves, suggesting a tight correlation between unsophisticated country folk and primitive appetite. This erotic description of the "two that appear as one," however, has a distinguished pedigree. In the fourth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Salmacis, a nymph, intertwined herself with Hermaphroditus. Their sexual union resulted in a combination of the two— both male and female — into one physical form.

Lorenzo's raw imagery also parodies other examples of non-sexual unions. In his *Simposium*, Plato adopts this notion of two becoming one to describe the supreme unity of humanity and God in life and in death. In his *canzone* "Doglia mi reca ne lo core adire," Dante

referred to the power of Love to render a spiritual merger of lovers. Lorenzo's parody even extends to a union found in the Bible; in Genesis 2:24, after God had created man and woman he commanded them to be so united in their love and purposes that they appear to be as one. This perversion of the union of God and man, the souls of lovers, and husband and wife best exemplifies the subversive vein of Lorenzo's poem.¹⁰³ Lorenzo jokingly borrows from hallowed classical texts, a sonnet of a revered Florentine poet of the Italian vernacular, and even the foundational scripture of Christian and Hebraic religious traditions.

Vallera's boorish expression depicts an intricate intertextual allusion that demonstrates the duality of Lorenzo's complex humor: it is humorous for those who notice the obvious sexual reference while its depth does not escape those who recognize a sly poke at literary, philosophical, and religious culture. Lorenzo successfully linked this image of two who are one with its literary heritage but also displaced it from that tradition in order to exhibit the nature of a young shepherd's lustful desires.

Lorenzo's usage of double entendre destabilizes the poem's photographic naturalism. Beneath this surface, these examples of double entendre and parodies emerge as a critical lens for readers to view *contadini*. Lorenzo compounds his parodistic sensibility already established by describing Nencia via bestial comparisons by presenting a layer of the text in which Vallera and Nencia themselves are beasts. This deanthropomorphization illustrates a potential moral verdict from the cultural elites looking down upon the simpletons in the countryside.

The complex nature of Lorenzo's presentation of rustic life and his relationship to it

¹⁰³ Orvieto and Brestolini find no coincidences in the degraded characteristics of comic poetry because intertextuality pervades the texts. As such, they identify one of the purposes of the comic poet: "Questo è uno dei compiti del comico: denudare o ribaltare tutto ciò che, nei testi più seri e sacri, è preterintenzionalmente equivoco." Orvieto and Brestolini 117-18. By focusing solely on intertextual degradations and parody, though, they overlook the extent to which Lorenzo has balanced his parody with a naturalistic portrayal of country life.

causes us to wonder whether his parody evidences disdain or merely a playful smile. Is he laughing *at* Vallera and Nencia or just laughing? Since some of the humorous allusions require a distance from the rustic lifestyle in order to fully comprehend them, they seem to promote a critical and derisive point of view. In this vein, Vallera and Nencia are the punch line; Vallera is even so self-deluded that he presents himself as if he were a poet.¹⁰⁴ They are caricatures of a social class that is ripe for mocking.

The abundant comic elements in *Nencia* reveal its obvious humorous intentions. Should the entire poem be read lightheartedly? Does this humorous nature indicate that readers should not presume a stern moral judgment of Vallera and Nencia's coarseness within the text? Vallera voices many of the comic exaggerations within the text instead of a third person narrator or the voice of the poet. Does this narratological structure deflect any potential condemnation from the poet? Coming from Vallera's lips, the parodic moments may be sufficiently self-damning but without such a disparaging bite.¹⁰⁵

Just as some of Lorenzo's allusions to canonical poetry require a distance from rustic lifestyle, we can also view his position in the narrative of the poem and the choice to have Vallera deliver its comical elements as a way for Lorenzo to create a distance from his own culture and to demonstrate a sympathy for the simplicity of Vallera's world. By mixing surface-level naturalism throughout *Nencia* with cutting parody of love poetry and other literary works,

¹⁰⁴ This presentation of Vallera as a poet inspired by Apollo leads Enrico Fusco to conclude that Lorenzo had made fun of Vallera and Nencia. For Fusco, the scales are tipped to viewing *Nencia* as a caricature rather than a representation of spontaneous rustic naturalism. Fusco, *La lirica. Storia dei generi letterari italiani*. Vol. 1 (Milano: Vallardi, 1950) 179.

¹⁰⁵ That the poet and the speaker of the poem (Vallera) are not the same persona allows for this more lighthearted view. Sturm suggests that his narratological approach and the detailed account of rustic lifestyle and woes demonstrate Lorenzo's affinity – not disdain – for Vallera. Sturm 54-56. Rochon believes that Lorenzo employs his teasings on purpose to demonstrate the lighthearted manner in which he intended it to be read. Rochon 434. Lorenzo is the quintessential representative of Florentine high culture, but his family roots trace back to the Mugello region. Lorenzo's broad range of pleasures included working the earth and grooming horses, demonstrating an

Lorenzo has presented a precarious equilibrium. His readers are left to choose their attitudinal approach to the text: sympathy or scorn.

Lorenzo balances many opposing forces – between sympathy for a lovesick shepherd and ridicule for a culturally bereft simpleton, between naturalistic representation of country living and idealized poetic expression, and between innovation and adherence to literary tradition – that create a productive affective and poetic tension that made *Nencia* popular in its time, so popular that it initiated a new genre, and that has fascinated readers for centuries. Refreshing familiar topoi and expectations of pastoral poetry and love poetry in general by presenting his readers with clever combinations of valid lenses for reading the poem represent Lorenzo's greatest poetic achievement in *Nencia* and render the poem worthy of inclusion in anthologies of *Quattrocento* poetry on its own merits, not solely because of the celebrity of its author. However, Lorenzo does not successfully sustain this fruitful tension for the entirety of his poem. In the concluding octaves, Vallera's alternative lifestyle, evidenced in his description of an upcoming visit to Florence and his responsibility to care for his animals, yields to the hegemonic forces of established culture.

When proclaiming Nencia's superlative beauty in the second octave, Vallera's boastful tone about the supposedly broad footprint of his travels reveals that he is far from cosmopolitan. In his pending trip to the city, Lorenzo highlights Vallera's rustic nature and confirms that he is merely a visitor to the city, not a citizen. His visit is spurred by the opportunity to sell two beast-drawn loads of kindling that he had chopped up while his calves grazed:

Nenciozza mia, i' vo sabato andare
sin a Firenze, a vvender duo somelle
de schegge, ch'i' me puosi ier a ttagghiare
mentre ch'i' ero a ppascer le vitelle. (17.1-4)

affinity for rustic life that may suggest a sympathetic view of Vallera. I find no evidence of *personal* antipathy for Vallera within the text.

The phonemic shift in *tagghiare* pairs well with his grazing calves to mark Vallera as an outsider in the verses immediately following the mention of *Firenze*.

In accordance with a traditional poetic conceit, Vallera proposes to shower Nencia with gifts, but the gifts that he proposes are practical quotidian items: hooks, loops, and buttons for her skirt, a pocket for her blouse, small straps for her socks, or a cord for her vest (19.1-8).¹⁰⁶ This purpose for his trip and the gifts he proposes for Nencia verify Vallera's lowly status and indicate that he does not belong in the network of the city that promotes civility, philosophy, and culture.¹⁰⁷ As we have seen, Vallera's superficial visual descriptions of his beautiful Nencia also lack a philosophical basis and they parody the hallmarks of beauty in civilized culture. In addition to Vallera exhibiting his own otherness, his animals are a significant factor that distances him from urban culture.

The animals within the poem anchor Lorenzo's *brioso quadro* of the countryside; their presence clearly denotes the specular representation of rural life. We have also analyzed the parodic role that animals perform in the *descriptio feminae* to depict Nencia's beauty. Intriguingly, animals also serve an operative role in the diagetical mechanism of the poem. In Vallera's anguished insomnia, he laments that it seems like a thousand years will pass before his animals will carry him away to see her face: "mill'anni me pareo che fusse giorno, / per poter via

¹⁰⁶ In Cielo d'Alcamo's *contrasto*, the poet-lover also gives gifts to his lady. Vallera's travelogue stands as a more overt parody of Cielo's poem, but the triviality of Vallera's gifts does upend our expectations based on poetic precedent. The rustic priest in *Decameron* VIII.2 made similar seductive advances via gifts to Monna Belcolore in the form of garlic cloves, beans, chives, and shallots. Like Vallera's offerings, the priest's gifts were of a practical and humble nature; but the priest's gifts represented the best of all the countryside and were a product of his own labor.

¹⁰⁷ Bettella claims that Vallera's cultural simplicity reaffirms the hegemony of the Florentine elite: "The cultural and political establishment based in the city centre, who promote the highest forms of refinement and cultivation, juxtapose their values to those of people living in the country, at the periphery; the rough attitudes and manners of the *villani* serve to reaffirm, by contrast, the cultural and political hegemony of the aristocracy living in the centre." Bettella 88.

con le bestie venire, con elle insieme col tuo viso addorno" (14.2-4). These animals are the vehicle of Vallera's love story. His responsibility to his flocks and herds requires him to rise in the morning to let the animals out into a pasture by Nencia's home. They grant Vallera the occasion to see his beloved lady, who, of course, emerges from her hut surrounded by animals: "Quand'i' te vidi uscir della capanna, / col cane innanzi e colle pecorelle [...]" (15.1-2).

Animals perform another vital role in the poem as the means of expressing judgment and preserving the purity of hegemonic culture. Vallera's sexual innuendo – "ch'i' cacci le mie bestie nelle tua / e pparem uno, e ppur saremo dua" – enables a diminution of Vallera and Nencia themselves to base animals; the mere suggestion of dehumanization reinforces a political divide that consigns them to a lower class than Florentines. Finally, animals hasten the conclusion of the poem. In the twentieth octave, Vallera must take leave of his lady:

Gigghiozzo mio, tu tte farai con Dio,
perché le bestie mie son presso a casa;
i' non vorrei che pel baloccar mio
ne fusse ignuna in pastura rimasa.
veggo che ll'anno valicato el rio,
e odomi chiamar da mona Masa;
rimanti lieta, i' me ne vo cantando,
e ssempre Nencia ento 'l mie cuor chiamando (20)

Vallera suggests that caring for his flock or herd take precedence over Nencia because he does not want to leave a single animal in the field. Vallera bids Nencia farewell; he puts aside his burning love for Nencia and returns to this obligation to his animals. The rhythm of countrylife demands that Vallera return to his duties. Though he will continue to sing of her in his heart, at the moment he cannot fritter away his time indulging his yearnings for Nencia.

No matter how deftly Lorenzo has created a choice for the reader, whether Vallera's effusive passion has engendered a sympathetic affinity or his crudeness has garnered scorn, the hegemonic force of the poem has prevailed. Vallera cannot overcome his rustic identity; he does

not belong in the culturally privileged space of love poetry. By attending to his pastoral duties, Vallera breaks tradition from pastorals in idealized versions of the countryside in which shepherds are unencumbered with quotidian responsibilities. Lorenzo composed *Nencia* in octaves; as an open form poem it has no formalistic bounds to dictate the duration of the poem. Without constraints of form, *Nencia's* octaves could continue indefinitely. However, Vallera is duty-bound to his animals. In Lorenzo's poem, the naturalism of presentation of country life demands a diegetical conclusion and the duties of Vallera's rustic world remove him from the space of love poetry. Instead of a return to the purity of pastoral life, Lorenzo's poem upholds the integrity of love poetry's ideals in high society. The naturalism of the presentation of Vallera's pastoral lifestyle prevents him from enjoying the amorous delights that an *idealized* bucolic setting provides.

Even though Lorenzo's "impossible conjunction" of naturalism and idealization within a pastoral setting breaks down in the end, its tension produced a memorable poem and inspired a new direction in rustic poetry with respect to its pastoral heritage. He continued to engage this notion of combining specular and idealized representation in other poems of his youth.¹⁰⁸

Lorenzo's drive to combine contradictory forces continues in his love sonnets in a later phase of his poetic production. In *Nencia*, Lorenzo combines naturalism and idealism by

¹⁰⁸ Other instances of Lorenzo's early works contain examples of these tensions. *Uccellazione di starne* (1472-1473) has an unstable naturalism similar to *Nencia* that combines a diary of a hunt with parodic caricatures of the participants. *Simposio (I beoni)* (1466-1478) presents a collection of drunkards participating in a mock Platonic symposium and is composed in the refined meter of *terza rima*. These surface-level conjunctions seem appropriate for the lighthearted pieces of Lorenzo's early poetic production. However, not all literary scholars share my interpretation of such mixtures as emblematic of Lorenzo's poetic style. Italiano Marchetti, in particular, claimed that the description of the shepherdess Nencia resembles no other description of a lady elsewhere in Lorenzo's corpus. In all other descriptions, Lorenzo deemphasized superficial or physical appearances as he, instead, privileged interior or spiritual beauty. Marchetti stated: "siamo di fronte a due posizioni spirituali diametralmente opposte." This observation led him to conclude that Lorenzo could not be considered the author of the work because it represented such a striking variance. Marchetti, "Stato civile e lineamenti della 'Nencia da Barberino,'" *Aevum* 25 (1951) 433-34. I argue that contradictions of this type, especially within the same work, are not motives for questioning Lorenzo's authorship; instead, they represent a common attribute of his writing as this chapter has demonstrated in *Nencia da Barberino*.

parodying literary ideals of beauty in Vallera's joyful praise of his lady. Though significant as a counterpoint to hegemony, I find no evidence within the text that suggests a spiritualization or intellectualization of Nencia's beauty. Vallera provides a visual depiction of Nencia's beauty and his presentation of her beauty persists only on a specular surface with no hint of transcendence to an ideal beauty. By contrast, Lorenzo composes his sonnets in a much different philosophical mode – his love lyrics insist on a leap beyond the physical plane of observable beauty to metaphysical beauty, even the beauty of God.

Lorenzo also wrote his love sonnets in a distinctive political context. Soon after composing *Nencia*, at only twenty years old, Lorenzo became the de facto head of state. As such, his later lyrics constitute a significant change from *Nencia* with respect to their political engagement. In *Nencia*, Lorenzo presents a juxtaposition of country living and cultural hegemony through a fictional and archtypal protagonist and the poem ultimately upholds the values and culture of urban society on a general level. In his love sonnets, though, Lorenzo composes in the first person and through his own voice he harnesses a sense of Florentine cultural hegemony for his own political advantage. In the next chapter I analyze how Lorenzo capitalizes on Florence's cultural preeminence to elevate his status among European political leaders as evidenced in his own poems in a collection of Tuscan poetry that he assembled for Federico, the prince of Aragon.

Chapter 3 – Assembling Authority: Stilnovism, Neoplatonism, and Petrarchism in the *Raccolta Aragonese*

In 1476 Lorenzo de' Medici gathered a collection of Tuscan vernacular lyric poetry that would serve as an official reference of vernacular lyric poetry for the subsequent century and a half. Lorenzo sent this *raccolta* to Federico d'Aragona, son of the Neapolitan king, subsequent to their discussion of Tuscan poetry a year prior in a meeting in Pisa.^{109 110 111}

Federico had expressed an interest in preserving the works of Tuscan poets, and Lorenzo, with the capacity to do so, would not miss this opportunity to further distribute impressive

¹⁰⁹ Lorenzo and Federico had first met in 1465 in Milan at the wedding of Ippolita Sforza and Federico's older brother, Alfonso. This trip marked the first diplomatic mission for Lorenzo who was sent to Milan in order to assure the support of the Sforza family through the tumultuous political transition at Cosimo's death. In a letter from Piero to Lorenzo on May 11, 1465, Lorenzo had also received instructions to strengthen ties with Naples by inviting Federico to a lavish dinner. Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lettere*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein, vol. 4 (Firenze: Giunti, 1977) 1.15. The date of Lorenzo and Federico's subsequent meeting in Pisa has been disputed; originally believed to be in 1465, Lucile Wood Ferguson reasoned that it occurred either in December 1474/January 1475 when Federico was en route to France to see the Duke of Burgundy or perhaps upon his return later that year. Lucile Wood Ferguson, "The Date of the *Raccolta Aragonese*," *Modern Philology* 23.1 (1925): 43-45. Mario Santoro suggested that they met in Pisa in 1476 but provided no evidence of a specific date. Mario Santoro, "Gli Aragonesi e la cultura napoletana," *Storia di Napoli* (Napoli: Società Editrice Storia di Napoli, 1967-1978), 343. A meeting date sometime in 1475-1476 seems all the more sensible since the epistle accompanying the collection claims a year had passed from Lorenzo and Federico's meeting and Michele Barbi has demonstrated that some of Lorenzo's own poems included in the *raccolta* had been composed at the earliest in 1476. Michele Barbi, *Studi sul Canzoniere di Dante* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1915).

¹¹⁰ In 1493, humanist Paolo Corte and poet Iacopo Corsi visited Federico d'Aragona while he was a guest of Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere in Rome for an evening of improvisational poetry. Afterward, Federico spoke very highly of Lorenzo de' Medici and proudly showed the *raccolta* to his visitors. Ludwig Pastor, *Storia dei papi dalla fine del medioevo*, vol. 3 (Roma: Desclée, 1942), 356. The *Raccolta Aragonese* was a prized artifact of Federico's widow Isabella as well. She loaned the collection to Isabella d'Este in 1512 at which point the historical record ends and the *raccolta* was presumed to be lost. The contents of the collection have been tracked through dependent codices: Laurenziano XC inf. 37 (with an addition of Laurenziano XLI 26), which dates between the end of the 15th and beginning of the 16th centuries, Parigino italiano 554 from the Biblioteca Nazionale di Parigi, from the beginning of the 16th century, and Palatino 204 from the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, from between 1514 and 1533.

¹¹¹ Contemporary precedents for this gift include Cristoforo Landino's translation of Pliny's *Natural History*, given to King Ferdinando between 1472 and 1474, and a collection given to Alfonso d'Aragona, Duke of Calabria, around 1470. Domenico De Robertis describes this smaller collection given to Alfonso d'Aragona in his chapter "*La Raccolta Aragonese primogenita*," *Editio e rari. Studi sulla tradizione letteraria tra Tre e Cinquecento* (Milano: Mondadori, 1978) 50-65. That collection served as an additional manuscript of Dante's minor works (*Vita Nuova*, *Convivio*, and *canzoni*) and also contained sonnets by Buonaccorso da Montemagno. The *Raccolta Aragonese* was a much larger undertaking and makes the collection given to Alfonso d'Aragona seem trivial by comparison.

artifacts of his region's cultural history. Lorenzo traded on the glory of Europe's cultural center not simply out of convenience; Florence lacked the military strength to assert its will on the battlefield. Sophistication, pageantry, wealth, and art were Florence's imperial influences.

The Florentines' love of liberty predicated on its representative government also meant that leaders of their government lacked titles of nobility. Lorenzo became a renowned statesman, but he was not a prince, duke, or count, but a merchant class banker. Nonetheless, he impressed Europe's feudal leaders and established his legitimacy among them by capitalizing on his literal and figural cultural inheritances. Lorenzo had always had unimaginable riches and at twenty years old, as an inheritance at his father's death in 1469, he personally owned the countless works of art that filled the family palace on *Via Larga*. Florence's young leader acquired a sense of grandeur by association with this collection of ancient and "modern" art.¹¹²

¹¹² I focus on Lorenzo's appropriation of an inheritance of Florence's greatest poets in order to impress contemporary dignitaries, but others have focused on the the Medici's use of the artwork within the Medici Palace that Lorenzo inherited and, more recently, on the collection of ancient artisanal relics that he assiduously assembled. The palace's styling and collection of artwork impressed Galeazzo Maria Sforza when the Milanese prince and his entourage toured the palace in 1459. In a letter to his father, Francesco Sforza, Galeazzo marveled at the construction and ornamentation of each room and the dignity and majesty of the many manuscripts, tapestries, and sculptures. He claimed it would take the eloquence of many orators and many months to fully describe the palace because it was "la più bella che vedesse mai, né credo di potere vedere." Mantua, Archivio di Stato, Gonzaga, 1099, fasc. 76, fols. 462v-463r. Galeazzo's chief counselor, Niccolò de' Carissimi da Parma, praised the same ornamentation and added his awe at the use of perspective in paintings and inlays created by masterful artists: "[...] de pincture et tarsiature facte in perspectiva da solennissimi et perfectissimi maestri." Mantua, Archivio di Stato, Gonzaga, 1099, fasc. 77, fols. 465v-467r. Copies of these letters appear in Rab Hatfield, "Some Unknown Descriptions of the Medici Palace in 1459," *Art Bulletin* 52 (1970): 232-49. Hatfield reviews these earliest accounts of how the palace was perceived by "the persons it was designed to impress." Anabel Thomas assesses the same letters about the Medici Palace as evidence of the role of splendor in Medici culture and diplomacy in her chapter "Fifteenth Century Florence and Court Culture Under the Medici," *Courts, Patrons, and Poets*, ed. David Mateer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 2000) 159-226. Using the 1492 palace inventory in conjunction with 173 previously unpublished letters that demonstrate Lorenzo's aggressiveness and commitment as a collector, Laurie Fusco and Gino Corti provide an exhaustive view of Lorenzo as a Renaissance collector in *Lorenzo de' Medici Collector and Antiquarian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). They suggest that Lorenzo demonstrated personal interest and great pride in his collection of gems, coins, and small antiquities in his home, while, much like paintings and sculptures, his collection represented a public format for projecting wealth, power, and knowledge to important visitors.

In the *Raccolta Aragonese* Lorenzo similarly positions himself as a figural heir to the great poets of the Florentine vernacular tradition in order to adopt their celebrity and to establish his own gravitas as a poet. He inserts his own poems into the canon of Italy's vernacular poetic tradition, a highlight of Florence's cultural distinction. In order to appropriate that distinction as his own and thus enhance his personal prestige, he included his own poems that contained stylistic cues from Tuscany's celebrated poets, Dante and Petrarch. Lorenzo wove both Dantean and Petrarchan elements into his poems and branded them as his own by placing them within a context based on Ficinian Neoplatonic ascension.

To demonstrate how Lorenzo establishes his poetic authority and consolidates his cultural prestige, I begin with the introductory epistle of the *Raccolta Aragonese* in which Lorenzo exalts himself and Federico for endeavoring to gather and preserve the poems of the collection. By arguing for the importance of preserving cultural artifacts, Lorenzo attempts to strengthen the pillar on which he builds his own legitimacy. Also within the epistle, I analyze how Lorenzo asserts the importance of the foundation laid by Sicilian and Tuscan poets of the *Duecento* and *Trecento* while simultaneously establishing a critical distance between himself and those poets, a rhetorical maneuver that positions Lorenzo's poems to establish a new trajectory for vernacular poetry. Considering his own poems in the collection I demonstrate how Lorenzo combines the dissimilar poetic modes of Petrarch and Dante. Recasting an established conceit of Italian love poetry – the image of the lady on the lover's heart – in terms of Ficinian metaphysical speculation represents a rich example of Lorenzo's attempt to appropriate the authority and the fame of Florence's lyric tradition.

The *Raccolta Aragonese* begins with an epistle to Federico, the Aragon prince.¹¹³

Though Angelo Poliziano has been identified as the author of the letter, we can legitimately assume that Lorenzo collaborated on and approved it (at the very least) as this collection of poems was his project.¹¹⁴ For this study, I refer to both Lorenzo and Poliziano as authors of the epistle and I refer solely to Lorenzo as the first-person voice within the letter. In the first of two sections of this epistle, Lorenzo and Poliziano describe the conditions that produced illustrious poetry in antiquity; in the second section they defend the potential of the Italian vernacular for poetic use by providing a summary and critical review of Tuscan poets and their predecessors. This assessment serves as the first historical document of literary criticism on Tuscany's vernacular tradition since Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* (1302-05).

Lorenzo and Poliziano's description of circumstances in which ancient poets operated insists on the difference in glory and rewards for poets in subsequent centuries. This distinction in reverence and reception for ancient poets evidences the critical distance that Lorenzo and Poliziano delineate between ancient and vernacular poets. They aim to recapture the former mode of celebrating poets and their verses. It is also significant that Lorenzo and Poliziano refer to vernacular poets of the *Duecento* and *Trecento* as "ancients." Lorenzo and Poliziano do not equate these vernacular poets with those of classical antiquity. Their reference to these

¹¹³ I quote from the reproduction of this letter "Allo illustrissimo Signore Federico D'Aragona figliolo del re di Napoli" as found in *Prosatori volgari del Quattrocento*, ed. Claudio Varese (Milano: Ricciardi, 1955).

¹¹⁴ In *Studi sul Canzoniere di Dante* Barbi reviews the manuscripts of the collection and identifies Poliziano as the author of the introductory epistle. Lorenzo's intimate involvement in penning the letter seems so apparent that Emilio Bigi finds no need to qualify it in "Genesi di un concetto storiografico: 'dolce stil novo,'" *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 132 (1955). Bigi said: "[...] [l']epistola dedicatoria della Raccolta, scritta, come pare certo, dal Poliziano, ma (è lecito pensarlo) con la collaborazione o l'approvazione di Lorenzo stesso." The fact that the origins of the project trace back to Lorenzo's discussion with Federico and the similarity in promoting the Tuscan vernacular in the *proemio* to Lorenzo's *Comento de' miei sonetti* confirm his first-hand participation. Just as Tiziano Zanato proposed when comparing this epistle to the *proemio* of *Comento de' miei sonetti*, I consider Poliziano and Lorenzo as "co-autori" of the epistle. Tiziano Zanato, *Saggio sul Comento di Lorenzo de' Medici* (Firenze: Olschki, 1979) 266.

vernacular poets as "ancients" represents a rhetorical urge to demonstrate the gulf that divided the poets of the *Duecento* and *Trecento* from the poets of the present day, especially Lorenzo. By establishing a critical distance between their time and the era of their vernacular predecessors, Lorenzo and Poliziano portray themselves not only as heirs of the original vernacular greats who continue their tradition, but also as standard bearers of a new poetic era in the vernacular. Lorenzo's rhetorical efforts in the epistle and in his poetic components in the *Raccolta Aragonesa* demonstrate a movement to set his time apart as a new (vernacular) cultural flowering that is more similar to antiquity than to the poetry composed by preceding vernacular poets.

In order to highlight the cultural climate in ancient times, Lorenzo and Poliziano remind Federico that in that *prima età* every great work of art was granted both public and private praise. Indeed, they attribute the greatness of artistic achievements in that age to this reward: "L'onore è veramente quello che porge a ciascuna arte nutrimento." The promise of glory incited greatness. By the same token, poets assured glory to men of praiseworthy deeds: "[i poeti] potessino i valorosi e chiari fatti delli uomini eccellenti con la virtù del poetico stile rendere immortali." Lorenzo and Poliziano lament the "shipwreck" of the Middle Ages, which lost much of the work of the illustrious ancients: "non sarebbe di poi la dolorosa perdita di tanti e sì mirabili greci e latini scrittori con nostro grandissimo danno intervenuta." After the age of antiquity, there was a shortage of awards for virtuous deeds. Men lacked the virtue and merit necessary to even appreciate the famous writers who celebrated great deeds.

In the fifteenth century, Florentine society experienced a cultural flourishing; the existence of the *Raccolta Aragonesa*, and the work of those who assembled it, evidence a renewal of that ancient spirit. The praise rendered to Federico d'Aragona for requesting a

collection of Tuscan vernacular poetry indicates a revitalization of ancient values. Lorenzo and Poliziano compare Federico to Pisistratus, the virtuous Athenian prince who offered great rewards to anyone who could gather verses of Homer's "dissipata e quasi dimembrata" work. They honor and reverence Pisistratus for having collected Homer's verses and for having given them *perpetua vita*. By establishing a parallel between Federico and Pisistratus, whom they praised, Lorenzo and Poliziano reinforce the similarity between contemporary and ancient times in the *Raccolta Aragonese* project.

We must consider, though, that Lorenzo, rather than Federico, actually performed this role of enlightened prince who collects and preserves works, thus gaining glory for himself. Lorenzo appears eager to draw attention to his own profile and to exploit the reciprocal prestige between his name and Florence's cultural history; the Aragon collection was created to preserve and to export that prestige.

This letter invokes the Pisistratus–Federico–Lorenzo relationship in order to designate the Medici era as the time of cultural renewal and as the conclusion of that medieval period in which men allowed the loss of classical authors because they themselves lacked the virtue and capacity to appreciate them. The claim of utility for such a cultural blossoming rests in the promotion of the civic function of language and of Florence as a seat of culture. The Medici name had already been associated with efforts to promote the vernacular language and its civic utility; in 1441 (before Lorenzo's birth), Leon Battista Alberti had received support from Lorenzo's father, Piero, to transfer the *Certame coronario* to Florence under the auspices of civic benefit. In the epistle, Lorenzo and Poliziano point out the loss of classical works, which indirectly references the many preservation efforts under Cosimo.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Sara Sturm's *Lorenzo de' Medici* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974) serves as a brief critical introduction to Lorenzo's literary works. And as the first twentieth-century monograph on Lorenzo's literary oeuvre by an

The praise that Lorenzo and Poliziano give to Pisistratus and Homer exhibits a role beyond utility: "O veramente divini uomini, e per utilità degli uomini al mondo nati!" Lorenzo and Poliziano refer to ancient poets as *divini uomini* and *sacri laudatori* that render *immortali* the works of excellent men. Homer is not merely a poet, but *'l divino poeta Omero* or *[il] santissimo poeta* and his work a *sacra opera*. The authors confer a similar celestial role to Pisistratus whose restorative efforts garnered him "immortal gloria e clarissimo splendore." Indeed, they include Pisistratus among the *divini uomini* of the poets. Such effulgent praise glorifies the role of poets and of cultural guardians like Pisistratus – Federico – Lorenzo; the religious language that Lorenzo and Poliziano employed amplifies their commendation of poets and guardians, suggesting a celestial role that surpasses their civic utility.

Lorenzo and Poliziano state that the glorious poets and enlightened prince cannot be imitated: "Cotali erano adunque quelli primi uomini, de' quali li virtuosi fatti non solo ai nostri secoli imitabili non sono, ma appena credibili." However, this first section of the epistle establishes just such an imitation. The vocabulary of sacredness and utility ascribed to the ancients adds to the grandeur of the corresponding activity of the *Raccolta Aragonese*. Furthermore, the establishment of this parallel activity underscores the distinctness of this project – and this era – from medieval times.

In the second section of the epistle, Lorenzo and Poliziano defend the use of the vernacular for poetry and provide a brief review of vernacular poets. Not all was completely lost in the *naufragio* of medieval times. There were *venerabili poeti* that had begun to cultivate the neglected Tuscan vernacular for whom this collection provided a safe harbor.

Anglophone prior to the burst of interest at the quincennial celebration of Lorenzo's death in 1992, it created an access point to Lorenzo's poetry for many scholars. In her chapter "Lorenzo and the Vernacular," Sturm argues that references to a Florentine "Golden Age" under Lorenzo's rule and indirect references to a humanist revival under Cosimo suggest the plausibility of Lorenzo's authorship of the epistle.

In their critical summary of vernacular poets, Lorenzo and Poliziano note the heritage of vernacular poetry from Sicily and France before addressing the works of their immediate predecessors. They praise early contributors like Giacomo da Lentini (circa 1210-50), identify Piero delle Vigne (1190-1249) by quoting Dante, and mention others like "il lucchese" Bonagiunta Orbicciani (circa 1220-90) and Onesto Bolognese (circa 1240-86). Lorenzo and Poliziano judged these oldest exemplars to be in need of more polish, insinuating that they were not as refined as the Tuscan stilnovists. Even the first Tuscan poet (the first *dei nostri*) to write in the *novello stile*, Guittone d'Arezzo (1235-94), was judged *ruvido e severo*. Lorenzo and Poliziano step outside their Florentine *campanalismo* to praise the Bolognese poet Guido Guinizzelli (circa 1230-76) as both *suave* and *ornato*. Because they consider him the first to sweetly color the beautiful form of their vernacular they appear to adopt him as one of their own Tuscan exemplars. For their highest compliment to Guinizzelli they simply defer to Dante who considered Guinizzelli "[il] miglior, che mai / rime d'amor usar dolci e leggiadre" (*Purgatorio* XXVI.98-99). The compliments paid to Guido Cavalcanti (1255-1300) seem profuse – "del corpo fu bello e leggiadro" and "nelle invenzioni acutissimo, magnifico, ammirabile, gravissimo nelle sentenze, copioso e rilevato nell'ordine, composto, saggio e avveduto" – but mirror the favorable light in which Lorenzo's circle held him, particularly by Marsilio Ficino (1433-99). Cino da Pistoia (1270-1336/7) is another Tuscan stilnovist lavished with praise as *delicato* and *veramente amoroso*.

The *Raccolta Aragonese* appears to have contained 499 texts spanning from the origins of Italian vernacular poetry to Lorenzo's own compositions; included are works from many of the poets praised in the epistle, with particular emphasis on those writers of the sweet new style. It begins with lyric offerings of Dante, as well as Dante's *vita* taken from Boccaccio's *Trattatello*

in laude di Dante. Sonnets and other lyric poems by Guinizelli, Guittone, Cavalcanti, Cino da Pistoia, and other “minor” poets of the *Trecento* and *Quattrocento* follow these initial components. It included Cino Rinuccini's small *canzoniere* (complete) and poems by Buonaccorso da Montemagno (both poets identified as Buonaccorso, who were not yet distinguished as separate poets at this time), Fazio degli Uberti, Sennuccio del Bene, Boccaccio, Saviozzo, Francheschino degli Albizzi, Leonardo Bruni, Sacchetti, and Niccolò Cieco. There is also a section of *Duecento* poems including compositions by Bonagiunta Orbicciani, Pier delle Vigne, Giacomo da Lentini, Lapo Gianni, and Lapo Saltarelli. This collection includes Sicilians Piero delle Vigne and Giacomo da Lentini and the Bolognese Guinizelli as if they were Tuscan in spirit; all other inclusions come from the Tuscan tradition. And although he seeks to minimize the worthiness of their inclusion, sixteen of Lorenzo's own compositions – 9 sonnets, 2 canzoni, and 5 *canzoni a ballo* – conclude the collection.^{116 117}

While Marsilio Ficino, the chief philosopher in Lorenzo's intellectual circle, held an interest in Guido Cavalcanti's philosophical love poems and Cristoforo Landino had begun his lectures on Dante a couple of years prior to the assembly of the *Raccolta Aragonesa*, the choice to assemble such a large selection of stilnovist poets in one collection was truly novel. In addition to the inclusion of so many representatives of the sweet new style, the most conspicuous choices of presentation in the collection relate to Dante and Petrarch.

¹¹⁶ Barbi suggests Codice Chigiano L. VIII. 305 and Codice Chigiano L. V. 176 as likely sources for the collection. For an exhaustive discussion of other potential source manuscripts for the *Raccolta Aragonesa* as well as derivations of the collection, see Barbi, 215-338.

¹¹⁷ Lorenzo's poems included his sonnets "In quale parteandrò io ch'io non truovi," "Di vita il dolce lume fugirei," "Come ti lascio, o come meco sei," "Occhi, voi siate pur dentro al mio cuore," "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti," "Che è quel ch'io veggo dentro agli occhi belli," "Come lucerna all'ora matutina," "Quando el sol giù dall'orizzonte scende," "O chiara stella che co' raggi tuoi," canzoni "Quelle vaghe dolcezze, che Amor pose," "Per rinnovare Amor l'antiche piaghe," and *canzoni a ballo* "Io priego Iddio che tutti i ma' parlanti," "Ècci egli alcuna in questa compagnia," "Donne belle, io ho cercato," "Chi non è innamorato," and "Donne e fanciulle, io mi fo coscienza."

Lorenzo and Poliziano refer to Dante and Petrarch as the *due soli* that shine brighter than other vernacular poets; however, the authors prefer to say nothing of them – rather than say too little – in their brief critical summary of vernacular poets. Despite their reverence for Petrarch, his *Canzoniere* is conspicuously missing from the collection. Perhaps readily available manuscripts and printings of his *Canzoniere* rendered inclusion in the *Raccolta Aragonese* unnecessary as there was no need to conduct such a popular and available text to "safe harbor."¹¹⁸ Perhaps Federico had expressed interest in collecting Tuscan lyric poetry other than Petrarch's renowned lyrical offerings. Or perhaps an inclusion of Petrarch's vernacular works would have muddled Lorenzo's recovery of stilnovist poets and the philosophical path to Lorenzo's Ficinian love poetry. Any motives we may suggest for Petrarch's absence remain mere conjecture. However, it would be misleading to claim that Petrarch is absent in the *Raccolta Aragonese* since Poliziano and Lorenzo so frequently invoke him in the introductory epistle. Despite not including Petrarch's works, the collection's opening epistle summons Italy's beloved poet to demonstrate the glory of the Tuscan vernacular tradition, to recall the glory of ancient poets, and to distinguish between different poetic eras.

Lorenzo and Poliziano open the epistle with a comment on the many times that Lorenzo had reflected on the infinite reasons for praising antiquity:

Ripensando assai volte meco medesimo, illustrissimo signor mio Federico, quale in tra molte e infinite laudi degli antichi tempi fussi la più eccellente, una per certo sopra tutte l'altre esser gloriosissima e quasi singulare ho giudicato: che nessuna illustre e virtuosa opera né di mano né d'ingegno si puote immaginare,

¹¹⁸ Petrarch's *Canzoniere* was likely both too large to include in the collection and too well known to need inclusion. Giuseppe Savoca, *Il Canzoniere di Petrarca tra codicologia ed ecdotica*, (Firenze: Olschki, 2008) 116-18 and Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 244 note the vast amount of manuscript copies in circulation and indicate that the *Canzoniere* had already been in print since its *editio princeps* in 1470 in Venice by German typographer Vindelino da Spira. Georg Laver printed another version, no longer extant, in Rome in 1471 and Bartolomeo Valdezocco printed a third edition in Padua in 1472. Considering the literary inclinations of Federico and his sister-in-law Ippolita Sforza, surely a copy reached the Aragon court prior to the first printing in Naples in 1477.

alla quale in quella prima età non fussino e in publico e in privato grandissimi premi e nobilissimi ornamenti apparecchiati.

Within the very first clause of the epistle, the expression *meco medesimo* echoes the opening sonnet of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, "Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono." Petrarch's emphatically self-reflexive line – "di me mesdesmo meco mi vergogno" (11) – emblemized the subjectivity, psychological struggle, and personal reflection found throughout his *Canzoniere*. *Meco medesimo* immediately foregrounds Tuscany's poet laureate in Lorenzo's project. This brief expression proves difficult to dismiss as linguistic coincidence since later within this first line Lorenzo and Poliziano allude to another Petrarchan verse. Lorenzo cannot imagine any illustrious and virtuous work – *né di mano né d'ingegno* – that was not nobly rewarded in antiquity. This expression regarding works by hand or by intellect references Petrarch's celebrated canzone "Italia mia" in which he pleads with the warring lords of Italy to transform their time spent on giving others pain into more worthy actions *o di mano o d'ingegno* (108).

Citing an overtly political poem in Petrarch's *Canzoniere* seems appropriate for the de facto leader of Florence, yet Petrarch's view of the role of the poet in politics does not reflect Lorenzo's direct involvement in the political affairs of the state. Petrarch sued for peace among the regions of Italy as a scholar and an outsider to the political machine, commenting from afar. Petrarch's detached, intellectual role differed from the participatory nature of a communal experience that preceded him, and it contrasted with the "impossible conjunction" that Lorenzo embodied as both a politician and a poet. To continue to flourish, though, the cultural hegemony of Laurentian Florence required the same peace for which Petrarch longs in "Italia mia." Stable and peaceful conditions permitted Lorenzo to devote his attention to his *Raccolta Aragonesa* and to employ it as a political vehicle to export a prototypically Tuscan artifact as a representation of Florence's cultural and philosophical prestige.

The brief Petrarchan citations in the introductory epistle to the *Raccolta Aragonese* draw upon the fame of one of the crowned pillars of Tuscan literature. Lorenzo and Poliziano rely on Petrarch's prominence, and take it for granted, since they refer to him as *il nostro toscano poeta*, without even calling him by name. The adjectives of this appellation – *nostro* and *toscano* – redundantly emphasize Petrarch's Tuscan origin. *Nostro* also indicates Lorenzo and Poliziano's effort to identify Petrarch's oeuvre as a cultural possession of the region. The implication of this possession renders Petrarch's poetry not merely an artifact, but an emblem of cultural cachet: Petrarch's prestige belonged to Tuscany. And since Lorenzo frames this project as his own effort to intertwine the Tuscan vernacular tradition and its reputation with his own work, then Petrarch's prestige also belonged to Lorenzo.

Lorenzo and Poliziano reference Petrarch – *il nostro toscano poeta* – in order to describe the perpetual fame of those whose deeds were sung by ancient poets. The enduring fame of those excellent men and their excellent deeds will persist: "se l'universo pria non si dissolve" (LIII.34). They cite the famous example of the ancient poets' eternalizing power from "Giunto Alexandro a la famosa tomba" in Petrarch's *Canzoniere* CLXXXVII in which Petrarch prescribes the thoughts of Alexander the Great during a visit to Achilles' tomb: "O fortunato, che sì chiara tromba / trovasti e chi di te sì alto scrisse" (3-4). And in yet another allusion to Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, Lorenzo and Poliziano disparage men's lack of virtue in medieval times: "Imperocché, essendo già in tutto i premi de' virtuosi fatti mancati, insieme ancora con essi ogni benigno lume di virtute è spento, e, non facendo gli uomini alcuna cosa laudabile, ancora questi sacri laudatori hanno al tutto dispregiati."¹¹⁹ The phrase "ogni benigno lume di virtute è spento" nearly quotes the fifth verse – "et è sí spento ogni benigno lume" – of the seventh poem of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, "La gola e 'l sonno et l'otïose piume," in which Petrarch laments the

lacking character of his time. Lorenzo and Poliziano employ the phrase in similar fashion in order to draw a distinction between ancient and medieval times and subsequently between the Middle Ages and their own day in which they sought to revive the cultural values of antiquity.

Another reference to Petrarch in the introductory epistle helps Lorenzo and Poliziano establish the history of vernacular poetry in Italy:

Fu l'uso della rima, secondo che in una latina epistola scrive il Petrarca, ancora appresso gli antichi romani assai celebrato; il quale, per molto tempo intermesso, cominciò poi nella Sicilia non molti secoli avanti a rifiorire, e, quindi per la Francia sparto, finalmente in Italia, quasi in un suo ostello, è pervenuto.

Lorenzo and Poliziano combine Petrarch's sketch of vernacular poetry's arrival in Italy with their prior citations to praise the treatment of poets in antiquity and to condemn the lack of virtue in medieval times; these rhetorical operations illuminate the Petrarchan historical view of the *Raccolta Aragonesa's* introductory epistle. Lorenzo and Poliziano celebrated the role of poets in antiquity and wanted to enact a restoration of those values, but more importantly for the cultural-political role of the collection, they adopted Petrarch's awareness of a critical distance between his time and antiquity. Petrarch longed for a restoration of ancient values and he succeeded in defining his time separate from the period that directly preceded him. In this epistle, Lorenzo and Poliziano indicated distinctions of a critical distance between Lorenzo's own poetry and those vernacular poets that came before.

In their brief critical summary of vernacular poets, Lorenzo and Poliziano make distinctions among different eras of poets while noting the overall worthiness of the Tuscan tongue itself. They declare that the first among them – Onesto Bolognese and the Sicilian poets – lacked nothing in terms of *ingegno*; the *antico rozzore* of their lyrics, however, needed more polish. They were among those poets who *began* to refine the Tuscan tongue: "li quali primi il

¹¹⁹ *Prosatori volgari del Quattrocento*, 986.

diserto campo della toscana lingua *cominciarono* a coltivare in guisa tale" (emphasis mine). Lorenzo and Poliziano defend the Tuscan vernacular from any potential disparaging claims. Their language cannot be considered *poco ornata, povera, or rozza*, but instead *abundante* and *pulitissima*; it is capable of expressing anything *gentile, florida, leggiadra, ornata, acuta, distinta, ingegnosa, sottile, alta, magnifica, sonora, ardente, or animosa*. With these declarations, Lorenzo and Poliziano do not even mention a comparison to Latin, but promote the vernacular language on its own merits and capabilities. Indeed, with this epistle and the *proemio* to his *Comento de' miei sonetti*, Lorenzo moved beyond all previous defenders of Italian with his unequivocal promotion of the vernacular.¹²⁰ He and Poliziano do not appear preoccupied with the *questione della lingua* in terms of vernacular or Latin. Even their predecessors who championed *il volgare*, e.g. Cristoforo Landino and Leon Battista Alberti, did so with veneration of Latin. Lorenzo's limitless vision of the vernacular did not bind him to the comparison with and deference to the ancient idiom.

In summary, the first section of the epistle emphasized the glorious poets of ancient times and the crucial role of an enlightened leader, Pisistratus, who took pains to collect and preserve the works of Homer. Like Pisistratus, they claimed that Federico's request to gather Tuscan vernacular poetry had resuscitated many poets of little renown, restoring their forgotten fame. This revitalization effort demonstrated a renewal of classical values that were sorely lacking in medieval times. Lorenzo sought to associate his project with the glory of ancient poetry and to

¹²⁰ Giancarlo Mazzacurati claims that Lorenzo liberated himself of the "volgare complex" and strengthened the intellectual character of the vernacular by looking forward and moving beyond comparisons to Latin. "Crede nella lingua nuova, ricostituirla e riattivarne le fonti, affidarle opere di vario impegno non è più ora, dopo l'esempio dell'Alberti e del Landino, un atto di coraggio. Al contrario, si comincia a leggere tra le righe come un orgoglio intellettuale, che deriva da una sempre più precisa coscienza storica, da un riordinamento del passato letterario secondo una linea ascensionale di progresso e di sempre maggior maturità." *Pietro Bembo e la questione del "volgare"* (Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1984) 37. Lorenzo's ascension beyond his predecessors' treatment of the *questione della lingua* mirrors his intentions to establish a critical distance between his own poetry and the vernacular poetry of previous generations.

distance it from the poetry of medieval times. Even among more recent vernacular poets, Lorenzo and Poliziano separated the roughness of the Sicilian and initial Tuscan poets from the refined stilnovists.

Lorenzo had assembled famous Tuscan poetry and literally inserted himself into its illustrious history by including his own poems in the collection. As the most contemporary of included poets, Lorenzo logically adds his own poetry at the end of the collection; however, he had not ordered the *raccolta* chronologically. The collection begins with Dante's biography along with his *Vita Nuova*, 19 canzoni, and 9 ballate and sonetti. Among the most famous of the anthologized poets and as a representative of the stilnovists, Dante served as a strategic bookend to pair with Lorenzo's own poems. Representing Lorenzo's – and his circle's – renewed interest in Dante's works, the collection begins with a poet invested in the political fortune of Florence, which serves to aggrandize Lorenzo's own poetry by association.¹²¹

Lorenzo reemphasized this self-aggrandizing purpose in the penultimate paragraph of the epistle when he again praised Federico for giving life to the collected poems and mentioned the inclusion of his own. He placed his own compositions at the end of the collection and noted that he figured it would please Federico to find them there:

Abbiamo ancora nello estremo del libro (perché così ne pareva ti piacessi) aggiunti alcuni delli nostri sonetti e canzone, acciò che, quelli leggendo, si rinnovelli nella tua mente la mia fede e amore singulare verso la Tua Signoria; li quali, se degni non sono fra sì maravigliosi scritti di vecchi poeti essere annumerati, almeno per fare alli altri paragone e per fare quelli per la loro comparazione più ornati parere, non sarà forse inutile stato averli con se collegati.

¹²¹ De Robertis claimed that the inclusion of sonnets by Buonaccorso da Montemagno in a smaller anthology given to Federico's brother, Alfonso, raised Buonaccorso's profile simply by including them in a collection that also contained Dante's *Vita Nuova*, *Convivio*, and *canzoni*. "La Raccolta Aragonese primogenita," *Editi e rari*, 50-65. I assert that Lorenzo intended a similar boost to fortify his own poetic authority by intentionally including his own poems as a bookend to a collection that begins with Dante's lyric poems.

On the surface Lorenzo's statement appears to be an expression of modesty from a poet who does not deem his poems worthy of inclusion with such illustrious company. Nevertheless Lorenzo has inserted his own poems into a collection of *maravigliosi scritti di vecchi poeti*. Because his poems appear alongside *maravigliosi scritti*, Lorenzo elevated their importance by association. He had positioned his poems as a continuation of the greatness of past Tuscan poets. Yet he also insisted on their remoteness. He specifically refers to the other works as the writings of old poets; *vecchi poeti* refers to all poets whose works appear in the collection, except for Lorenzo. Thus despite the emphasis on praising and classifying poets of the past, the trajectory established in the epistle remains forward-looking and Lorenzo's own poems represented the next stage of the vernacular tradition. This forward thrust necessitated a difficult rhetorical combination. To establish his own poetic authority and to bolster his own prestige, Lorenzo relied upon the gravitas of the Florentine luminaries in the assembled collection; he could not summarily break from his predecessors. To forecast the future of Italian vernacular poetry, Lorenzo inserted his own poetry as the forward momentum. The characterization of Lorenzo's poems, then, demonstrates his attempt to continue a poetic tradition while unmistakably reshaping it with his own indelible imprint.

By the time Lorenzo assembled his collection in 1475-76, Lorenzo's poetry had begun to shift from the Petrarchan lyrics of his youth to a style that revealed stilnovistic, specifically Dantean, influences. Literary scholars often utilize the *Raccolta Aragonese* to exemplify this turning point. Either his poems in the collection represented the last offerings of his Petrarchan stage or they already demonstrated a transition to a more stilnovistic style.¹²² If Lorenzo's own

¹²² The difficulty in dating Lorenzo's lyrical production has accentuated the complications for categorizing the development of his oeuvre. Emilio Bigi considers the *Raccolta Aragonese* as the end of Lorenzo's youthful stage of lyric production which he deemed strictly Petrarchan in nature, while those sonnets that followed were more explicitly stilnovist. See especially Lorenzo de' Medici, *Scritte scelti*, ed. Emilio Bigi (Torino: UTET, 1955) 18-21,

poems in the collection were Petrarchan in nature, then they would not easily accommodate the philosophical tones of the stilnovistic poetry so amply represented in the collection and lauded in the epistle. Rather, they would seem forced into the framework of this collection of Tuscan lyric poetry. If, instead, Lorenzo's own pieces were stilnovistic in nature, then they would serve well as a continuation of the stilnovists of the past whose works fill the collection.

It is my contention that Lorenzo's own poems in the *Raccolta Aragonese* demonstrate characteristics of both Petrarchan and stilnovistic (and at times, particularly Dantean) style and themes. Such combinations may evidence a general transitional phase in Lorenzo's lyrical evolution; however, I view these combinations in light of this specific project in which Lorenzo placed them. I argue that Lorenzo has not haphazardly scattered Petrarchan derivations and stilnovistic elements in his sonnets. Instead, Lorenzo has conjoined these elements of disparate poetic traditions within a framework of the philosophy that was the vogue in Lorenzo's intellectual circle – Ficinian Neoplatonism. His own poems, then, suggest that Lorenzo has gathered the cultural prestige of Tuscany's poetic tradition, appropriated and repackaged it in a philosophical mode with his own imprint, and purposefully distributed it beyond Tuscany's borders. Lorenzo's sonnet "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti" exhibits how he has merged Petrarchan and stilnovistic elements within a poem through a mechanism of Ficinian contemplation. In this sonnet, Lorenzo employs musical harmony as a metaphor for harmony between the physical and metaphysical spheres in Ficinian Neoplatonic terms. Additionally, we

241-42 and "Lorenzo Lirico," *Dal Petrarca al Leopardi: Studi di stilistica storica* (Milano: Ricciardi, 1954) 23-39. Mario Martelli considers the *Raccolta Aragonese* as a sign of transitioning to a new style in "La cultura letteraria nell'età di Lorenzo," *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo tempo*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Firenze: Olschki, 1992), 54-56. Mazzacurati suggested that putting together the *Raccolta Aragonese* put Lorenzo in direct contact with stilnovistic poetry and that it showed in his own production that Mazzacurati deemed more mature than Lorenzo's youthful Petrarchism. *Pietro Bembo e la questione*, 38-39. De Robertis too characterizes the time of the *Raccolta Aragonese* as a period of transition that sees more stilnovistic aspects enter his prior Petrarchan mode. "L'esperienza poetica del Quattrocento," *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. Emilio Cecchi and Natalino Sapegno, vol. 3 (Milano:

encounter a similar approach in his sonnets "Come ti lascio, o come meco sei" and "Che è quel ch'io veggo dentro agli occhi belli," of which I also provide a brief analysis and interpretation.

Surprisingly little has been said of Lorenzo's sonnet "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti" considering its curious combinations of Petrarchan and Dantean influences. Until now, it has not been viewed as an interpretative touchstone of Lorenzo's purposes for the *Raccolta Aragonesa*; instead it has received brief mention in encyclopedic accounts of Lorenzo's works or footnotes on its intertextual references.¹²³ My analysis demonstrates how the manner in which Lorenzo's imagery of Ficinian contemplation encompasses both Dantean and Petrarchan treatments of love provides the interpretative key to this sonnet.

Se con dolce armonia due strumenti
 nella medesima voce alcun concorda,
 pulsando l'una, rende l'altra corda,
 per la conformità, medesmi accenti.

Così par dentro al mio cor si risenti
 l'imgo impressa, a' nostri sospir' sorda,
 se per similitudin mi ricorda
 del viso, ch'è sopra l'umane menti.

Amor, in quanti modi il cor ripigli!
 Ché fuggendo l'aspetto del bel viso,
 d'una vana pittura il cor pascendo,

Garzanti, 1988) 509-27.

¹²³ The scarcity of critical attention to "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti" indicates how the significance of its combination of Dantean and Petrarchan images has been overlooked. De Robertis merely states that it is a representation of Lorenzo's "immaginazione amorosa." "L'esperienza poetica," 513. Bigi includes the sonnet in a collection of Lorenzo's poetry. His footnotes mention its inclusion in the *Raccolta Aragonesa*, indebtedness to Ficino for the notion of harmony in the first quatrain, and a reference to the origins of the image of the lady on the poet's heart in Sicilian poetry. Bigi fittingly suggests that Lorenzo has taken a cue from Petrarch's sonnets on a portrait of Laura, but provides no comment. Later in this chapter I interpret this connection to Petrarch's sonnets LXXVII and LXXVIII as a crucial element of Lorenzo's Ficinian reinterpretation of Petrarchan conceits. *Scritti scelti*, 269-70. Paolo Orvieto treats this sonnet in the footnotes to the text in his anthology of Lorenzo's literary works. His notes focus on the Neoplatonic roots of the sonnet upon which I rely for my analysis and interpretation of the poem. Lorenzo de' Medici, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Paolo Orvieto, vol. 1 (Roma: Salerno editrice, 1992), 178-83. Orvieto, however, does not offer an interpretation of Lorenzo's use of Ficinian metaphysical speculation as a means of combining Dantean and Petrarchan poetic modes. Nor does he consider this sonnet within the greater context of Lorenzo's *Raccolta Aragonesa* as I do in this chapter.

o che non vegghino altro i nostri cigli,
 o che il pittor già fussi in paradiso,
 lei vidi propria: or va' d'Amor fuggendo!

Se claims preeminence in the first quatrain as the sonnet's initial dialectical opening; Lorenzo stirs the reader to the possibilities of inquiry, debate, and doubt. He employs this initial "if" to set forth the Ficinian analogy that underlies the sonnet: if two stringed instruments are tuned together then they can strike harmonized chords. These two instruments and their *dolce armonia* establish the musical theme of the first quatrain. Lorenzo explains that the two instruments are tuned to the *medesima voce* and that when one instrument is sounded, the other renders *medesmi accenti*.

Congruence and agreement mark the tone of the first quatrain, which is underscored by *armonia*, *medesima voce*, *concorda*, *conformità*, and *medesmi accenti*. In verse two the poet states that the two instruments are tuned in the *medesima voce*, indicating that both instruments can produce unison when they strike a uniform note. In verse four, *conformità* and *medesmi accenti* reinforce this consonance between the two instruments. This sonnet's symmetric meter and rhyme scheme *abba* reflect the harmony described therein. Terms associated with both music and language, like *voce* and *accenti*, further demonstrate a link between the medium of the poetic lyric and the musical expressions it describes. Lorenzo even repeats the Petrarchan modifier *medesimo* ("same") for the vocal elements, voice and accent, which reinforces the appropriateness of their usage for the spoken word as well as music.

In the second quatrain, Lorenzo introduces another instance of agreement. In this case he describes an image of his lady found on his heart (*imago impressa*) as similar to a countenance that lies beyond the human mind (*viso, ch'è sopra l'umane menti*). The second quatrain also contains the first instances of the first person: *al mio cor* (5), and *mi ricorda* (7); however, the *io*

poetante does not truly appear until the final verse of the sonnet as the implied, but unwritten, subject of the verb *vidi*.

The attention to sound, demonstrated through the two instruments and their *voce* and *accenti*, present in the first quatrain continues in the second *in absentia*. In verse six, the *imago impressa* is *sorda* to our sighs. The synesthesia of the deaf image heightens awareness of Lorenzo's appeal to our senses and emphasizes the two instruments as integral parts of his sonnet. This heightened awareness of sensory perception serves to contrast the *viso, ch'è sopra l'umane menti*; the supernatural face of deity lies beyond the capacity of human senses.

Suitable for the sonnet's turn, we find a tension that belies the harmony emphasized throughout the two quatrains. Lorenzo's exclamatory address – "Amor, in quanti modi il cor ripigli!" – can refer to the number of ways in which Love re-captures his heart or the ways in which Love chastises his heart. Whether as a restorative agent or as one who scolds, Love operates on Lorenzo's heart for lending its attention to a *vana pittura*.

The second tercet completes the poem formally but provides little in terms of a conclusion. Instead, the lines "o che non vegghino altro i nostri cigli, / o che il pittor già fussi in paradiso" open up multiple possibilities to the scenario in which Lorenzo "truly" saw his lady (*lei vidi propria*): either our brows do not see beyond (the physical world), or if the painter (of the "vain picture" in verse eleven) were already in Paradise. Both verses reveal a need for metaphysical capacity for Lorenzo to "truly" see his lady in the final verse. We are left to wonder whether he succeeded in seeing her in the proper manner, overcoming limitations imposed by his senses, because the *vana pittura* he beheld was masterfully created by an artist of divine ability, or because the *vana pittura* he viewed coincided so perfectly with the "true" image

of his lady in a metaphysical realm of "true" ideas. The experience of seeing his lady proves fleeting – "va' d'amor fuggendo" – and provides an open-ended conclusion to the sonnet.

"Se con dolce armonia due strumenti" contains the vernacular lyric tradition employed by Dante of the topos of an *imago* of a beloved lady on the heart of the poet-lover and Petrarch's treatment of a portrait of his lady.¹²⁴ Lorenzo combines these approaches. He encapsulates both traditions by describing an image on his heart of his lady as both impressed and painted; the former continuing the tradition followed and altered by Dante, the latter with a direct reference to Petrarch's sonnets on a portrait of Laura executed by Simone Martini. Lorenzo combines these two traditions within this sonnet and recasts them in terms of Neoplatonic harmony and contemplation of supreme beauty.

The *imago* in verse six refers to an image of Lorenzo's beloved lady on the heart of the poet-lover that could be stamped or painted. An "impressed" image suggests a seal imprinted into the lover's heart; he also describes Love as a "pittor," recalling the Italian vernacular tradition of an image of a lady painted on the poet-lover's heart. This peculiar condition – an "impressed" image that Love had painted – calls attention to the history of the image and how Lorenzo continues the evolution of that topos. A brief review of the Italian vernacular tradition of images in the poet-lover's heart is needed to understand more fully Lorenzo's contribution.¹²⁵

Provençal troubadours spoke of the lady's name or her beauty that had been placed, written, or engraved on the heart of the poet-lover. The physicality of Lorenzo's "impressed"

¹²⁴ The image of a beloved lady on the heart of the poet has a long history. I summarize that tradition and Dante's contribution to it in this analysis.

¹²⁵ In his note to the text, Orvieto simply merges diverse modes of artistic creation – "dipinta, scolpita, o impressa" – for the image on the lover's heart. *Tutte le opere*, vol. 1, 181. Though he, too, lists many of the stilnovist lyrics that I consider here, I emphasize how the treatment of this interior image has changed in its vernacular usage leading up to Lorenzo's sonnet. In my brief review of the history of this image, I echo Vincent Moleta's analysis with my own additions. "'Voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso' (V.N., XIX, 12): The Roots of Dante's Metaphor," *Dante Studies*

image hearkens to this notion of her incised name or beauty. For the painted image of a lady we trace the origins to the famous Sicilian notary Giacomo da Lentini.¹²⁶ The first appearance of an image of his lady painted on the poet-lover's heart resides within the first three stanzas of Lentini's canzone "Meravigliosamente:"

Meravigliosamente
 un amor mi dstringe
 e mi tene ad ogn'ora.
 Com'om che pone mente
 in altro exemplo pinge
 la simile pintura,
 così, bella, facc'eo,
 che 'nfra lo core meo
 porto la tua figura. (1-9)

In cor par ch'eo vi porti,
 pinta como parete,
 e non pare difore.
 O Deo, co' mi par forte
 non so se lo sapete,
 con' v'amo di bon core;
 ch'eo son sì vergognoso
 ca pur vi guardo ascoso
 e non vi mostro amore. (10-18)

Avendo gran disio
 dipinsi una pintura,
 bella, voi simigliante,
 e quando voi non vio
 guardo 'n quella figura,
 par ch'eo v'aggia davante:
 come quello che crede
 salvarsi per sua fede,

(1992) 57-75.

¹²⁶ Provençal troubadors employed similar treatment of images on the poet-lover's heart, but the concept of the image *painted* on the poet's heart begins with Giacomo da Lentini. In this regard I uphold Moleta's reasoning regarding the originality of Giacomo's contribution to the conceit in the Italian vernacular tradition: "Direct examination of alleged Provençal sources for Giacomo da Lentini's image(s) would have demonstrated that none of the Provençal 'sources' contains the verb 'to paint,' and that all of the images which speak of her name or beauty written/engraved/lodged in the heart, ascribe that writing/engraving/lodging to Love." Moleta, "Roots of Dante's Metaphor," 73.

ancor non veggia inante.¹²⁷ (19-27)

Giacomo describes how he maintains an image of his lady *pinta* (11) in his heart; this image proves so indelible that he is able to paint a portrait that exactly resembles her, just as a painter depicts a model from memory (19-21). The manner in which he beholds this portrait that he created evokes the treatment of icons: he fixes upon the image to such an extent that his actual lady seems to be physically present. His subsequent comparison to a believer who places his faith in a salvific figure that he does not truly see before him (25-27) borrows from the tradition of religious imagery for the description of the portrait that he painted. Whether we refer to the image fixed in his heart or the portrait he painted, the image of Giacomo's lady brings the promise of salvation or consolation through her presence.

Florentine poets in the latter half of the thirteenth century continued to use Giacomo da Lentini's invention, but they employed more direct metaphors – for which the painter and explanation of his process were not always identified – instead of Giacomo's lady who "seemed" to be painted on his heart and his comparison by similitude to a painter who paints from memory. For instance, in the anonymous courtly poem "Il mare amoroso," penned perhaps by Brunetto Latini or Chiaro Davanzati, we find the lady's painted image:

Certo, se voi poteste una fiata
 veder[e] sì come il lupo cerviere
 che vede oltra li monti chiaramente,
 voi vedreste la vostra figura
 dipinta e suggellata nel mio core,
 e lettere dintorno che diriano in questa guisa:
 "Più v'amo, dēa, che non faccio Deo,
 e son più vostro assai che non son meo."¹²⁸ (38-45)

¹²⁷ *Poeti del Duecento, La letteratura italiana: storia e testi*, ed. Gianfranco Contini (Milano: Ricciardi, 1960).

¹²⁸ *Poeti del Duecento, La letteratura italiana: storia e testi*, ed. Gianfranco Contini (Milano: Ricciardi, 1960).

Lacking an identified painter or elaborations on his process, this example demonstrates the development of the image to a metaphor that has encapsulated Lentini's detailed simile and distilled it into simply stating that the lady's image is painted (and sealed) on the lover's heart.

The "Detto d'amore," attributed to Dante, demonstrates another permutation in the progression of the painted image. These verses follow a description of the lady's virtues and beauty:

Amor, se Dio mi vaglia,
 il terreb[b]e a•ffollore,
 e ben seria foll' o re'
 quand'io il pensasse punto.
 M'Amor l'à sì a punto
 nella mia mente pinta,
 ch'i' la mi veg[g]io pinta
 nel cor, s'i' dormo o veglio.¹²⁹ (252-259)

Again we find a metaphor of a painted image; the poet speaks of an interior painting, not a memory or mental image that is like a painting. This time it resides in the mind of the poet and by identifying Love as the painter, the poet has introduced a new element. This new aspect harkens back to the Provençal tradition in which Love writes or engraves the name of a lady on the poet-lover's heart.

Other works, definitively from Dante's hand, had also contributed to the progression and variation of the topos, proceeding from Love who paints an image of the lady in the heart of the poet-lover to the image of Love painted on the countenance of the lady. "La dispietata mente, che pur mira," from Dante's *Vita Nuova*, includes a metaphor of his lady's image (perhaps Beatrice or *la donna dello schermo*) painted by Love:

E certo la sua doglia più m'incende,
 quand'i' mi penso ben, donna, che vui

¹²⁹ *The Fiore and the Detto d'Amore: A Late 13th-century Italian Translation of the Roman de la rose*, ed. and trans. Santa Casciani and Christopher Kleinhenz (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).

per man d'Amor là entro pinta sete:
 così e voi dovete
 vie maggiormente aver cura di lui;
 ché que' da cui convien che 'l ben s'appari,
 per l'immagine sua ne tien più cari.¹³⁰ (20-26)

In verse twenty-two Love's hand has painted an image of the beloved lady in the poet's heart.

Dante portrays the lady in such an impersonal manner that we might assume that her presence in the poem is conventional, but his appeal to her as a source of consolation or mercy signals a new role for the image – the painted image performs a significant function in seeking this mercy.

Dante proposes that just as God lends great care to man who is created in His image, so this lady should care for the poet since her image appears painted within his heart. By appealing for her consolation and by casting this comparison, he portrays his lady – and her image – as a salvific figure.

Dante altered the topos of the image of the lady by changing the location of her portrayal. In "Volgete li occhi a veder chi mi tira" Love depicts a lady in the poet's mind: "ch'elli m'è giunto fero ne la mente, / e pingevi una donna sì gentile" (9-10). This lady's nobility garners the poet's adoration. In "Gentil donna cortese e dibonare," Lapo Gianni also carried a painted image of his lady in his mind, an appropriate locus since its purpose was to prevent memory loss of his beloved: "poi che 'n la mente / vi porto per non ubliare" (3-4).¹³¹

The consolatory role of the lady and her image in Dante's "La dispietata mente, che pur mira," Dante's adoration of the lady in "Volgete li occhi a vedere chi mi tira," and Lapo's memory aid in "Gentil donna cortese e dibonare" starkly contrast the image of Dante's lady in "E' m'incresce di me sì duramente." Though not specifically referenced as a painted image, this

¹³⁰ All citations of *Vita Nuova* come from Domenico De Robertis's critical edition of Dante's *Rime*. Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova, Rime* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2002).

¹³¹ *Poeti del Duecento, La letteratura italiana: storia e testi*, ed. Gianfranco Contini (Milano: Ricciardi, 1960).

interior image stands out because Dante has located the image in his mind, but has wholly changed its role:

L'immagine di questa donna siede
 su ne la mente ancora,
 là 've la pose quei che fu sua guida;
 e non le pesa del mal ch'ella vede,
 anzi vie più bella ora
 che mai e vie' più lieta par che rida;
 e alza li occhi micidiali, e grida
 sopra colei che piange il suo partire:
 "Vanne, misera, fuor, vattene omai!" (43-51)

The image of the lady (43) in this canzone appears in the mind of the poet-lover. For Dante, Love placed the image of the lady in the rational center of the lover, where she torments him psychologically as she mockingly commands his miserable soul to leave its body. The disquieting purpose of the image of the lady of "E' m'incresce di me sì duramente" closely resembles the role of the image in "Amor, da che convien pur ch'io mi doglia." In this instance we find another permutation of the metaphor in which the poet-lover's soul paints her image, which treats the poet-lover with hostility and scorn:

L'anima folle, che al suo mal s'ingegna,
 com'ella è bella e ria,
 così dipinge, e forma la sua pena:
 poi la riguarda, e quando ella è ben piena
 del gran disio che de li occhi le tira,
 incontro a sé s'adira. (19-24)

The role that Dante assigns to the image of his lady in these cases deviates from the previous purposes that the image served as a means of giving comfort or as a token of remembrance. Instead, we find similarities to Guido Cavalcanti's use of the image, whose treatment demonstrates his melancholic and painful poetics.

In "Quando di morte mi conven trar vita" Cavalcanti makes a brief reference to a new figure (of his lady) that Love forms within his heart: "dentro lo cor si posa / formando di disio

nova persona;" (16-17).¹³² However, this figure brings the regrettable wounds of cruel Love. In "Era in penser d'amor quand' i' trovai" one of the passing young girls notices his despondent condition and remarks that his great suffering has been caused by the countenance of the lady that is set in his heart: "Disse: 'La donna che nel cor ti pose / co la forza d'amor tutto 'l su' viso.'" (39-40). This punitive role demonstrates an alteration of the metaphor of the interior image of the beloved. Dante established a more radical path for the image of his lady in "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore."

The first canzone of Dante's *Vita Nuova* appears in section XIX: "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore." This canzone marks a break from the prior components of the *Vita Nuova*; it inaugurates Dante's new poetics of praise in which he lauds his lady with no expectation of consolation or recompense. For the purpose of this study, "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore" also designates a significant change in the metaphor of the interior image of the lady.¹³³

¹³² All quotations of Guido Cavalcanti are found in *Rime*, ed. Roberto Rea and Giorgio Inglese (Roma: Carocci editore, 2011).

¹³³ In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, studies of Dante's lyric poetry have revolved around an overarching question of editorial ordering. Originally, his lyrics had been separated by genre: canzoni, *ballate*, and sonnets. The major editions in the twentieth century, however, ordered them chronologically. Michele Barbi's 1921 uncommented edition of Dante's *Rime* was the definitive chronological edition while Gianfranco Contini (1939) and Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde (1967) provided reputable commentary and translation. Domenico De Robertis (2002), however, produced what is now considered the definitive edition by returning to ordering Dante's lyrics by genre. For his *Vita nuova*, Dante himself took editorial control by ordering his own poems and by surrounding them with prose introductions and commentary. In his time, lyrics were rarely collected so Dante's self-assemblage lends greater significance to the order of his poems. "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore" is the first canzone of the work and it is central and of singular importance to Dante's new poetics. See De Robertis, *Il libro della Vita Nuova* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1970) and Foster and Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). In the most recent and significant critical treatment of the *Vita Nuova*, Teodolinda Barolini notes Dante's fondness for this canzone since in his *De vulgari eloquentia* (1302-1305) he listed it as his first example when designating the canzone form as the highest form of vernacular poetry and in *Purgatorio* XXIV he identified it as a pivotal work in Italian love poetry and the beginning of a new poetic style, the *dolce still novo*. Barolini concentrates on this radical innovation of "Donne ch'avete" as a transformation of Dante's poetics. He had shifted from a desire to possess to a desire to praise his lady. He had surpassed Guido Guinizzelli (1230-1276) who had praised his beloved in "Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore" because she was like an angel since in "Donne ch'avete" the angels note Beatrice's absence in heaven as defect of the celestial realm. God had reproved Guido for praising a mortal woman in a manner that elevated human love to the level of divine love, but in "Donne ch'avete," God himself participates in Beatrice's praise. *Dante's Lyric Poetry: Poems of Youth and of the Vita Nuova* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014) 177-87. Barolini adroitly identifies the reinvention of Dante's poetics in "Donne ch'avete," however

In the fourth stanza of the canzone, Dante's praise for his lady leads him to proclaim her perfection, indicating that she is the very model of beauty. He then pronounces his altered metaphor:

De li occhi suoi, come ch'ella li mova,
 escono spirti d'amore infammati,
 che feron li occhi a qual che allor la guati,
 e passan sì che 'l cor ciascun retrova:
 voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso,
 là 've non pote alcun mirarla fiso. (51-56)

Spirits of love penetrate to the heart of he who gazes on this lady; the lines referring to the metaphor that we are studying may be glossed as "you see Love painted in her face, there where no one can gaze." In this transformational canzone in Dante's oeuvre we find a considerable revision of the standard metaphor: Love is painted on the countenance of the lady in a manner that suggests a fusion of the lady and Love.

In the history of the image of the lady on the poet-lover's heart within Provençal, Sicilian, Tuscan, and stilnovist traditions, the image has changed from its deployment as a simile to a metaphor, from the lady's carved name or characteristics to a painted image, from a location in the heart to the mind, and from a role of providing consolation in her absence to scornful mocking of the poet-lover. Dante rendered a shift in location of the image from the heart to the mind of the poet-lover and a new role of derision rather than comfort; he punctuates his attitude of incorporation and adaptation of the original image by producing yet another change: an image of Love painted on the countenance of the lady.¹³⁴

she does not mention his innovative adaptation of the metaphor of the interior image of the lady, the focus of my reading of the canzone.

¹³⁴ De Robertis views the image of Love on Beatrice's countenance as a mere combination of two commonplaces: the image of the lady painted on the heart and Love in the eyes of the lady. *Il libro della Vita Nuova*, 127. I concur with Moleta who articulates a more meticulous alteration of the original Lentinian image.

Lorenzo de' Medici's implementation of the interior image of his lady in "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti" belies simple derivation; the changes that Lorenzo effects resemble the manner in which Dante altered the topos. Lorenzo employs a curious combination of an impressed and painted image in order to account for the history of the metaphor and then to add his transformation to the image as an example of Ficinian Neoplatonic harmony and as a spur to contemplation of supreme beauty. To begin an interpretation of Lorenzo's treatment of the image, let us first analyze the role of Love in "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti."

In verse nine, at the turn of the sonnet, Lorenzo addresses Love with this exclamation: "Amor, in quanti modi il cor ripigli!" Placing "Amor" at the *volta* heightens our awareness of Love's active role in *re-capturing* the poet-lover's heart. The subsequent lines – "Ché fuggendo l'aspetto del bel viso, / d'una vana pittura il cor pascendo" – evoke an Augustinian conceit of the impossibility of fleeing the love of God and a love for God. In this interpretation, *bel viso* refers to the countenance of God and may also refer to the "true" ideal image of the countenance of his lover. Such a love never abandons one's heart, ever following the errant lover. In this case, Lorenzo's heart had fled the face of God or the "true" face of his lady in order to nourish itself on a "vain picture." This errant behavior necessitated Love's recapture of the poet's heart.

As an additional role, Love is the *pittor* of the image of the lady that appears inside Lorenzo's heart. Through the history of the interior image of the lady that we have reviewed, that image has served as a memory aid to the lover, as a potential source of mercy and comfort for the lover, and also as a source of torment. For Lorenzo, the interior image of the lady functions to bridge the distance between the lover and beloved and to bridge the distance between the poet-lover and "true" beauty. Love's painting in Lorenzo's heart is so expertly executed – and verse thirteen suggests that he may have received supernatural proficiency if he

was in *paradiso* for its rendering – that it coincides with the countenance of God *ch'è sopra l'umane menti* (8). The image of his lady painted on Lorenzo's heart prompts his metaphysical ascent to the highest beauty. Thus the image serves to bridge the physical distance between lover and absent beloved and the metaphysical distance between God and man.

The image of the lady on Lorenzo's heart functions as the crux of the sonnet and is integral to understanding its Neoplatonic foundation. Lorenzo established a nuanced relationship between the *imago impressa* (6), the *viso, ch'è sopra l'umane menti* (8), the *bel viso* (10), and the *vana pittura* (11). The basis for that complex association comes from Marsilio Ficino's *Theologia Platonica* XI.4 in which he explains the notion of the divine idea of beauty that exists beyond the realm of beautiful objects. One accesses this ideal realm through contemplation of perceptible beauty.

Lorenzo describes the *imago* on his heart as coinciding with or congruent with – *per similitudin* – the *viso, ch'è sopra l'umane menti*. Love depicted this image so expertly, and perhaps with divine aid ("o che il pittor già fussi in paradiso"), that it reminds Lorenzo of the "true" image of his lady. Indeed, in the final line of the sonnet, he claims that by means of the image depicted on his heart he sees his "true" lady ("lei vidi propria"). *Propria* indicates her proper or authentic self, meaning her "true" self in the metaphysical sense of the realm of ideas.

Lorenzo directs his readers to this congruence between the interior image and the "true" image of his lady by the musical comparison in the initial quatrain of the sonnet. As noted, indications of congruence fill the first quatrain: *armonia, medesima voce, concorda, corda, conformità*, and *medesmi accenti*. The *imago* in Lorenzo's heart coincides with the "true" image of his lady as the two instruments are tuned together.

That Lorenzo employs musical imagery and lexicon to expound the image of his lady should not surprise us considering the interest that Ficino had demonstrated in music. In fact, a similar description to the one Lorenzo employs in the first quatrain appears in a letter from Ficino to Amerigo Corsini: “La concordanza in due cetre o in due lire fa sì, come possiamo ogni giorno sperimentare, che ogniquaivolta venga pulsata l’una, anche l’altra si muova.”¹³⁵ For Ficino, the beauty of musical harmonies and rhythms prompted the contemplation of divine harmonies. In his letter *De divino furore*, he states: “per aures vero concentus quosdam numerosque suavissimos animus haurit, hisque imaginibus admonetur, atque excitatur ad divinam musicam, acriori quodam mentis et intimo sensu considerandam.”¹³⁶ In this letter on divine frenzy, Ficino explains that through the ears, the soul senses the smoothest harmonies and rhythms. In the next clause, Ficino curiously refers to these sensations as images that prompt the soul to lift itself to the consideration of divine music.¹³⁷ Ficino's peculiar reference to music in terms of images in his explanation of the correlation between earthly and divine music advance a

¹³⁵ Amerigo Corsini (1452-1501) was a poet and statesman who participated in Ficino's intellectual circle or academy. In this letter, Ficino compares the reciprocal love between two persons to properly tuned strings of a lyre. *Lettere*, ed. Sebastiano Gentile (Firenze: Olschki, 1990) 236-37.

¹³⁶ *Opera omnia*, 614.

¹³⁷ In “*Orpheus Redivivus: The Musical Magic of Marsilio Ficino*,” Angela Voss reviews the correspondences that Ficino found between musical harmony and perceiving metaphysical symbolic meaning and how a musician can thus lift his soul to the celestial realm. She uses a common translation, attributed to members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science in London, of Ficino's statement: “the soul receives the sweetest harmonies and numbers through the ears, and by these *echoes* is reminded and aroused to the divine music which may be heard by the more penetrating sense of the mind” (emphasis mine). “*Orpheus Redivivus: The Musical Magic of Marsilio Ficino*,” *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J.B. Allen, Valery Rees, and Martin Davies, (Boston: Brill, 2002) 233-34 and Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. The Language Department of the School of Economic Science in London (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1975) 45. This translation of *imaginibus* as “echoes” fits well with Voss's usage as it aptly captures the Platonic congruence of earthly and divine music and also demarcates their aural quality. However, I suggest that this translation betrays the meaning of *imaginibus*. A more literal rendition of that term supports my reading of this excerpt as it applies to Lorenzo's musical analogy and the *image* of his lady. I recommend Virginia Conant's translation: “Through the ears the Soul perceives certain sweet harmonies and rhythms, and through these images it is exhorted and excited to consider the divine music with a more ardent and intimate sense of the mind.” Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. Virginia Conant (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1964) 308.

Ficinian metaphysical reading of Lorenzo's musical analogy that explains the relationship between the image of his lady and her "true" image.

The *viso, ch'è sopra l'umane menti* refers to the countenance of the lady's "true" image – in the Platonic realm, beyond the tangible, and it refers to *the* countenance beyond the human intellect: the supreme beauty of God. The harmonized relationship – interior image that corresponds to its "true" supernatural form – parallels a philosophical concept that Dante offers in the first canto of *Paradiso*: the imprint (*orma*) of God on his creations. Ficino takes up this notion of God's imprint on man in *De Amore* V.4 in which he explains that though it does not shine as brightly as in the angels, inside the soul of man we find the "volto di Dio che dentro all'animo risplende."¹³⁸ Thus Lorenzo's mention of the *viso, ch'è sopra l'umane menti* refers not solely to the "true" form of his lady, but also to the countenance of God. The image of his lady that Love painted on his heart coincides so precisely with her ideal form that it permits Lorenzo a glimpse of supreme beauty in the face of God.

Lorenzo thus establishes this painted image as a *sacro volto* or depiction of the face of God. Salvific and spiritual language and comparisons had been employed in the history of the painted image on the heart of the poet-lover, but not as emphatically as Lorenzo and Dante before him. Giacomo da Lentini – in "Meravigliosamente" – compares his devotion to his lady, even in her absence, to one who puts faith in a god he does not see. In "La dispietata mente, che pur mira," Dante brings the parallels much closer in his claim that his lady should provide him with consolation because he carries her image in his heart, just as God has great care for man whom he created in his image. Dante had changed the topos of the painted image into a

¹³⁸ In Book 5, Chapter 4, Ficino expounds on the notion of beauty and its source, the divine countenance. God's imprint within man reflects the order of the world since it appears in the elements of the world, but much brighter in the soul of man, and brightest of all in the angels. Marsilio Ficino, *El libro dell'amore*, ed. Sandra Niccoli (Firenze: Olschki, 1987) 85-86.

profound new form in "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore," wherein Love is painted on the face of the lady. The presence of deity in the face of his lady creates a type of *sacro volto*. Lorenzo takes up this notion of a *sacro volto* in Ficinian Neoplatonic terms: the congruence of Lorenzo's interior image of his lady to the *bel viso* of God invites contemplation of supreme beauty.

In *De Amore* V.4, Ficino speaks of the *volto di Dio* and how it resides "in modo molto obscuro" inside of man – not nearly as brightly as it shines within the angels. Since the mortal body responds to the senses, it remains oblivious to the divine countenance within it: "Ma l'animo nostro, creato con questa conditione, che si circonda da corpo terreno, al ministerio corporale declina, dalla quale inclinatione gravato, mette in oblio el thesoro che nel suo pecto è nascoso."¹³⁹ Ficino's claim that man *mette in oblio* the portion of the divine countenance within him suggests the need for a method to give attention to and to remember the divine countenance. Previously I considered *ricorda* in verse seven of Lorenzo's sonnet in terms of resemblance or similitude; the image on Lorenzo's heart coincides with the "true" image of his lady so perfectly that it invites comparison to and incites contemplation of supreme beauty: God's countenance. However we must also consider that *ricorda* indicates a function of memory in which the interior image causes Lorenzo to *remember* that countenance *ch'è sopra l'umane menti*. Again, the relationship between the interior image and the "true" image invokes an analogy to God's image, an image that God has instilled within, but is forgotten by man. Thus when the image of the lady painted on Lorenzo's heart stimulates Lorenzo's contemplative ascent, it does so as both a function of congruence to and remembrance of the countenance of God.

¹³⁹ Ficino explains that the image of God's supreme beauty and love resides within man but is shrouded by a corrupt earthly body. As such, sexual drive represents a desire for communion with God's love that is often reduced to base appetite because of man's earthly condition.

In his commentary on *Paradiso* VIII, Cristoforo Landino claimed that corporeal beauty "non è d'alcuna sostanza, ma ombra vana de la vera bellezza." His statement references the divide between physical representations and Neoplatonic ideals.¹⁴⁰ This relationship aids our understanding of the *vana pittura* of verse eleven: "d'una vana pittura il cor pascendo." We have discussed how the *imago impressa* is the image of Lorenzo's lady, so expertly depicted that it coincides with her "true" (Neoplatonic ideal) image. By comparison, that interior image of his lady is similar to the countenance of God that is instilled, yet forgotten, inside of man. Conversely, Lorenzo also refers to this interior image as the *vana pittura*. No matter how expertly created nor how well it coincides with the idea of his lady, the interior image remains merely a reflection of that beauty. It is no longer described as an *imago*, with the philosophical heft of sacred images that this term connotes, whose similarity to its "true" idea invites contemplation of God. The pejorative adjective "vain" suggests that, despite its extraordinary congruence, it remains a depiction that Lorenzo can observe with the senses.

Lorenzo describes his contemplative ascent to the *bel viso* as fleeting – he repeats *fuggendo* in verses ten and fourteen – otherwise his heart is left to consume the *vana pittura*. By approaching his interior image in two different manners – as an *imago* that coincides directly with ideal beauty and as a *vana pittura* observed by the senses – and by demonstrating the fleeting contemplative ascent to supreme beauty, Lorenzo illustrates both a congruence and a

¹⁴⁰ Landino presented his commentary on Dante's *Comedia*, complete with drawings by Sandro Botticelli, to the Florentine governors – the *signoria* – on August 30, 1481. Deborah Parker attributes its popularity to the fact that it was the first illustrated edition of the poem, it included a synthesis of early commentators, it provided the most thorough examination of Dante's language to date, and because it presented Dante as an exemplary exponent of Neoplatonic ideals. Deborah Parker, *Commentary and Ideology: Dante in the Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993) 89. Though I utilize it here in a very specific sense to distinguish between *vain* and *true* beauty, Landino's reading of Dante's *Comedia* serves in a general sense as another example, like Lorenzo's own operation in the *Raccolta Aragonese*, of an interest within Lorenzo's circle to reclaim Florence's great poet within the context of Ficinian Neoplatonism. Cristoforo Landino, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2001) 1681.

distance between the interior image and the ideal. This tension can be comprehended and overcome through Ficino's conception of the contemplation of beauty.

In earlier lyrics with the painted image of a lady on the heart of a poet-lover, the image functioned as a means of compensating for the distance or absence of the lady. The image, it was hoped, served to provide a semblance of her benevolent presence. However, for Lorenzo's metaphysical speculation, the actual presence of his lady would not fulfill his purposes. In order to effectively contemplate the "true" beauty of his lady, Lorenzo must distance himself from the "vain picture" observed by the senses while relying upon that image to spur his ascent to the contemplation of his lady's "true" image / the countenance of God.

In *Theologia platonica* IX.2 Ficino explained that the mind thrives when separated from the body: "Mens quo magis separatur a corpore, eo melius se habet" and "quanto magis mens in hoc corpus immergitur, tanto deficit magis & quo discedit longius, eo magis & proficit."¹⁴¹ Lorenzo's sonnet demonstrates this notion of distancing the mind from the corporeal and sensual by displacing the *io poetante*. The first intimation of the first person of the poet does not appear until the second quatrain: "dentro al *mio* cor" and "se per similitudin *mi* ricorda." With a modifier - "al *mio* cor" - and a first person object pronoun - "*mi* ricorda," Lorenzo appears to transition from the universality of the musical metaphor in the first quatrain to the subjectivity of his own experience; however, the poet's agency is limited in these initial appearances of the first person. In verse five, Lorenzo employs the possessive pronoun *mio* in the phrase *dentro al mio cor*, in which *mio cor* functions not as the subject of action, but as a locative noun. The subject of the verb *si risenti*, in verse five, remains ambiguous. If reflexive, then the sentiment expresses a passive submission of Lorenzo's heart: "mio cor" feels the consequences of being subject to

¹⁴¹ *Opera omnia*, 213.

the *imago impressa*. If the grammatical construction is instead impersonal – *l'imago impressa* is sensed – then Lorenzo removes his own agency even further. Thus Lorenzo introduces his subjective voice in the sonnet without ascribing to it an active role.

Even the central image of the sonnet – the image of his lady – does not appear by any apparent volition by the poet; *Amor* paints her image. Lorenzo receives the painting on his heart. Among the numerous appeals to our sense of sound in the opening analogy of harmonized instruments, the poet expresses no experience of any of it; Lorenzo distances himself from active engagement of the senses. The singular instance of a first person verb does not appear until the sonnet's final verse when the poet achieves his contemplative ascent for a fleeting glimpse of the "true" image of his lady: "lei vidi propria." Ironically for this sonnet based on a musical metaphor, the poet's displacement of agency and sensation culminates in an ecstatic experience in which he *sees*.¹⁴²

Lorenzo's contemplative ascent to God proved difficult to execute. In verses 10-11 – "Ché fuggendo l'aspetto del bel viso, / d'una vana pittura il cor pascendo" – Lorenzo demonstrates his submission to the appetite of the senses. Because his heart (in this sense, emphasizing corporeality) cherished the vain picture, the *bel viso* of his lady was fleeting. And when he succeeds in distancing himself from his senses through contemplation, his ecstatic vision of his lady in her "true" form – "lei vidi propria" – ends abruptly. *Or(a)* indicates the immediacy of the vision's close. As soon as Love recaptures his heart (verse 9), he flees (verse 14). This fleeting nature of contemplative experience and supposed return to his senses leaves no real conclusion to the actions described in the sonnet. With *fuggendo* in rhyme with

¹⁴² See note 137 on the discrepancy in translations for Ficino's *De divino furore* in which he describes the sensations of harmony and rhythm as images.

pascendo, we might assume that Lorenzo distances himself from Love by, once again, seeking nourishment in or by cherishing "vain pictures" that are accessible through the senses.

Turning again to Ficino, we find that Lorenzo has connected this notion of distancing the senses with the affective quality of music. A lyre was Ficino's frequent companion. In Lorenzo's own work, *De Summo Bono*, Ficino roams the forest of Monteverchio singing sweet songs with the accompaniment of his lyre. In a letter of advice to Antonio Canigiani, Ficino addresses the neglect of the senses with respect to music:

Post theologiae vel medicinae studia gravioribus fidibus cantibusque frequenter incumbo, ut caetera sensuum oblectamenta penitus negligam, molestias animae corporisque expellam, mentem ad sublimia Deumque pro viribus erigam, auctoritate Mercurii Platonisque fretus, qui musicam nobis a Deo concessam dicunt ad domandum corpus, temperandum animum, Deumque laudandum.¹⁴³

Music enabled Ficino to neglect the pleasure of the senses and to lift his mind to contemplate God. The similarities to the process that Lorenzo exhibits in his sonnet – an image that invokes contemplation of God in a relationship that he describes in terms of harmonized music – accentuate the Ficinian approach that Lorenzo applied to the topos of the painted image of his lady on his heart.

Thus far I have interpreted "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti" as a new employment of the topos of the painted image of the lady on the heart of the poet-lover in terms of Neoplatonic contemplative ascent to the divine. Lorenzo's innovative zeal mirrors the alterations Dante had made to the topos of the image, despite the significant difference in the purposes of the image. Yet this singular interpretation of the image leaves an incomplete view of the process and purpose of Lorenzo's own entries in the collection because he includes a Petrarchan treatment as well. This combination of Dantean and Petrarchan approaches within a sonnet

¹⁴³ *Opera omnia*, 651.

based on Ficinian tenets of metaphysical beauty demonstrates how Lorenzo has positioned his poetry as a continuation of the greatness of the Florentine lyric tradition while also seeking to establish a new philosophical trajectory. Likewise, he has taken the unassailable reputations of his illustrious predecessors and made them his own.

In verse 13, to account for the precision with which the image on his heart coincides with the "true" image of his lady, Lorenzo proposes that perhaps the painter was in Paradise when composing that picture – "che il pittor già fussi in paradiso." The suggestion that the nature of the image could be traced to supernatural privilege seems redundant since we had already identified the godly nature of the painter (Love). This verse serves another purpose as a direct allusion to Petrarch's "Per mirar Policeto a prova fiso" – component LXXVII of his *Canzoniere* – in which Petrarch lauds a portrait of his beloved Laura and its creator, Simone Martini.

Petrarch claimed "Ma certo il mio Simon fu in Paradiso" when he depicted Laura's *bel viso* (5-8). Such an explicit invocation of Petrarch's sonnet on a portrait of his lady elicits the question whether Lorenzo's *vana pittura* may actually refer to an actual painting.¹⁴⁴ If the *vana pittura* does refer to an actual portrait, then it would alter the dynamic that I previously presented that fused the *vana pittura* with the *imago impressa*; with this new reading, the *imago impressa* serves as the reflection of the "true" image (or *bel viso*) and the *vana pittura* is the painted portrait that can be observed by the senses. However, there is more at stake than multiplying the potential meanings of these images in Lorenzo's sonnet. Lorenzo's statement purposefully introduces a Petrarchan element into his sonnet in combination with the stilnovistic/Dantean

¹⁴⁴ Evidence suggests that Lorenzo did possess a portrait by Andrea del Verrocchio of his mistress Lucrezia Donati. C. De Fabriczy, "Andrea del Verrocchio ai servizi de' Medici," *Archivio storico dell'arte* (1895) 163-76. However, It is not my contention that Lorenzo's *vana pittura* alludes to this portrait of Lucrezia.

central image so that he can recast them both in terms of the Ficinian brand of Neoplatonic philosophy that he espoused.

To better understand Lorenzo's operation I must briefly review components LXXVII and LXXVIII of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*; often read in tandem, these sonnets later became models for 16th-century sonnets on portraiture.¹⁴⁵ Component LXXVII of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* lauds the painter Simone Martini and his portrait (now lost) of Petrarch's Laura. Martini was a Sienese painter who was active from 1315 to 1344 and who lived in Avignon in the last years of his life. Besides this lost portrait of Laura referred to in this sonnet, Martini also painted a frontispiece to the works of Virgil (currently in Milan) for Petrarch. The sonnet reads:

LXXVII
 Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso
 con gli altri ch'ebber fama di quell'arte,
 mill'anni non vedrian la minor parte
 della beltà che m'ave il cor conquiso.

Ma certo il mio Simon fu in Paradiso
 onde questa gentil donna si parte;
 ivi la vide, et la ritrasse in carte
 per far fede qua giù del suo bel viso.

L'opra fu ben di quelle che nel cielo
 si ponno imaginar, non qui tra noi,
 ove le membra fanno a l'alma velo;

cortesia fe', né la potea far poi
 che fu disceso a provar caldo et gielo
 et del mortal sentiron gli occhi suoi.

¹⁴⁵ Notable examples include sonnets composed by and exchanged between Agnolo Bronzino, Benedetto Varchi, Anton Francesco Grazzini, and Laura Battiferri regarding Bronzino's portrait of Battiferri. Pietro Bembo and Antonio Brocardo composed sonnets based on Petrarch's sonnets on a portrait of Laura. Their sonnets move beyond their Petrarchan models since the portraits of their ladies do interact and converse with the poet whereas Petrarch's longing for interaction with his portrait of Laura remained one-sided. Mary Rogers, "Sonnets on female portraits from Renaissance North Italy," *Word and Image* 2.4 (1986) 291-93. Lorenzo's sonnet does not adhere so closely to Petrarch's themes and tropes in sonnets LXXVII and LXXVIII as these later poets did. Instead, Lorenzo's allusion to Petrarch informs the multiplicity of readings that Lorenzo wraps into the image of the lady – the interpretive key to his poem.

In the first verse Policleto, an illustrious ancient Greek sculptor from the fifth century B.C.E., represents the greats of the classical period and *gli altri* in the second verse are other great and famous artists. If they were to all compete for a thousand years they would not even see the *minor parte* of Laura's beauty. The first quatrain possesses a dual function in its praise – lauding Laura's beauty and the merits of the artist Simone Martini. Laura's beauty is one for the ages that even the celebrated artists of the past would not be able to produce, suggesting that they had never before encountered such a beautiful lady. Petrarch also lauds Martini for his ability to represent such beauty in portraiture. One reason for which the greats of the past may not have been able to produce such a beauty is that they operated in the realm of physical beauty, whereas Martini succeeded in displaying Laura's inner beauty, or the beauty of her character and soul.

In the second quatrain we see that, according to the poet, Martini must have been given some sort of special dispensation to be in Paradise. Certainly Martini had to have been in Paradise in order to paint her face so faithfully to her celestial beauty for the viewer to see it *qua giù* on Earth. After the second quatrain, the turn of the sonnet is noted in the shift from lauding the artist directly to an implied praise through extolling the work itself.

The first tercet again references Paradise since the work resembles the type one could imagine in Heaven instead of on Earth where the body veils the soul. Thus the greatness of this portrait is how the internal beauty of Laura – the beauty of her character or her soul – is displayed instead of merely the ephemeral corporeal appeal of the female form. In the concluding tercet Petrarch again emphasizes that Martini could not have created such a work on Earth. A special sort of grace – a *cortesia* – was granted to create the portrait of Petrarch's beloved while in Paradise. Martini could not have produced the work once he had returned to feel the heat and cold of the world; he could not have rendered the beauty of her soul so

effectively had he seen her with solely mortal eyes. Indeed, the sonnet proclaims the beauty of Laura and lauds the triumph of the artist Martini who surpassed the ancients and must have been in Heaven while painting the beautiful Laura.

The successive component of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, another sonnet, also treats the lost portrait of Laura, but focuses more on the work itself and the viewer's (Petrarch's) reaction to the work.

LXXVIII

Quando giunse a Simon l'alto concetto
 ch' a mio nome gli pose in man lo stile,
 s'avesse dato a l'opera gentile
 colla figura voce ed intelletto,

di sospir molti mi sgombrava il petto
 che ciò ch' altri à più caro a me fan vile.
 Però che 'n vista ella si monstra umile,
 promettendomi pace ne l'aspetto,

ma poi ch' i' vengo a ragionar con lei,
 benignamente assai par che m'ascolte:
 se risponder sapesse a' detti miei!

Pigmaliòn, quanto lodar ti dei
 de l'immagine tua, se mille volte
 n'avesti quel ch' i' sol una vorrei!

The opening quatrain indicates that Martini took up his stylus on behalf of Petrarch for the depicting of Laura. Petrarch laments, however, that when the *alto concetto* of depicting Laura came to the painter, Martini could not give the figure an intellect and voice as well. If the portrait were to have such qualities, then, as seen in the second quatrain, Petrarch's breast would have been lightened of many sighs. It is noted, however, that the sighs are inspired by her purity and her humility, not by any sort of base physical beauty or sexuality that are vile aspects to him. Indeed, in the portrait, Laura seems humble, and the image of her countenance promises consolation and peace. Such a statement on the expression of her face affords a life-like quality

to the portrait. And such a life-like representation highlights the lack of a voice and intellect that Petrarch laments in the first quatrain. Indeed, it seems that the poet is remarking on the convincing realism of the portrait by recalling the classical epigrammatic history that often claimed that for the figures “only the voice is lacking” (*vox sola deest*).

In the first tercet the poet desires to converse with the lady of the portrait and, indeed, it seems that she kindly listens. However, Petrarch wishes that she could respond in this one-sided conversation; hence, again, the lament over her lack of voice and intellect. In the concluding tercet, Petrarch addresses Pygmalion in an apostrophe and comments on how pleased he must be because he actually received many responses from his desired image while for Petrarch just one response from this portrait of Laura would suffice. According to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 10.243-97, Pygmalion was the mythological sculptor who created a statue so beautiful that he fell in love with it. Venus then turned the statue into a living woman. Hence the reader understands why Pygmalion was evoked, since Petrarch would relish the same vitalization of the image of Laura.

Lorenzo's direct reference in "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti" to "Per mirar Policleteo a prova fiso" serves as an invitation to read Petrarch's sonnets with a Ficinian lens. In "Per mirar Policleteo a prova fiso" Petrarch argues that Laura's beauty could not be seen by other great artists; a Neoplatonic reading then suggests that her ultimate beauty was not perceivable by one's senses. Simone must have been in Paradise to depict her *bel viso*, which in Lorenzo's Neoplatonic sonnet represents the "true" image of his lady and the countenance of God. Petrarch gives the impression that Simone's portrait is congruent to Laura's "true" beauty in a manner that could spur contemplation since it is an image that one can imagine in heaven – or that one can contemplate in order to reach the divine realm – and not one that Simone could have created by relying on his eyes.

In "Quando giunse a Simon l'alto concetto" Petrarch sought consolation and peace from the image of his lady and, more notably, he wishes the image of his lady would take up life and speak with him. In the first verse, Petrarch refers to the image of his lady as an *alto concetto*. This "high concept" of his lady lends itself well to the Neoplatonic notion of the "true" image of his lady in the realm of ideas, which sharply contrasts with his desire for interaction at the conclusion of the sonnet – much like Lorenzo's ascent to the *bel viso* contrasts his consumption of the *vana pittura*. Unless, that is, we read Petrarch's longing for interaction with Laura as an analogy of a desire for ecstatic communion with God.

Lorenzo's straightforward allusion to "Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso" asks that we reconsider other elements of the sonnet in a Petrarchan vein. In verse nine, Lorenzo addresses Love: "Amore, in quanti modi il cor ripigli." The tercet explains how Love returns the poet's heart to God, after having sought empty nourishment among "vain pictures" (physical beauty that appeals to the senses). In this sense, Love is a restorative agent that redirects Lorenzo toward the *bel viso* of God. However, I suggest that *ripiigliare* indicates the many ways in which Love chastises or scolds the poet's heart for having fled the *bel viso* in pursuit of a *vana pittura*. Love reproves Lorenzo's heart for seeking nourishment from a source other than God. Love scolding Lorenzo's heart seems appropriate whether we read "d'una vana pittura il cor pascendo" as the heart "cherishing" a vain picture or "nourishing" itself on a vain picture.¹⁴⁶

This admonishing tone of Lorenzo's use of *ripiigliare* recalls the reprimand Petrarch received for his oscillations between his love for Laura and love for God. In book three of *Secretum*, Saint Augustine rebuked Petrarch for allowing his love for Laura to cause his soul to

¹⁴⁶ While the idea of a heart nourishing itself on a vain image of a beloved lady presents a different role for the heart, it nonetheless evokes Dante's vision of Beatrice in *Vita Nuova* in which Love nourished her by feeding Dante's heart to her.

wander: "Ab amore celestium elongavit animum et a Creatore ad creaturam desiderium inclinavit."¹⁴⁷ In this fictive dialogue, Augustine disciplined Petrarch for inverting the order of his affection when he claimed that loving Laura made him love God more. In Lorenzo's case, a discrepancy emerges between attention given to a beauty perceived by the senses, the *vana pittura*, and that beauty, the *bel viso* or the Platonic "true" image that one approaches through contemplation. Love's role then – *il cor ripigli* – is not to recapture but to chastise Lorenzo's heart for straying from the ideal. In verse twelve, Lorenzo suggests that man does not see beyond his own brow: "o che non vegghino altro i nostri cigli." By positioning *cigli* in rhyme with *ripigli*, Lorenzo appears to emphasize the motive for Love's scolding – not seeing beyond the "vain picture" or not moving beyond the senses.

As stated above, Lorenzo's use of *medesimo* twice in the first quatrain recalls Petrarch's very first entry in his *Canzoniere* and leads us to expect to find perhaps additional subtle Petrarchan elements in the sonnet; instead, we find a use of "memory" (*ricordare* in this case) that rebuffs our expectations. Although the *imago impressa* and the *bel viso* so perfectly coincide that the *imago impressa* invites a contemplation of the *bel viso*, there remains a distance between them. *Ricordare* – "mi ricorda" in verse seven – bridges the distance between the *imago* and the *viso*: the impressed image *resembles* the face of deity and in Ficinian terms, the interior *imago* helps an individual *remember* his divine creator. That Lorenzo points out the relationship between them as *per similitudin* helps accentuate the congruence of the images, but also underscores their difference. This similarity, but not uniformity, of images mirrors the concept of the two tuned instruments in the first quatrain. Lorenzo deliberately employs *ricordare*, yet it still recalls the *rimembrare* that Petrarch famously employed in "*Chiare fresche e dolci acque*." Petrarch's *rimembrare* represented the mental reconstitution of his beloved Laura, the memories

¹⁴⁷ Liber Tertius, 5.1. Francesco Petrarca, *Secretum*, ed. Ugo Dotti (Roma: Archivio Guido Izzi, 1993).

of whom had dissipated by the passage of time and by death. Lorenzo uses *ricordare* for an analogous procedure of spanning an absence or a distance that lies between image and idea. The explicit use of *ricordare* signals an apt choice for Lorenzo considering its semantics (to remind, to resemble, and to remember) as well as for its tie to the strings of two tuned instruments (via *corda*) in the first quatrain. *Ricordare* spans the distance between the *imago* and *bel viso*, but does so in a way that underscores a tension between them.

Tension underlies this sonnet as much as harmony. Just as different sized strings at different tension settings create the harmonies produced by stringed instruments, the interior image on Lorenzo's heart is so attuned to the "true" image of his lady that it invites contemplation of the *bel viso*. But there is a distance, a tension, between the two that must be bridged (or harmonized) by contemplation. Overcoming the underlying tension between the *vana pittura* and "true" image is a difficult process because nourishing his heart on an image that he can perceive with his senses is natural. Lorenzo must overcome his human condition to contemplate a divine idea, which proves to be a fleeting experience.

Lorenzo casts his own difficulty with contemplative ascent in terms that demonstrate the struggle for all men to overcome their human nature. The language that Lorenzo employs alternates between his own experience and universal experience. In verses five and six, Lorenzo states that the image within his own heart – "dentro al *mio* cor" – is deaf to our sighs – "a' *nostri* sospir' sorda." Collectivizing our sighs serves to universalize Lorenzo's experience. He continues to underscore this universal aspect by describing the *bel viso*, in verse eight, as beyond the human mind – *sopra l'umane menti* – instead of beyond his own mind. Placing *paradiso* in rhyming position with *viso* in the previous tercet, and noting that our brows do not see beyond that which is vain – "non vegghino altro i nostri cigli" – combine to underscore the distinctness

between the perceptible realm and that which lies beyond the human mind. By reporting it as a universal flaw – not seeing beyond *our* brow – Lorenzo ties this last tercet to the second quatrain in which the impressed image is deaf to *our sighs* and the face of God is above *human* minds. Lorenzo's ascent to see his lady in her "true" form in the concluding verse – "lei vidi propria" – is a very personal experience that is marked by the sole manifestation of the *io poetante* in the sonnet. Lorenzo's oscillations between personal and universal experience create an interpretive tension between a specific painting of *his* lady that invites *him* to contemplate *her* "true" image and a generalized commentary on how man can commune with deity through contemplation.

Two different possible interpretations of the *vana pittura* create another tension that Lorenzo does not reconcile for the reader. He does not indicate which way we should read the *vana pittura* and so we must read it both ways – as interior image that is a mere reflection of his lady's "true" image and as a painting on canvas. For me, Lorenzo explicitly draws on these multiple possibilities in order to insert both the Dantean tradition of the image on the heart of the poet-lover and the Petrarchan tradition of the portrait of the poet's beloved. Lorenzo brought these two traditions together in his sonnet to reconcile these disparate traditions via a new direction for vernacular love poetry based on Neoplatonic harmony.

Lorenzo also refers to the topos of the interior image and its relation to Ficinian contemplative ascent in "Come ti lascio, o come meco sei." Indeed, it is another of Lorenzo's sonnets included in the *Raccolta Aragonese* that demonstrates a Neoplatonic framework. Highlighting solely the Neoplatonic elements, though, overlooks the combination of Petrarchan and stilnovist elements of the poem.

Come ti lascio, o come meco sei,
o viso, onde ogni nostra sorte move?
Come qui moro, o come vivo altrove?
Amor, dimmelo tu, ch'io nol saprei.

Chi mi sforza al partir, s'io nol vorrei?
 S'io fuggo un Sol, come lo fuggo o dove?
 Lasso!, qual ombra fa che non ti trove,
 se non è notte mai alli occhi miei?

Questo è ben ver: che se la forma vera
 veggio, mi par bellissima e superba,
 leggiadra oltra misura e disdegnosa;

s'io son lontan, novella Primavera
 riveste i prati di fioretti e d'erba:
 così bella la veggio e sì pietosa.

Lorenzo compares the ever-present memory of his lady to the omnipresence of God who is always present in man's soul. He illustrates this connection through the sun that represents Lucrezia, his beloved lady, and by invoking a common synonym for God. Relying on the fifth book of Ficino's *El libro dell'Amore*, Lorenzo uses the notion of the sun (and light) to distinguish between the physical beauties that he can observe with his senses and the imperceptible light of God. Lorenzo also demonstrates this sonnet's Neoplatonic basis by highlighting the distance between the physical world and the realm of ideas: Primavera's work of dressing the fields with flowers and grass represents the perceptible beauty described as *bella* in verse 14; that perceptible beauty incites a contemplation of "true" beauty described as *bellissima* in verse 10. Lorenzo sees "true" beauty, that he describes as *forma vera*, from a distance – "s'io son lontan," (12). This distance must be bridged through contemplation.

Within this Neoplatonic framework, Lorenzo included more Petrarchan than stilnovistic characteristics. Lorenzo begins this sonnet with a Petrarchan oxymoron of presence and absence in the opening verse and another of life and death in verse three. His use of oxymora continues when he describes the *forma vera* of the sun (his lady/God) as *bellissima e superba* in verse ten and *leggiadra* and *disdegnosa* immediately after in verse eleven. In addition to this stylistic trait,

Lorenzo recalls the lasting memory of Laura that persists in her absence as found throughout Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, and particularly in "Chiare, fresche et dolci acque." Lorenzo, though, evokes such a lingering memory in relation to God and Ficino's notion of God's inescapable eye as explained in *Theologia Platonica* XIV. Thus Lorenzo cannot flee God (sun, verse 6), who even though invisible (shadow, verse 7), continues to illuminate his soul (never night, verse 8). Thus Lorenzo draws upon Petrarch's use of memory, but casts it in terms of a metaphysical connection with divinity.

Lorenzo also places a topos from the stilnovist tradition within his Neoplatonic framework. The first tercet describes what he sees when he has ascended to that supersensory perception of *la forma vera* of his lady that provided a glimpse of the supreme beauty – *bellissima* – of God. The concluding tercet, though, references Lorenzo's experience of what triggers that contemplation; it refers to a physically perceptible encounter with beauty. Revealingly, he indicates the distance of the experience – "s'io son lontan" – from the "true" or "ideal" form. This statement, "s'io son lontan," refers to the very same notion of the interior image discussed in my analysis of "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti." This particular usage cites Cino da Pistoia's sonnet "Lo intelletto d'amor ch'io solo porto," in which Cino describes the image of his lady that Love has painted in his mind:

Lo intelletto d'amore ch'io solo porto,
m'ha sì dipinta ben propriamente
quella donna gentil dentro a la mente,
ch'i' 'la veggio lontano e mi conforto. (1-4)

Cino views his lady from a distance – the distance between an interior image of his lady and her "true" self. Lorenzo explicitly evokes this type of relationship in "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti" and situates it within a scenario of contemplative ascent to divine beauty.

In "Come ti lascio, o come meco sei," Lorenzo treats similar themes to those found in "Se con dolce armonia due strumenti:" the interior image of his lady / of God and contemplative ascent to supreme beauty. He also recasts Petrarchan and stilnovist elements to function within his Neoplatonic context. We find yet another example of this approach in "Che è quel ch'io veggo dentro agli occhi belli."

This sonnet begins with a favorite Laurentian image: the eyes of his beloved. The splendor of her eyes has blinded Lorenzo's own sight. In light of this scenario, he asks why Love does not help him by causing his lady to favor him. His lady, however, has power over Love and turns away his arrows. Lorenzo worries that he can no longer rely upon Love, his only source for solace.

Ch'è quel ch'io veggo dentro agli occhi belli
della mia donna? Lasso!, egli è Amor forse?
Pur l'accecata vista ve lo scorse,
benché la vinca lo splendor di quelli.

"Amor, perché per me non li favelli?"
Rispose lui, che dello error s'accorse:
"Perché l'arco e li stral di man m'estorse,
e mi legò co' suoi biondi capelli.

Questa con voluntaria violenza
fatto ha che in me le mie saette ho vòlto;
per lei ho in odio la mia antica stella.

Due ne ho per una, e molto più bella
ciascuna d'esse;" e io triemo, ché tolto
e secco è il fonte d'ogni sua clemenzia.

Lorenzo commences with a stilnovist concept in the opening two verses: *Amore* resides within his beloved's eyes before entering the heart of the lover. The other two verses of the initial quatrain recall a scenario frequently employed by Dante – the splendor of his lady's eyes have blinded Lorenzo. The splendor of divine beings blinded Dante, the pilgrim, in *Paradiso*. It

also recalls an element of "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore" that we have already discussed in conjunction with the notion of the interior image; the image of Love painted on the lady's face shines so brightly that one cannot look upon it: "Voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso, / Là 've non pote alcun mirarla fiso" (55-56).¹⁴⁸

In the second quatrain, Lorenzo's dialogue with *Amore* demonstrates a common stilnovistic form. Within this dialogue, *Amore* reveals that he no longer has power over Lorenzo's lady – yet another stilnovistic theme. Indeed, she has won over Love by sequestering his bow and arrows and by binding him with her hair. The manner in which Lorenzo describes Love as bound by his lady's blond locks recalls Cino da Pistoia's sonnet "Omè! ch'io sono all'amoroso nodo" in which Cino himself is tied by "due belle trecce bionde" (2). It also recalls Petrarch's "L'aura celeste che 'n quel verde lauro" in which Laura's hair bound his soul: "dico le chiome bionde, e 'l crespo laccio, / che sí soavemente lega et stringe / l'alma" (9-11).

The *volta* of the sonnet bears a philosophical turn regarding liberty and love. *Amore* claims that Lorenzo's lady turns away his arrows with *volontaria violenza*. This statement is a continuation of the act in the second quatrain in which she has bound Love with her tresses. This capacity and liberty to refute Love completely overturns the Petrarchan notion wherein all are deprived of liberty in the face of Love. With this turn, Lorenzo has placed the preceding Petrarchan and Dantean/stilnovist elements within a sonnet of Ficinian underpinnings. This notion of liberty with Love stems from Ficino's *Dialogus inter Deum et Animam theologicus* in which he explains that love for *il Bene* and *il Bello* is the sole act that can be completed in

¹⁴⁸ Lorenzo visits often this concept of blinding splendor as a Neoplatonic metaphor of "true" beauty that cannot be seen with mortal eyes. In his commentary to "Quel che il proprio valore e forza eccede," sonnet VIII of his *Comento de' miei sonetti*, he compares staring at the sun and losing the ability to see as an example of the baseness of our human nature. Lorenzo also addresses this Ficinian blinding splendor in his philosophical poem *De Summo Bono* (IV.7-15) in which he notes that the intensity of the light of "truth" overcomes our mortal eyes.

absolute liberty.¹⁴⁹ In this case, Lorenzo's lady exercises her liberty in order to refute Love. His lady's voluntary violence against Love denies Lorenzo of his lone source of solace – "ché tolto / e secco è il fonte d'ogni mia clemenzia" (13-14).

This sonnet also contains a Platonic distinction between vulgar and celestial Venuses, which mirrors the division between matters earthly and divine. Because of Lorenzo's lady, *Amore* now holds his *antica stella* in contempt. Venus is the ancient star; but more precisely it is *Venere volgare* that represents love for objects that can be experienced by the senses. *Amore* states that he has exchanged two stars for one (verses 12-13), meaning that he now reverences the two eyes of Lorenzo's lady that possess a purity above (*più bella*, verse 12) that which is perceived by our senses. Lorenzo has cast a familiar analogy between his lady and God, wherein her eyes represent the celestial splendor of divine love.

These sonnets are more than mere youthful compositions in the style of Petrarch or a return to stilnovistic conventions. Lorenzo's combination of these disparate traditions within a Neoplatonic context renders his sonnets more significant than artless derivation of former greats. With the *Raccolta Aragonese* Lorenzo established his poetic authority and assumed the cultural prestige of the Florentine poets included in the collection. In the epistle he rhetorically presented himself as an heir to and continuation of those Florentine greats while simultaneously insisting on a critical distance from them. His included poems demonstrate a similar maneuver since he claimed Petrarchan and Dantean conceits, especially the image of the lady on the poet's heart, as his own by placing them in a new context of Ficinian speculation.

Because he gathered this collection and exported it beyond Tuscany's borders, we must consider the political implications of a project in which Lorenzo sought to equate himself with

¹⁴⁹ *Opera omnia*, 611.

Florence's cultural prestige, a significant source of Lorenzo's and Florence's legitimacy in foreign relations. In retrospect, the timing of Lorenzo's gift to Federico d'Aragona takes on even more significance than perhaps any of Lorenzo's attempts to solidify relationships with his political contemporaries. In the second half of the 1470s the Italian political landscape was changing rapidly. Pressures and provocations from Pope Sixtus IV had eroded the once-firm triple alliance that Cosimo had established with Milan and Naples. The Pope's aggressiveness matched the ambition of the power-seeking Pazzi family of Florence and their machinations resulted in an assassination attempt that claimed Lorenzo's brother Giuliano on April 26, 1478 and precipitated a war.¹⁵⁰ The eldest son, Alfonso, Duke of Calabria, of Naples's King Ferrante led forces that battered the Tuscan countryside while Lorenzo struggled to rally consistent support from Milan and Florence's old ally Venice. In December of 1479 Lorenzo departed for Naples to beseech King Ferrante for peace.

Lorenzo arrived at the port in Naples to a much warmer reception than one might expect for an opponent with no leverage with which to negotiate. One reason for his convivial welcome from the Neapolitan court was the relationship that Lorenzo had cultivated with Ferrante's younger son Federico. Years later Federico expressed high esteem for Lorenzo and demonstrated great pride in the collection of Tuscan poetry that Lorenzo had gifted to him.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Popular interest in the Pazzi Conspiracy increased in 2004 when historian Marcello Simonetta decoded an encrypted letter that implicated Federico da Montefeltro, Count of Urbino, among the main conspirators against Lorenzo and Giuliano. Lauro Martines's *April Blood: Florence and the Plot Against The Medici* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003) provides a comprehensive reconstruction of the events leading to the thwarted coup. Miles Unger's recent popular history *Magnifico: The Brilliant Life and Violent Times of Lorenzo de' Medici* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008) dedicates three chapters to the conspiracy and includes the assumed role of the Count of Urbino.

¹⁵¹ Niccolò Valori (1464-1530) penned the oldest known biography of Lorenzo de' Medici – *Vita di Lorenzo* (1492-1494, 1517-1521) – soon after Lorenzo's death. He wrote another version sometime between 1517 and 1521 and gifted that version to Pope Leo X (Lorenzo's son, Giovanni de' Medici). In this oldest of biographies, Valori indicates that Federico d'Aragona personally received Lorenzo at the port of Naples. *Vita di Lorenzo de' Medici* (Vicenza: Accademia olimpica, 1991) 118. Questions linger about whether Federico was truly present because no

In an era in which the alliance with Naples faltered, Lorenzo had sent this quintessentially Florentine gift to Federico. Lorenzo had relied on his native city's cultural prestige as a form of political currency. By equating himself with his city's prominence through the *Raccolta Aragonese*, Lorenzo had established his legitimacy as a poet and as a politician. The gift of this collection served to strengthen his personal ties with Federico and therefore functioned as a cultural-political tool to augment his status in the eyes of the members of the Neapolitan court.

After King Ferrante signed a peace treaty, Lorenzo returned to Florence as a hero to his people and as a bona fide statesman to the rest of Europe. Lorenzo, the banker with no title of nobility, utilized his poetry and Florence's cultural cachet to impress his contemporaries abroad, but in Florence he utilized his poetry in *Comento de' miei sonetti* instead as a way to liken himself to his fellow citizens without appearing to elevate himself above them.

other sources appear to confirm the report. *Ferguson*, "The Date of the Raccolta Aragonese," 45. Felix Gilbert represents historians who question the reliability of Valori's historiography in general because they deem Valori's work to be political flattery. "Guicciardini, Machavelli, Valori on Lorenzo Magnifico," *Renaissance News* 11.2 (1958) 107-14. More recently Mark Jurdjevic has suggested that Valori's praise was genuine and that the overall purpose of the text was not to flatter the Medici but to attempt to sustain Platonic (Ficinian) studies as a worthy pursuit of the Florentine ruling elite. Mark Jurdjevic, "Marsilio Ficino and the Valori Family," *Guardians of Republicanism: The Valori Family in the Florentine Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Regardless of the reliability of the claim that Federico personally welcomed Lorenzo to Naples, Ferrante's court would have been well disposed to Lorenzo's arrival because of the relationship that he had fostered with the king's son.

Chapter 4 – Dante, Petrarch, Ficino, and Lorenzo: Negotiating Florentinity and Empathy in Lorenzo de' Medici's *Comento de' miei sonetti*

"A Firenze li uomini amano naturalmente la equalità e però si accordano mal volentieri a avere e ricognoscere altri per superiore."¹⁵²

Lorenzo's *Comento de' miei sonetti* consists of forty-one self-ordered sonnets; a prose commentary on poetic, philosophical, and thematic content follows each poem. Whereas through the *Raccolta Aragonese* project Lorenzo projected an image of himself as the embodiment of Florentine cultural traditions in order to elevate his status in royal courts beyond Tuscany, in the sonnets and commentary in *Comento de' miei sonetti* Lorenzo appropriates the poetry of Florence's greatest poets and recasts it in Ficinian love sonnets in order to establish his *fiorentinità*, to find common ground with his fellow citizens, and even to elicit their sympathy for his woes. Evidence of these purposes emerges from within the text, but the context of Florentine domestic politics in the 1480s elucidates the political purposes of Lorenzo's collection.

For much of the fifteenth century, the Medici sought a balance between their own ambitions and the interests of their fellow citizens. By dint of their multinational banking success they positioned themselves for social ascension and the associated political power; however, the people's fierce allegiance to republican ideals dictated a measured effort from anyone vying for control of the state. Lorenzo, in particular, needed to appear to be a dignified leader, worthy of admiration, but without arousing jealousy among his peers. In order to improve his reputation by association, Lorenzo had kept dignified company since his birth. At

¹⁵² Bernardo del Nero, a Medici sympathizer who strove to facilitate the family's return to Florence in 1497, makes this comment on Florentine equality as an interlocutor in Francesco Guicciardini's fictional dialogue on Florentine government. Guicciardini, *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, ed. Roberto Palmarocchi (Bari: Laterza, 1932) 21. This statement captures the democratic spirit of Florence's bourgeois class that necessitated a balance in Lorenzo's image making between credible ruler to foreign dignitaries and private citizen in a republic.

his baptism Lorenzo earned prestige by association because the archbishop of Florence presided at the ceremony and the *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*, each member of the *Signoria*, and even Federico da Montefeltro, lord of Urbino, were in attendance. Throughout his life, Lorenzo's association with foreign dignitaries signaled his social and political rank abroad and also at home. In 1482, an unnamed ambassador from Ferrara noted how Lorenzo's reputation outside of Florence raised his profile within the city: "la riputazione del prefato Mag.co Lorenzo è la stima che ne facciamo li potentati d'Italia e Signori fuorvia; che non la avendo, non saria de la estimazione ne la terra che è."¹⁵³ As evidenced by Lorenzo's own marriage, though, connections with foreign dignitaries also had the potential to undermine his reputation.

The Medici risked offending Florentine families by finding a wife for Lorenzo in Rome instead of in Florence. The Orsini were an influential Roman family that had two popes in their family line: Celestine III (1191-1198) and Nicholas III (1277-1280). Marriage to Clarice Orsini represented a political opportunity for the Medici family to outclass their Florentine rivals; the Orsini's sway within the Vatican would also secure the most profitable branch of the Medici bank.¹⁵⁴ And, indeed, this new kinship benefitted the Orsini by establishing easier access to the

¹⁵³ This quotation regarding a reliance upon foreign reputation for esteem in Florence appears in *Lettere di Lorenzo de' Medici detto il Magnifico conservate nell'Archivio Palatino di Modena con notizie tratte dai carteggi diplomatici degli oratori Estensi a Firenze*, ed. Antonio Cappelli, Vol. 1 (Modena, 1863) 265. Miles Unger suggests that relationships with royalty catalyzed "social climbing" for the merchant class family of bankers, but a risk of provoking jealousy among other Florentines always accompanied any prestige the Medici gained in this manner. Unger, *Magnifico: The Brilliant Life and Violent Times of Lorenzo de' Medici* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008) 8, 23.

¹⁵⁴ In a letter to Lorenzo's father, Piero, on March 28, 1467, Lorenzo's mother, Lucrezia Tornabuoni, submitted a matter-of-fact assessment of Clarice Orsini's physical traits and personality that exhibits a transactional quality of their search for a mother to continue the family line. Though she deemed the teenaged maiden a suitable match, I find most curious an intimation of pride in Lucrezia's description: "[Clarice], come dico, è di ricipiente grandezza, e bianca, et à si dolce maniera, non però si dolce *come le nostre*: ma è di gran modesta, e da ridulla presto a nostri costumi" (emphasis mine). Later in the same letter Lucrezia compares Clarice to her own daughters, so *le nostre* in this judgment must refer to the superior gracefulness of Florentine women generally. Lucrezia's unflattering description of Lorenzo's bride-to-be, especially in comparison to Florentine women, underscores the unabashedly political significance of joining forces with the powerful Orsini family. *Tre lettere di Lucrezia Tornabuoni a Piero de' Medici ed altre lettere di vari concernenti al matrimonio di Lorenzo il Magnifico con Clarice Orsini*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1859) 9-10.

Medici's wealth. The wedding festivities in Florence in June of 1469 consisted of five banquets at the Medici palace, but it was a relatively understated celebration. The flow of hundreds of citizens in and around the palace indicated deference to local tradition that called for an event with less ostentation than the exclusive and pompous fêtes in royal courts in the rest of Italy and Europe. The family needed to project an air of modesty to balance the dynastic ambition so apparent in the wedding arrangement between Lorenzo and Clarice.

Lorenzo's unwavering service to the state – or at minimum an appearance of such steadfastness – also served to balance any signs of superiority as he wielded his political influence in Florence. After conspirators infamously murdered Giuliano on 26 April 1478 but failed to assassinate Lorenzo, Florence plunged into a war with the allied forces of Pope Sixtus IV. In this calamitous environment, Lorenzo leveraged the people's vindictive patriotism to tighten his grip on affairs of the state by leading a newly created governmental body, the *Dieci della guerra*. As the leader of this crisis-response committee, Lorenzo exercised unparalleled power to raise revenue to organize Florence's military defense.

Lorenzo's attempts to assemble mercenary and allied forces proved haplessly insufficient to quell the batterings in the Tuscan countryside at the hands of the Neapolitan and papal armies. As public pressure mounted due to a scarcity of food in the city and as personal financial ruin loomed because Pope Sixtus IV had seized funds in the Vatican branch of the Medici bank, Lorenzo and Florence desperately needed a conclusion to the war. Lorenzo also knew that Pope Sixtus's determination to control Tuscany and to defeat Lorenzo would not be subdued, so he sought peace with the pope's strongest military ally, King Ferrante in Naples.

On December 7, 1479 Lorenzo departed from Pisa on a boat that had been sent from Naples. In his missive to Florentine members of government upon his departure, Lorenzo

acknowledged that he was the focus of the city's opposing forces and he underscored his willingness to put himself in the hands of the opposition if it would generate a chance for peace:

Parendomi in effetto che codesta città habbi desiderio et bisogno grandissimo di pace, vedendo tutti l'altri partiti scarsi, m'è paruto meglio mettere in qualche pericolo me, che tenervi più la città; et però ho deliberato [...] transferirmi liberamente a Napoli, perché essendo io quello che principalmente sono perseguitato dalli nimici nostri, potrei forse ancora essere cagione, andandomene nelle mani loro, di fare rendere pace alla nostra città. [...] Se la dispositione [del re di Napoli] è buona, non c'è miglior via a fare experientia che l'andar io liberamente nelle mani sue, et voglio ardir di dire questo esser unico rimedio a trovar pace et honestar più le conditione in essa si può. [...] Et io sono molto contento di esser quello per due cagione: la prima perché [sono] quello che principalmente sono perseguitato dalli nimici nostri, [...] l'altra si è perché, havendo io nella nostra città havuto più honore et conditione non solamente che non si conviene a me, ma forse più che niuno altro cittadino a' di nostri, giudico essere più obbligato anchora che tutti li altri ad fare per la patria nostra insino a mettervi la vita. Et con questa buona dispositione vo. [...] Questa guerra cominciò dal sangue di mio fratello et mio, così anchora finisca per le mie mani. Et desidero summamente che la vita et la morte e'l male e'l bene mio sia sempre con beneficio della nostra città. [...] Et priegho Iddio che mi dia gratia di fare quello ch'è obligato ciascuno cittadino per la patria sua.¹⁵⁵

By self-identifying as the chief target of the opposition, recognizing his indebtedness to the state, and highlighting his readiness to do what is best for the state, Lorenzo had rhetorically exploited what appeared to be his glaring political vulnerability. By singling himself out as a sacrificial offering for the good of the state he also positioned himself to receive all of the credit if he could successfully restore peace to Florence.¹⁵⁶ Lorenzo cast himself as a potential savior, but he tempered the exalted role by emphasizing that his service was for the common good of the

¹⁵⁵ A copy of Lorenzo's letter to the *Signoria* on December 7, 1479 is found in Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lettere*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein Vol. 4 (Firenze: Giunti, 1977) 265-69.

¹⁵⁶ Though certainly a risky mission, Lorenzo's trip was not as much of a perilous initiative as he describes it in this letter to the *Signoria*. Lorenzo had secretly sent Filippo Strozzi to Naples a month prior to arrange a meeting with King Ferrante to discuss a peaceful resolution to the war. Strozzi had a proven relationship with King Ferrante that he had built over many years in Naples before he was restored to Florence from exile in 1466.

state.¹⁵⁷ He pursued solidarity with his fellow citizens by noting that he only sought to perform the duty of every man to his homeland – *fare quello ch'è obligato ciascuno cittadino per la patria sua*.

Lorenzo left to meet his opponent with no discernible leverage and returned to Florence having reached a peace agreement with King Ferrante. The perception throughout Europe of Lorenzo's political acumen increased exponentially; he built his reputation as a statesman on this settlement. In Florence, he was hailed as a veritable hero for having effectively ended the war. Lorenzo capitalized on this goodwill to seize even more control of state affairs by organizing a new executive governing body, *il Consiglio dei settanta*, that effectively rendered powerless the *Signoria* of elected priors. Within that body were two committees that ran the practical domestic affairs, *Dodici procuratori*, and foreign affairs, *Otto di pratica*, of the government. Without question, Lorenzo was appointed to the *Otto di pratica*; he had succeeded in concentrating more power into loyal hands.

With this new council Lorenzo succeeded in surrounding himself with an executive committee of reliable sympathizers but he ran the risk of alienating his peers among the Florentine ruling class. Despite an increased amount of control on governmental affairs, Lorenzo was not a monarch – he still depended on public support.¹⁵⁸ More important than

¹⁵⁷ In "Amor and Patria: Citing Petrarch in Florence and Naples," William Kennedy proposes that in the *Comento* Lorenzo combines Petrarchan conceptions of love and patriotism with an emphasis on vernacular language to catalyze the potential for a linguistic expansion of a Florentine cultural empire similar to the promulgation of Roman cultural influence via Latin. More importantly for this study, Kennedy notes that Lorenzo draws upon Petrarch to enhance his patriotic image. By demonstrating how much he has sacrificed for Florence, Lorenzo has projected an image of himself as a Petrarchan lover of the state. "Amor and Patria: Citing Petrarch in Florence and Naples," *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003) 57-66. I address this portrayal in the *Comento* of Lorenzo as Petrarchan lover of the state later in this chapter, but I note it here because this brief letter to the *Signoria* provides a potent example of Lorenzo casting himself in a sacrificial role for the sake of Florence in order to elicit sympathy, and eventually political backing, from the Florentine ruling class.

¹⁵⁸ Lorenzo could not blindly pursue his own best interests and completely disregard the will of the people. Unger insists that the disputed sale of Imola to Pope Sixtus IV provides a clear example of this reality. Unger, *Magnifico*,

placating the *volgo*, Lorenzo needed to assert his *fiorentinità* and his service to the state in order to demonstrate that he did not seek to vaunt himself above his fellow citizens.¹⁵⁹ One avenue through which Lorenzo attempted to project this image was his poetry and self-commentary in *Comento de' miei sonetti*.¹⁶⁰

The composition of *Comento de' miei sonetti* likely spanned two decades: some poems were begun as early as the late 1460s or early 1470s, including five sonnets (I-IV, VII) that Lorenzo also placed in his *Raccolta Aragonese* in 1476. Some of the prose commentary dates at least to after the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478 and into the 1480s. Dating the composition of this work, though, has proven to be difficult, with no consensus among philologists on a single

244-51. It was in Lorenzo's best interest to fund the Pope's acquisition of Imola considering the importance of the Papal account for the Medici bank. However, Lorenzo could not risk provoking the people's indignation by funding a suspicious buyer for the purchase of a land on Florence's border. See Chapter One for more information on the sale of Imola and its role in the progression of events that triggered the Pazzi conspiracy.

¹⁵⁹ Lorenzo sought to please the masses with a nearly literal enactment of "bread and circuses" governance. Gene Brucker notes that Lorenzo had partially subsidized the cost of bread in the 1470s and through the Pazzi war but that prices steadily grew after 1480. "The Economic Foundations of Laurentian Florence," *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo mondo*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini (Firenze: Olschki, 1994) 14-15. Alison Brown notes the difficulty of assessing public opinion regarding Lorenzo because of a lack of written accounts from the mostly illiterate masses. She does, however, cite posters on street corners that bemoaned heavy taxation during the Pazzi war. "Lorenzo and Public Opinion in Florence: The Problem of Opposition," *Medicean and Savonarolan Florence: The Interplay of Politics, Humanism, and Religion* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepolis, 2011) 102-03. Prior to 1480, members of the *Signoria* aired criticism freely and dissenting votes were tracked in the records of governmental proceedings. In Brown's chapter she accounts for the difficulty in tracking dissenting opinions among elected officials after 1480 because the Council of Seventy was comprised solely of Lorenzo's supporters. She points to Guicciardini's description of the obfuscating style of Laurentian policy making: "spesso tra 'l palazzo e la piazza è una nebbia sì folta o uno muro sì grosso che [...] tanto sa el popolo di quello che fa chi governa [...] quanto delle cose che fanno in India." Guicciardini, *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, ed. and trans. Alison Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 174. For my purposes, I am more concerned with how Lorenzo sought to project an image of not wishing to vaunt himself above his peers in the *Comento* than with how well he succeeded in the endeavor. Furthermore, I have chosen not to address Lorenzo's *canti carnascialeschi* and their role in the many festivities he convened and their potential for diverting the masses' attention away from the political process. In my study of political uses of his poetry, I instead focus on his relationship with the governing class.

¹⁶⁰ Unless otherwise noted, quotations come from Orvieto's anthology of Lorenzo's works. *Comento de' miei sonetti, Tutte le opere*, ed. Paolo Orvieto, vol. 1 (Roma: Salerno, 1992).

authoritative text. The majority of the critical attention on the *Comento* in the twentieth century consisted of attempts at dating different versions of the text.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Aldo Manuzio first printed Lorenzo's collected sonnets and commentary in 1554 in *Poesie volgari nuovamente stampate di Lorenzo de' Medici*. Today there are eight surviving manuscripts – seven in Italy and one in Seville. Tiziano Zanato codes the manuscripts as such: C, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chigiano M.VII.142 (già 1124); V, V1, V2, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticano lat. 3218; VA, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticano lat. 3219; L, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, XLI.25; LA, Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, cod. Acquisti e Doni 264; P, Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Palatino 816; R, Firenze, Biblioteca Ricciardiana, 2726; SV, Siviglia, Biblioteca Colombina di Siviglia, 7.1.33 (già AA.141.44). See Zanato, "Sul testo del 'Comento' Laurenziano," *Studi di Filologia Italiana* 38 (1980) 71-152 and "Un nuovo codice del 'Comento' Laurenziano," *Studi di Filologia Italiana* 39 (1981) 29-55. Bigi and Rochon propose a relatively continuous and brief drafting of Lorenzo's *Comento*, beginning either in 1476-77 or 1482-82 through 1484. Emilio Bigi, *Scritti Scelti*, 295; Andre Rochon, 140. Martelli appears to have supplanted that view with a more "adventurous" series of editions, rethinkings, and revisions: at least three drafts that occurred in the summer of 1473, another in 1485-1486, and a third (unfinished) version in 1490-1491 that was interrupted by Lorenzo's death. Mario Martelli, "Aventurosa storia del Comento," *Studi Laurenziani* (Firenze: Olschki, 1965) 51-133. Martelli also proposed a potential original version of the text for which full evidence remains inconclusive. "L'autografo laurenziano del 'Comento dei Sonetti,'" *La Bibliofilia* 68 (1966) 233-71. There are two dependable reference points that aid us in dating this collection. The first is Martelli's argument that lines 752-62 of Poliziano's *Nutricia* refer to particular sonnets of a 1486 version of Lorenzo's *Comento*, though Tiziano Zanato contests the strictness of Martelli's application of Poliziano's imagery to a version of Lorenzo's *Comento* in 1486. Tiziano Zanato, *Saggio sul Comento di Lorenzo de' Medici* (Firenze: Olschki, 1979) 285-321. The second reference point is Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's letter to Lorenzo in 1484 that praises Lorenzo for his poems and commentary and urges him to complete the project. Paolo Orvieto believes that a more orthodox Christian lens (with a Savonarolan influence) may have spurred late revisions perhaps until shortly before Lorenzo's death; he hypothesizes that there may have been an earlier version of the *Comento* that was even more emphatically Platonic (in a Ficinian vein). Orvieto, "Nota introduttiva," *Comento de' miei sonetti in Lorenzo de' Medici Tutte le opere* Vol. 1. (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1992) 325-52. For the purposes of this study, I assume that the *Comento* version of 1484 had a similar structural, philosophical, and literary consistency that it has in the version that we read today. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, critical inquiry of Lorenzo's *Comento* pivoted away from the issues of dating the text. Marianne Shapiro and Giancarlo Mazzacurati addressed how Lorenzo advanced Florence's cultural hegemony by promoting the vernacular but failed to truly recover the tradition of *Trecento* poets (considering the explosion of Petrarchism in the sixteenth century). Marianne Shapiro, "Poetry and Politics in the *Comento* of Lorenzo de' Medici," *Renaissance Quarterly* 26.4 (1973) 444-53. Giancarlo Mazzacurati, "Storia e Funzione della Poesia Lirica nel *Comento* di Lorenzo de' Medici," *MLN* 104.1 (1989) 48-67. Sherry Roush, in her survey of self-commentary in Italian medieval and Renaissance poetry, concurred that Lorenzo's attempt to recover *Trecento* poetry was overshadowed by Petrarchism. She focused, however, on the *Comento* as a poetic vehicle for self-understanding in which Lorenzo defended self-commentary by claiming its usefulness for himself (altering Dante's justification for self-commentary when useful for others). Sherry Roush, "'Know Thyself': Self-knowledge and New Life in Lorenzo de' Medici's *Commentary on My Sonnets*," *Hermes' Lyre: Italian Poetic Self-Commentary from Dante to Tommaso Campanella* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 71-95. James Cook opened the *Comento* to a wider audience with his translation of the text. He provided a distinct reading among recent scholars by insisting on its autobiographical nature. He suggested that the text focuses on how intellectual, moral, and emotional experiences had formed Lorenzo, the private man. Cook also considered the *Comento* as part of a discourse among Lorenzo's friends. James Cook, *The Autobiography of Lorenzo de' Medici The Magnificent: A Commentary on My Sonnets*, Introduction (Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995) 1-23. Cook does suggest that perhaps some of the *Comento* was intended for public purposes (whereas Roush avoided questions of cultural politics). I think Cook understates the political role of the collection. Lorenzo's projected image of himself in accord with his fellow citizens shapes my reading of the collection in this study.

Lorenzo never completed the work and may not have yet set the poems of the second half of his collection in the order he had envisioned. The order of the first section, however, represents Lorenzo's novel contribution with regards to form by inverting the natural order of life and death. In the first four sonnets comprising the original *Argomento*, Lorenzo mourns the death of Simonetta Cattaneo, wife of Marco di Piero Vespucci, who died in April 1476 at only twenty-three years old. She was a well-known figure in Florence for her beauty and grace, qualities that Angelo Poliziano also celebrated in his *Stanze per la giostra* (1475-1476). In the second section of the text, the *Nuovo argomento*, takes inspiration from a relationship with another lady. Though unnamed in the text, there is no disagreement among scholars that this inspiring lady was none other than Lorenzo's mistress Lucrezia Donati. The narrative of this second section revolves around his lady's absence and Lorenzo's desire to unite with her, but it lacks a lucid teleology. Lorenzo shifts between numerous themes – his lady's eyes, heart, and hands, her effect on his psychological state, her implied reciprocation of love, and her absence – without conclusion.

As an incomplete collection of poems with a meandering diegesis and a debated draft history, the *Comento* proves difficult to categorize and to interpret; yet it does demonstrate Lorenzo's attempts to reach common ground with the citizens of Florence. In the remainder of this chapter I analyze the proem of the *Comento* for Lorenzo's defensive stances: Lorenzo's advocacy for the dignity of vernacular language and his self-justification for composing and commenting on his own poetry demonstrates his keen desire to promote Florentine culture and not to appear superior to his peers. I then interpret the Dantean, Petrarchan, and Ficinian elements of various sonnets and their commentary as indicators of Lorenzo's *fiorentinità*. And in

expressing his thorough Florentine identity and service to the state I also analyze how Lorenzo seeks a shared experience with Florentine citizens.

Lorenzo's defense of the dignity of the vernacular tongue in the *Comento's* proem aligns closely with his promotion of Tuscan vernacular in the epistle that accompanies his *Raccolta Aragonese*. His defense of the vernacular in the *Comento's* proem suggests that some critics will consider it reprehensible to write in the vernacular tongue; he counters this potential objection with four elements that shape the *dignità* of a language that he believes are exemplified in the Italian vernacular.

The first two elements that qualify the praiseworthiness of a language are: "l'essere copiosa e abundante e atta ad esprimere bene il senso e il concetto della mente" and "la dolcezza e armonia." For these requirements of a dignified language, Lorenzo highlights the necessity of expressing man's thoughts in a beautiful way. For these aspects, he has relied upon Dante's authority. As established in his *Convivio* (1304-1307), Dante praised the virtue of the *volgare* for its suitability in expressing new and lofty concepts (I.X.12) and for its harmony and beauty (I.V.13-14). However, Dante believed Latin to be more harmonic than the vernacular whereas Lorenzo touts the merits of the vernacular without a comparison to the ancient idiom.

The third element of a dignified language is "quando in una lingua sono scritte cose sottili e gravi e necessarie alla vita umana." For this characteristic, Lorenzo again turns to Dante's authority and other Florentine greats: Dante, Cavalcanti, Petrarch, and Boccaccio had all written serious and necessary works. Lorenzo builds on the foundational vernacular works of these poets and highlights the abundance and harmony of the Italian vernacular to validate it as a worthy language. Again, it is compelling to note that Lorenzo touts the capacities and qualifications of the vernacular without a point-by-point comparison to Latin; promoting the

Tuscan vernacular without such a comparison demonstrates Lorenzo's belief and pride in the unlimited capacities of his maternal tongue.¹⁶²

The final element that brings dignity to a language, as Lorenzo posited in the proem to his *Comento*, indicates that his vaunted views of his mother tongue do not arise solely out of literary purposes. He states: "quando el successo delle cose del mondo è tale, che facci universale e quasi comune a tutto il mondo quello che è naturalmente proprio d'una città o d'una provincia sola." Lorenzo's judicious tone belies the intent of his *Raccolta Aragonese* and *Comento* projects; Florence's cultural acclaim did not naturally become common to the entire world, nor did it occur by happenstance. His resolute eagerness to establish the linguistic merit of the Tuscan vernacular underlies a desire to laud, to spread, and to capitalize on Florence's rich literary history to establish his own artistic authority and to increase his realm of cultural-political influence even beyond Tuscany's borders.¹⁶³ Lorenzo's drive to include his famous Florentine poetic models within his *Comento* – as well as their incorporation within the *Raccolta Aragonese* that he sent to the Neapolitan court – are a cultural-political act to recollect the prestige of Florence's great poets, around which the city's cultural patrimony had been erected and to establish himself as a curator, administrator, arbiter, patron, and creator of Florentine culture.

¹⁶² See note 120 on Lorenzo's liberating himself from the restrictions of always comparing the virtues of vernacular languages to those of Latin.

¹⁶³ Shapiro claims that the suggestion of capriciousness in language development represents a modern aspect of Lorenzo's proem. She notes, however, that Lorenzo's apparent affirmation of the importance of fortune in establishing the dignity of a language lends a speculative character to his argument that contradicts his cultural-political purposes of concentrating on the vernacular and its illustrious past. Shapiro, "Poetry and Politics," 444-53. The relentlessness with which Lorenzo actively promoted Florence's cultural preeminence renders little indication that Lorenzo actually left to fortune the power to determine when that which belongs to one city becomes common to all.

Autobiographical readings of the *Comento* vary in their focus, from revealing Lorenzo's thoughts to manipulating his public image.¹⁶⁴ With respect to his public image, Lorenzo does, in fact, begin his prologue by stating a concern for how he will be viewed: "Assai sono stato dubbioso e sospeso se io dovevo fare la presente interpretazione e comento de' miei sonetti."¹⁶⁵ While it was perhaps a topos of modesty, Lorenzo nonetheless recognizes that he risks presuming the value of his works, of thinking too much of himself, and of suggesting that others could not understand his sonnets on their own. He follows that he merely wishes to free his readers from the task of interpretation, and if they laugh at his attempts, at least they will have taken a little delight in the exercise. The fact that he considers such perceptions indicates his carefulness and concern for not vaunting himself that parallels his concerns over the legitimacy of his poetry.

In the proem to his *Comento*, Lorenzo invites compassion from his readers by citing his well-known personal and political misfortunes. As promised in the proem, this current returns in the commentary to his poems as well. In the commentary to sonnet X, "Se tra li altri sospir che escon di fore," Lorenzo relates the serious persecutions he had endured through the Pazzi conspiracy that sought his life and took the life of his brother, Giuliano, as well as his subsequent excommunication by co-conspirator Pope Sixtus IV. Regarding the sharing of his personal problems, Lorenzo says:

Prometemo nel proemio, quando venissimo alla esposizione del presente sonetto, narrare quanto fussi grande e maligna la persecuzione che io sopportai in quel tempo e dalla Fortuna e dagli uomini; e nondimeno sono in disposizione

¹⁶⁴ See note 161 on James Cook's naming his *Comento* translation *The Autobiography of Lorenzo de' Medici the Magnificent*. William Kennedy espouses an autobiographical view with a political slant, claiming the *Comento* to be "an unabashed autobiographical platform upon which to shape and reshape the events of his life as he wants his Florentine audience to perceive them." "Petrarchan Figurations of Death in Lorenzo de' Medici's Sonnets and *Comento*," *Life and Death in Fifteenth-century Florence*, ed. M. Tetel et al. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1989) 47.

¹⁶⁵ *Comento*, 353.

passarmene molto brevemente, per fuggire el nome di superbo e vanaglorioso. Imperò che il narrare e proprii e gravi pericoli difficilmente si fa senza presunzione o vanagloria.¹⁶⁶

Again we note Lorenzo's attention to the presumptuousness of writing about himself. He specifically states that to avoid an appearance of vainglory he will pass briefly over the persecution he endured. However, the commentary to sonnet X marks the second time that he has mentioned the troubles he went through. He attempts to temper any indications of pride for reminding his readers, but both the *proemio* and commentary allow Lorenzo to present the burdens he had endured in his own terms, in order to gain sympathy for his plight. His pleas for compassion help portray Lorenzo as one who had suffered for the state. This excerpt that mixes a self-defense and invitation for sympathy from his readers indicates that the *Comento* was not solely a collection of his own thoughts to be shared with his close circle of friends but that it was intended for public consumption. Unlike the *Raccolta Aragonese*, a pre-packaged emblem of Florentine culture to be exported beyond the region, or his *poesia popolare*, well liked by the Florentine *volgo*, the *Comento's* philosophical poetry appears to be intended for a patrician or upper bourgeoisie audience with whom Lorenzo seeks common intellectual and political ground.¹⁶⁷

Lorenzo perceived that he risked accusations not only of thinking too highly of himself, but for wasting time on matters of love in the first place:

Pensavo [...] potere essere da qualcuno facilmente ripreso di poco iudicio, avendo consumato el tempo nel comporre e comentare versi, la materia e subietto de'

¹⁶⁶ *Comento*, 409.

¹⁶⁷ In his letter to Lorenzo on July 15, 1484, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola discusses at length Lorenzo's *Comento* and compares Lorenzo's poetry favorably to the poetry of Dante and Petrarch. He urges Lorenzo to complete his project. Because of this discussion of his collection with Pico, Lorenzo's *Comento* might be portrayed as an intellectual discussion among friends. As noted, however, Lorenzo's pleas for compassion within the proem and commentary question the veracity of such a limited intended audience.

quali in gran parte fussi una amorosa passione; e questo essere molto più reprovabile in me per le continue occupazioni e pubbliche e private, le quali mi dovevano ritrarre da simili pensieri, secondo alcuni non solamente frivoli e di poco momento, ma ancora perniciosi e di qualche pregiudicio così all'anima nostra come all'onore del mondo.¹⁶⁸

In this first part of the quotation, Lorenzo points to the possible objection that a man in his position should not spend time on frivolous matters like "amorosa passione." The rest of his statement, though, indicates a much greater potential for folly:

E, se questo e il pensare a simili cose è grande errore, metterle in versi è molto maggiore, ma il commentarle non pare minore difetto che sia quello di colui che ha fatto uno lungo e indurato abito nelle male opere, massime perché e comenti sono riservati per cose teologiche o di filosofia e imporanti grandi effetti, o a edificazione e consolazione della mente nostra o a utilità dell'umana generazione.¹⁶⁹

Lorenzo does not assume it to be a foolish task to comment on his love poems, so this statement serves both to heighten expectations for the reader that serious matters – worthy of discussion – will be treated and to qualify love as one such serious matter.

Lorenzo's incorporation of Dante and Petrarch in his defense and in the structure of his work help establish the seriousness of his love poems. In describing their use of language, Lorenzo draws attention to the *gravi e dolcissimi versi* of Florence's crowned poets, and to Petrarch's *stile grave* and the *tanta gravità* with which he treated amorous matters. Lorenzo even states that part of his defense for commenting on love poems was that Dante did it too. Weaving these Florentine paragons into his own work and relying on them for his defense help Lorenzo to affiliate himself as their literary heir, to help him establish his image as a *poeta grave* as he begins his philosophical love sonnets, and to provoke a sense of pride within his fellow citizens for Florence's cultural reputation.

¹⁶⁸ *Comento*, 353.

¹⁶⁹ *Comento*, 353-54.

The form of *Comento de' miei sonetti* exhibits a particularly Dantean feature: love sonnets followed by their exposition in prose. This structure deliberately recalls the configuration of Dante's *Vita Nuova* (1295). Lorenzo even appeals to Dante – who commented on his own works in his *Vita Nuova* and *Convivio* – in the *Comento's* proem when defending his decision to comment on his own poetry: "Né io sono stato el primo che ho commentato versi importanti simili amorosi subietti, perché Dante lui medesimo comentò alcuna delle sue canzone e altri versi."¹⁷⁰ Lorenzo makes it abundantly clear that he claims *Dante lui medesimo* as an example upon whose authority he draws in structuring his text.

The first lady in the initial four sonnets of Lorenzo's text (Simonetta) prepares the way for a treatment of his relationship with another lady in the subsequent components (Lucrezia). This progression in his relationship from one lady to the next informs Lorenzo's metaphysical ascent from the carnality of the world to the realm of "pure" ideas. Simonetta's earthly beauty comes before the supernatural beauty of Lucrezia in a way that demonstrates a similarity to the role Giovanna serves as a precursor or forerunner to Beatrice. In his *Vita Nuova*, Dante established the relationship of Giovanna to Beatrice as a progression toward a divine and salvific figure, analogous to the relationship of John the Baptist as forerunner of Jesus Christ.

Despite modeling the structure of his *Comento* on Dante's self-commentary in *Vita Nuova* and appealing to Dante's use of the vernacular, Lorenzo differed from Dante in terms of which poetic configuration he privileges. In *De vulgari eloquentia* (1302-05), Dante made the case for the *canzone* to be considered as the noblest form of verse. Lorenzo, however, favors the sonnet, particularly for the difficulty of its required brevity:

È sentenza di Platone che il narrare brevemente e dilucidamente molte cose non solo pare mirabile tra gli uomini, ma quasi cosa divina. La brevità del sonetto non

¹⁷⁰ *Comento*, 362.

comporta che una sola parola sia vana; e il vero subietto e materia de' sonetti per questa ragione debbe essere qualche acuta e gentile sentenza, narrata attamente e in pochi versi ristretta, fuggendo la oscurità e durezza.¹⁷¹

To break from Dante's tradition in order to favor the sonnet surely speaks to the popularity of and Lorenzo's reverence for the master sonneteer, Francesco Petrarca.¹⁷²

Lorenzo's combination of Petrarchan and Dantean approaches in his *Comento* positions Lorenzo as the literary heir of the famous poets of the vernacular tradition. In addition to the simple and evident connection to Petrarch through form – the *Comento* consists of *sonnets* and their commentary – Lorenzo incorporates other elements that are Petrarchan in nature. A retrospective reordering of his own poems and frequent use of oxymora demonstrate cursory echoes of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. In the second section of his *Comento*, Lorenzo's narrative thread wanders among recurring thematic elements like the power of his lady's eyes and his anguish in her absence. This thematic fluidity may indicate an affinity for a flexible thematic structure like Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, as opposed to Dante's relatively rigid linearity. The *Comento's* most substantial link to a Petrarchan model, though, consists of the portrayal of Lorenzo as a Petrarchan lover and the attendant usefulness of that role.

At the beginning of the proem, Lorenzo acknowledges the argument against commenting on his love lyrics because commenting is typically reserved for theological or philosophical works: "[...] perché e comenti sono riservati per cose teologiche o di filosofia e importanti grandi effetti, o a edificazione e consolazione della mente nostra o a utilità dell'umana

¹⁷¹ *Comento*, 370-1.

¹⁷² See Angelo Lipari, *The Dolce Stil Novo According to Lorenzo de' Medici*, in which he focuses on Dante (of the *Vita Nuova*, *Convivio*, and *De vulgari eloquentia*) as Lorenzo's model in the *Comento*. Yet, especially in pages 57-61, Lipari argues for a mixed influence of both Dante and Petrarch. Lipari relies on Lorenzo's first four sonnets as a key to determining between aspects of realism and symbolism in stilnovistic poetry. His general argument unraveled when subsequent studies demonstrated that dates for the first four sonnets did coincide with the actual death of Simonetta Cattaneo. His thoughts, cited here, on Dante's and Petrarch's influence on Lorenzo's compositional choices still stand.

generazione."¹⁷³ Philosophical and theological texts merited comment because of their capacity to edify and to provide utility to all readers. In a letter to Lorenzo, July 15, 1484, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola praises the draft that he has read of Lorenzo's *Comento* and urges him to complete it *because* of the utility and pleasure that it will bring:

Illud non praeteribo inhortari te quantum possum opere maximo, ut aliquod quandoque a moderanda republica ociulum suffuratus absolvendae paraphrasi impartiaris, tibi quidem et linguae patriae ad honorem, civibus tuis et nobis omnibus futurae ad usum et voluptatem.¹⁷⁴

Pico exhorts Lorenzo to steal as many moments away from governing the republic as he can in order to finish his work for the utility and pleasure it will bring everyone, including Lorenzo.

What is the utility of Lorenzo's love sonnets and commentary? In his defense of love poetry,

Lorenzo claims that love inspires virtue:

Chi ama una cosa sola e sempre, di necessità non pone amore ad altre cose, e però si priva di tutti gli errori e voluttà, nelle quali comunemente incorrono gli uomini; e amando persona atta a conoscere e cercando in ogni modo che può di piacerli, bisogna di necessità che in tutte le opere sue cerchi dignificarsi e farsi eccellente tra gli altri, seguitando opere virtuose.¹⁷⁵

Thus his love poems can aid individuals, also prone to love, to avoid errors and sensuality, and to seek to perform virtuous works.¹⁷⁶ However, in the proem, Lorenzo points to a more significant utility of the text for the author himself.

The key to the *Comento's* utility for Lorenzo lies in his self-defense for commenting on his love sonnets and in his attempt to justify why he spoke of the persecution he had suffered.

¹⁷³ *Comento*, 354.

¹⁷⁴ This quotation and all others of Pico's letter come from a copy of his letter presented in *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Milano: Ricciardi, 1952).

¹⁷⁵ *Comento*, 359.

¹⁷⁶ Lorenzo's suggestions for the fruits of love echo those that Marsilio Ficino posits in *El libro dell'Amore* II.IV: love spurs a desire for honorable undertakings, and appetite for beautiful, praiseworthy, and magnificent things, and

Devoting time to a frivolous topic like love was one potential indictment that Lorenzo identified in his proem. At the conclusion of his self-defense, Lorenzo wonders if he may not have satisfied all accusers and makes the same appeal to his readers that Petrarch – whom he calls *il fiorentino poeta* – had employed in the first component of his *Canzoniere*: "spero trovare pietà, non che perdono."¹⁷⁷ He asks not to be denied a personal benefit – the solace for his well-known afflictions that comes to him through commenting on his love poems by repeating Petrarch's plea:

E se pure alla purgazione mia non sono sufficienti [...] la compassione almeno mi doverria giustificare, perché, essendo nella mia gioventù stato molto perseguitato dagli uomini e dalla fortuna, qualche poco di refrigerio non mi debbe essere dinegato, el quale solamente ho trovato e in amare ferventemente e nella composizione e commento de' miei versi. [...] Quale sieno sute le mie maligne persecuzioni, per essere assai publiche è assai noto, qual sia suta la dolcezza e refrigerio che el mio dolcissimo e constantissimo amore ha dato a queste, è impossibile che altri che io lo possi intendere. [...] E però torno al sopra detto verso del nostro fiorentino poeta [...] "spero trovar pietà non che perdono."¹⁷⁸

This repetition of Petrarch's plea for sympathy and forgiveness signals Lorenzo's desire to establish a connection to Petrarch's audience: those who have suffered for love. Suffering for love humanizes Lorenzo in a way that presents common ground on which Lorenzo can build a personal connection instead of a relationship as governor and governed. Lorenzo then immediately orchestrates a juxtaposition between the universal bond that comes from experiencing pain for the sake of love and the impossibility of comprehending his many persecutions for which Lorenzo had given his sweetest, *dolcissimo*, and most constant, *constantissimo*, love. Lorenzo creates this juxtaposition in order to overcome the impossibility

it causes one to flee from that which is dishonest and unclean.

¹⁷⁷ In the first poem of his *Canzoniere*, Petrarch seeks compassion and forgiveness from his readers for his youthful wandering: "spero trovar pietà, non che perdono" (1.8).

¹⁷⁸ *Comento*, 363-64.

of understanding how much he had suffered by means of his unlikely analogy to the willingness to give everything for love. If his dedication to Florence does not satisfy his critics, Lorenzo, quoting Petrarch twice in order to underscore his role as lover of the state, asks for sympathy and forgiveness.¹⁷⁹

In the same letter in which he encouraged Lorenzo to finish his *Comento* project (July 15, 1484), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola reinforced Lorenzo's determination to unite Dantean and Petrarchan influences in his sonnets. Pico began his assessment of Lorenzo's text with a generalized critical statement about the works of Dante and Petrarch: "Sunt apud vos duo praecipue celebrati poetae florentinae linguae, Franciscus Petrarcha et Dantes Aligerius, de quibus illud in universum sim praefatus, esse ex eruditis qui res in Francisco, verba in Dante desiderant." Pico praised Lorenzo for having produced better content – *res* – than Petrarch and better form or style – *verba* – than Dante. According to Pico, Petrarch, if alive, would concede to Lorenzo's greater treatment of his material: "Franciscus quidem si reviviscat, quoad attinet ad sensus quis dubitat ultro herbam tibi daturum."¹⁸⁰ If Pico were to reluctantly acknowledge that Petrarch's style were more refined than Lorenzo's, then it would be due to Lorenzo's more serious content: "Quod et si demus (quod nunquam dabo) lepidiora esse quae ille scripsit et comptiora tuis, facile id fuit praestare hominem cui non esset cum ipsis sensibus labor et pugna."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Kennedy notes Lorenzo's role as a Petrarchan lover of Florence in his search for sympathy in the *Comento*. "Petrarchan Figurations" and *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) 58-66. More important than the sympathy he seeks for having loved Florence, though, is the opportunity to establish his fellow citizens as his peers. Lorenzo levels the hierarchical relationship between leader and citizen by appealing to the shared experience of love and suffering for love.

¹⁸⁰ *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, 796.

¹⁸¹ *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, 798.

In his letter, Pico continued to praise Lorenzo, claiming that no one would argue that Dante's style is greater than his: "Primas certe, quod ad stylum spectat, denegaturum tibi neminem puto, ita est Dantes nonnunquam horidus, asper et strigosus, ut multum rudis et impolitus." And with no equivocation, Giovanni Pico notes that Lorenzo had thus surpassed his venerable model: "...quo mihi videris Dantem exuperasse."¹⁸² Thus for Pico, Lorenzo's *Comento* combines a stylistic refinement on par with that of Petrarch with an exalted substance like that of Dante.

Readers may consider Pico's profuse compliments as an element of conventional encomium. He made a pointed effort, though, in his letter's first paragraph to claim that his comments should be above suggestion of perfunctory flattery: "Sed vellem dici posse extra suspicionem adulationis, quod de illis sentio."¹⁸³ Regardless of the sincerity of his compliments, modern readers of Pico's letter can recognize a correlation between his comparisons of Lorenzo to poetic masters, Dante and to Petrarch, and Lorenzo's willful conjunction of those two poetic models in his text.¹⁸⁴

Lorenzo's conspicuous use of Dante and Petrarch does not constitute an attempt at strict imitation of or a reverential salute to these poetic masters, nor do Lorenzo's allusions to Dante and Petrarch constitute an attempt at engaging these luminaries in intellectual discourse.

Furthermore, these Dantean and Petrarchan models do not appear to be at odds with one another

¹⁸² *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, 800.

¹⁸³ *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, 796.

¹⁸⁴ Pico refers to a combination of Petrarchan style and Dantean material in Lorenzo's *Comento*. Giancarlo Mazzacurati suggests that a combination of Petrarchan sonnets and Dantean exegesis enables Lorenzo to merge existential subjectivity with a vehicle of civil doctrinal transmission. With this combination, Mazzacurati notes, Lorenzo calls upon the strength of Florentine archetypes for a new cultural dominion but expansive Petrarchism in the sixteenth century eventually overwhelms the maneuver. Mazzacurati, "Storia e funzione" 48-67. Mazzacurati aptly identifies Lorenzo's adoption of past Florentine greats and the potential of combining subjective experience

within Lorenzo's text. The tenuous conjunction of Dantean and Petrarchan poetry in the *Comento* contributed to Lorenzo's poetic authority and to his position himself as their heir. As the heir of her greatest poets, Lorenzo has appropriated and equated himself with the prestige of Florence's cultural patrimony; by combining the influence of these Florentine icons in Ficinian love poems, Lorenzo has assumed the capacity to direct Florence's cultural trajectory in a new philosophical direction, that is also quintessentially Florentine, in an attempt to further expand the cultural-political influence of Florence and the Medici.¹⁸⁵ I turn again to Pico's letter for another clue in this regard. After having praised Lorenzo for surpassing both Petrarch and Dante, Pico notes the ingenious way in which Lorenzo had woven weighty philosophical doctrines into his pleasant love poems: "At fuit dubio procul summi ingenii opus, quod ipse praestas, philosophica facere quae sunt amatoria, et quae sunt sua severitate austerula, superinducta venere facere amabilia."¹⁸⁶ These sonnets are not frivolous love poems or hollow imitations of Dante and Petrarch because Lorenzo had infused his lyrics and narrative arc with Ficinian metaphysics.

Lorenzo's report of Simonetta's death in the *Comento's* prologue signifies the first indication of Ficinian metaphysics in the text. Both Dante in the *Vita Nuova* and Petrarch in his

and universalizing exegesis, however his observation remains theoretical.

¹⁸⁵ P. O. Kristeller has declared that Marsilio Ficino's brand of Neoplatonism dominated Florentine intellectual life for the latter half of the fifteenth century. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965) 100. As such, Lorenzo's Ficinian love poems prove to be as emblematic of contemporary Florentine culture as the *Trecento* crowns recovered in his sonnets are representative of the city's illustrious past. Recovering Dante and Petrarch and setting a new course through Ficinian-Neoplatonic verse represent a pinnacle of *fiorentinità*. James Hankins has challenged the degree to which Ficinian Neoplatonism was characteristic of Florentine intellectual currents in Laurentian Florence. See my section on Marsilio Ficino in Chapter One and Hankins, *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. 2 (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2003-2004) 187-272, 351-95. Whether Ficinian Neoplatonism dominated Florence or the philosophical trends were significantly more polyphonic, Neoplatonism still emerged as a cultural export to other Italian cities and the rest of Europe with an unambiguous Florentine imprint.

¹⁸⁶ *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, 800.

Canzoniere divide their texts in relation to the life and death of their beloved ladies. Beatrice's death marked her transcendence. While her death created an anguish of distance for Dante, returning to Beatrice's presence served as a teleological achievement for Dante-pilgrim in the *Commedia*. Laura's death designated a final absence that Petrarch sought to recover through memory. However, Lorenzo, in his collection, proceeds from death to life – beginning with the death of a woman renowned for her beauty and nobility: "Morì [...] nella città nostra una donna, la quale se mosse a compassione generalmente tutto el populo fiorentino, non è gran maraviglia, perché di bellezza e gentilezza umana era veramente ornata quanto alcuna che inanzi a lei fussi suta."¹⁸⁷ Beginning the narrative portion of the *Argomento* with the word *Morì* underscores Lorenzo's differentiation from his models and it also serves to establish a Ficinian-Neoplatonic arc by enacting the conceit of death that leads to life. Lorenzo also concludes the explication of his *Argomento* by describing Simonetta with another quotation from Petrarch – "Morte bella pareva nel suo bel volto" (*Trionfo della Morte* I.172) – this time recast in a Ficinian-Neoplatonic frame wherein earthly beauty coincides with transcendent beauty or the ultimate beauty of God.

At the beginning of the *argomento* section, Lorenzo continues his preoccupation with preemptively addressing potential detractors by recognizing how unnatural it must seem to commence with death:

Forse qualcuno giudicherà poco conveniente principio a' versi miei cominciando non solamente fuori della consuetudine di quelli che insino a qui hanno scritto simili versi, ma, come pare *prima facie*, pervertendo quasi l'ordine della natura, mettendo per principio quello che in tutte le cose umane suole essere ultimo fine.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ *Comento*, 375.

¹⁸⁸ *Comento*, 372-73.

Lorenzo explains that this order does not appear so unnatural when one considers that love necessarily proceeds from death:

E [...] molto convenientemente la morte è principio a questa nostra opera; e tanto più perché chi essamina più sottilmente, troverà el principio dell'amorosa vita procedere dalla morte, perché chi vive ad amore, muore prima a l'altre cose. E se lo amore ha in sé quella perfezione che già abbiamo detto, è impossibile venire a tale perfezione se prima non si muore quanto alle cose più imperfette.¹⁸⁹

Death that leads to life is a conceit treated by Plato as well as by Paul, Augustine, and Bonaventure, chief representatives of Christian scripture and thought. In particular, though, it comes to Lorenzo through Ficino's syncretistic treatment of this paradoxical concept of death that is life in *El libro dell'Amore*: "Platone chiama l'amore amaro, e non senza cagione, perché qualunque ama amando muore; e Orpheo chiamò l'amore un pomo dolce amaro: essendo lo amore volontaria morte, in quanto è morte è cosa amara, in quanto volontaria è dolce" (II.VIII.5). This change that comes about through love can be considered a death by self-abnegation; the self dies, being wholly subjugated to and in the beloved. Furthermore, for the poet to contemplate fully the beloved divine lady requires a death of the senses – he must leave behind imperfect, terrestrial objects, thoughts, and feelings in order to ascend to the divine.

This Ficinian concept of death that begets life helps clarify Lorenzo's description of Simonetta in the *Argomento*: "Mori [...] nella città nostra una donna, la quale se mosse a compassione generalmente tutto el populo fiorentino, non è gran maraviglia, perché di bellezza e gentilezza umana era veramente ornata quanto alcuna che inanzi a lei fussi suta" (375). *Umana* emerges as a crucial adjective in Lorenzo's statement on the motives for Florence's mourning. Lorenzo states that she was as beautiful and noble as any before her, but notes that hers were *human* beauty and nobility. With her death, Lorenzo describes leaving behind a generalized

¹⁸⁹ *Comento*, 374.

human condition – beauty perceived by the senses – in order to ascend to a higher metaphysical realm that he will expand upon in the sonnets and commentary in the second section of the *Comento*.

Lorenzo includes a brief aside to demonstrate, again, that with his new structure, he does not intend to cast off his poetic models, but rather, to cast them in new philosophical light. After describing the process of progressing from death to life and from imperfect things to perfection, he adds that Dante, Homer, and Virgil had proceeded in this same manner: "Questa medesima sentenza pare abbino seguito Omero, Virgilio e Dante, delli quali Omero manda Ulisse apresso agl'inferi, Virgilio Enea, e Dante lui medesimo perlustra lo inferno, per mostrare che alla perfezione si va per questa via."¹⁹⁰ Subsequent to recasting Dante's redemptive pilgrimage as a metaphysical ascension, Lorenzo concludes with a Neoplatonic maxim – "[...] il principio della vera vita è la morte della vita non vera."¹⁹¹ Lorenzo argues that one accesses "true" life – referring to the metaphysical realm of ideas – by dying in order to transcend the baser life of the natural world.

This overarching interpretive key to the *Comento – la morte ch'è vita* – is one of two themes that persist throughout Lorenzo's text; the other unifying theme is the transcendent potential of love. In his defense in the proem of composing and commenting on love poems, Lorenzo offers this definition of love: "Perché, chi cerca diligentemente quale sia la vera diffinitione dello amore, trova non essere altro che appetito di bellezza."¹⁹² This explanation of love as appetite for beauty represents Plato's philosophy of love, which reached Lorenzo through

¹⁹⁰ *Comento*, 374.

¹⁹¹ *Comento*, 375.

¹⁹² *Comento*, 357.

his interactions with Marsilio Ficino.¹⁹³ These two Ficinian-Neoplatonic concepts of love and of death as the commencement of life create an overall philosophical vision in the text that emerges from within Lorenzo's sonnets.

In sonnet II – “Quando el sol giù dall’orizzonte scende” – Lorenzo laments a sunflower’s recurring plight each evening, when it no longer can view the sun; he thanks dawn for returning the sun to this flower’s view. No new dawn, however, can restore the world’s sun and thus hopes are vain to see it again until its eyes are closed at death; until then, the world’s eyes must be fixed on the far horizon that took the sun away. Lorenzo's text:

Quando el sol giù dall'orizzonte scende,
rimiro Clizia palida nel volto,
e piango la sua sorte, che li ha tolto
la vista di colui ch'ad altri splende.

Poi quando di novella fiamma accende
l'erbe, le piante e ' fior' Febo a noi volto,
l'altro orizzonte allor ringrazio molto
e la benigna Aurora che gliel rende.

Ma lasso, io non so già qual nuova Aurora
renda al mondo el suo Sole! Ah, dura sorte,
che noi vestir d'eterna notte volse!

O Clizia, indarno speri veder l'ora:
tien' gli occhi fissi infin li chiuda morte
allo orizzonte estremo che tel tolse.

Lorenzo employs precise Petrarchan form in this sonnet, which consists of fourteen hendecasyllabic verses in an *abba abba cde cde* rhyme scheme. He presents images of the sun and a sunflower in the first quatrain, which he continues in the second. In verse six, *L'erbe, le*

¹⁹³ Lorenzo's definition of love as an appetite for beauty reflects the basic tenet of Ficinian love – the pursuit of beauty. See *El libro dell'Amore* I.IV.9 in which Ficino claims all philosophers consider love to be a desire for beauty – *desiderio di bellezza* – and that beauty typically originates in a state of harmony. In VII.XIV.12 Ficino specifies that love is a thirst for *divine* beauty. In II.II.1 Ficino explains that divine beauty generates love and

piante e' fior represent an ascendant progression of plant life from low grass, to rising plant, to outreaching flower that the sun will illuminate upon its return at dawn of the following day.

Lorenzo reinforces this continuity of images and dawn's repeated return with each new day with a standard repeating rhyme scheme for these two quatrains – *abba abba*.

Indications of a metaphorical reading appear in the second quatrain. In verse six, the fact that Febo turns to us – *a noi* – hints at this metaphorical representation. The first quatrain, first person singular verbs *rimiro* and *piango* designate a recounting of Lorenzo's personal experience; the switch in the second quatrain to first person plural to note that Febo is turned *a noi* changes the experience from Lorenzo in a field at dusk to a metaphorical scenario of all of humanity. "L'erbe, le piante, e' fior" then represent a generalized earthly experience or an experience observable by the senses.

This sonnet's turn, which Lorenzo marks with a quintessential *ma* and emphasizes with *lasso*, complicates these images presented in the quatrains. Lorenzo maintains continuity of the images of the sun and dawn, but adds a metaphorical layer. These verses contradict the notion of a returning sun since he knows of no dawn that can restore the world's sun: "io non so già qual nuova Aurora / renda al mondo il suo Sole" (9-10). Lorenzo utilizes these images to establish a metaphor for his sonnet: no new dawn can return the world's sun, meaning there will be no return of Simonetta after her death.

In the concluding tercet, again we find statements that contradict those made in the second quatrain. The sun, snatched away from the sunflower in the first quatrain, returns in the second quatrain to illuminate the natural world; but in the last tercet, Lorenzo claims the sunflower's hope to see his sun again is vain. Read as a continuation of the metaphor established

circuitous attraction, beginning with God, extending to the world, and returning to God. In II.IX.1 Ficino describes the reciprocal love between lovers as the pursuit of beauty since love is the desire to enjoy beauty.

in the first tercet, this sunflower represents the lover (and all the world) who can only hope in vain to see his beloved (Simonetta) again. In the commentary to the sonnet Lorenzo indicates that his inspiration for these verses came as he strolled through a meadow. Simonetta died in April, a time in which colors and flowers cover the earth, thus the flowers he observed on his walk reminded him of his deceased beloved.

Lorenzo sympathetically recalls the Ovidian metamorphosis of the nymph Clyzia turned to a sunflower that continually gazed on her beloved sun.¹⁹⁴ He pities her fate and casts her in the light of a distraught lover: “Rimirando io adunque questo amoroso fiore, pallido come è natura degli amanti e perché veramente il fiore è di colore pallido, perché è giallo e bianco, mi venne compassione della sorte sua.”¹⁹⁵ Lorenzo's pity stems from the fact that once the sun passes beyond the western horizon it will be beyond the flower's view. The forlorn flower will no longer see her beloved. Nevertheless, Lorenzo points out that, although this flower loses her delightful vision in the night, dawn kindly returns her beloved the next morning.

Lorenzo's pity for this sunflower is more aptly described as compassion – co-passion – or empathy born of similar experience with the death of his beloved. Indeed, Lorenzo indicates his shared experience as he hints at the figurative reading of his sonnet. The fate of the sunflower reminds him of his own pain, necessarily greater pain than that of the sunflower because a vision

¹⁹⁴ Clytie's unrequited love for Apollo resulted in her metamorphosis from nymph to sunflower. Distraught over Apollo's rejections, she prostrated herself on the ground for days with her gaze fixated on the sun. She saw no other object and had no other care as the sun traversed its daily course. After nine days of focused attention and no food or drink other than her own tears, her limbs rooted to the ground and her face became a sunflower that always turned toward her beloved sun.

¹⁹⁵ *Comento*, 379.

of his beloved is not restored each morning: "E però durissima sorte è quella di colui che con assai desiderio aspetta quello che non può avere."¹⁹⁶

Lorenzo then states more clearly an additional figurative reading of his sonnet by claiming the western horizon is equivalent to the death of this noble lady: "però che orizzonte non vuole dire altro che l'ultimo termine, di là dal quale gli occhi umani non possono vedere."¹⁹⁷ From this experience, Lorenzo draws the conclusion that mortal beings must be loved as *cose finite*. He realizes that he must apply this lesson to himself, observing the wise dictum written in the temple of Apollo – *Nosce te ipsum*. He must persevere in the thought of his lady until death comes to him to restore his sun to this new Clyzia who figuratively represents Lorenzo as a lover. Upon death's arrival, the soul will be able to consider the beauty of her spirit: "perché allora l'anima, sciolta dal corpo, potrà considerare la bellezza dell'anima di costei, molto più bella che quella la quale era prima visibile agli occhi, perché la luce degli occhi umani è come ombra rispetto alla luce dell'anima."¹⁹⁸

Within this sonnet and its commentary, Lorenzo incorporates brief references to Petrarchan and Dantean texts. The first verse of the sonnet – “Quando el sol giù dall'orizzonte scende” – alludes directly to the first line of component CCXCI of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*: "Quand'io veggio dal ciel scender l'Aurora." Indeed, Lorenzo relies upon Petrarch's sonnet for the subject matter of “Quando el sol giù dall'orizzonte scende;” this reference in the first verse is only the first signal that establishes Petrarch's sonnet as a model for his own. Petrarch's sonnet CCXCI reads:

¹⁹⁶ *Comento*, 380.

¹⁹⁷ *Comento*, 380.

¹⁹⁸ *Comento*, 381.

Quand'io veggio dal ciel scender l'Aurora
 co la fronte di rose et co' crin d'oro,
 Amor m'assale ond'io mi discoloro
 et dico sospirando: "Ivi è Laura ora."

"O felice Titòn, tu sai ben l'ora
 da ricovrare il tuo caro tesoro;
 ma io che debbo far del dolce alloro?
 ché se 'l vo' riveder, conven ch'io mora.

"I vostri dipartir non son sì duri,
 ch'almen di notte suol tornar colei
 che non à schifo le tue bianche chiome;

"le mie notti fa triste e i giorni oscuri
 quella che n'à portato i penser miei,
 né di sé m'à lasciato altro che 'l nome."

Petrarch's sonnet treats temporarily separated lovers: he addresses Tithonus, lover of Eos (Aurora, in Roman mythology). Readers of mythology often view Tithonus with pity since his immortality was not accompanied by youth – he lived forever, but was old and withered. Petrarch, however, demonstrates envy for Tithonus's condition because he knows he will see his beloved Aurora each morning – "tu sai ben l'ora / da ricovrare il tuo caro tesoro" (5-6). His beloved's departure each night is softened by knowing that Aurora will return (and, furthermore, that his old age does not diminish her devotion to him): "I vostri dipartir non son sì duri, / ch'almen di notte suol tornar colei / che non à schifo le tue bianche chiome" (9-11).

In this sonnet, Petrarch has connected masterfully Aurora and Laura. The phonetic resemblance between "l'Aurora" and "Laura," especially "Laura ora" in verse four, mirrors their similar roles as Tithonus's and Petrarch's beloved ladies. This connection between Aurora and Laura highlights their contrast in order to substantiate the pathos of the sonnet: although she departs each night, Tithonus knows well the hour of his beloved's return, but Laura will not

return from death. In order to see Laura again, Petrarch must die himself: "ché se 'l vo' riveder, conven ch'io mora" (8).

Lorenzo modeled his role as lover of a departed lady after Petrarch and relies upon Petrarch's sonnet to express the pain a lover experiences for a deceased lady. In "Quand'io veggio dal ciel scender l'Aurora," each dawn Petrarch sees Laura: "Quand'io veggio dal ciel scender l'Aurora ... dico sospirando: 'Ivi è Laura ora'" (1-4). Petrarch's sonorous play on Laura and Dawn creates a hollow experience that simultaneously assuages and renders his pain more acute because of his beloved's absence. With an ambiguous sigh, Petrarch expresses grief and wonder for dawn's pleasurable beauty and for his painful loss. Petrarch notes that for Tithonus, his goodbyes with his lady are less difficult because he knows that she will return the next morning: "I vostri dipartir non son sì duri" (9).

Lorenzo recreates this very scenario in similar terms. To compound his allusion to Petrarch's sonnet, Lorenzo nearly copies the first verse and mentions Aurora by name twice in verses eight and nine. However, these appearances of "Aurora" are contextually divided in Lorenzo's sonnet. The first mention of "Aurora" occurs in verse eight, at the close of the second quatrain in which context it refers to Tithonus's beloved; the second occurrence, though in tight proximity in the following verse, appears after the sonnet's *volta*. Thus it belongs to a tercet that complicates the images presented in the first two quatrains. In this case, Lorenzo initiates the layered meaning or the metaphor of the new Clyzia (Lorenzo) and his beloved (Simonetta). Just as Tithonus would see his beloved Aurora the next morning in Petrarch's sonnet, Clyzia would see her beloved sun. In his commentary on this sonnet, Lorenzo highlights the greater difficulty of a departure without an expected return: "E però durissima sorte è quella di colui che con assai

desiderio aspetta quello che non può avere."¹⁹⁹ So, too, Petrarch must die to see his deceased Laura (8) and Lorenzo must die to see his departed lady (13).

With these comparisons Lorenzo depicts himself as a Petrarchan lover of his absent lady. In this light, Lorenzo's poem appears to be quintessentially Petrarchan in nature. However, Lorenzo borrows directly from Dante's *Vita Nuova* as well. The mere presence of Lorenzo's prose commentary following his sonnet reminds us of Dante's *Vita Nuova* and its focus on the beloved, but Lorenzo's realization of his lady's mortality specifically draws upon "Donna pietosa e di novella etate," the fifteenth poem and second *canzone* of the *Vita Nuova*. Dante's *canzone* swells with pain and anguish, from his physical illness and from the poet's realization of his lady's mortality.

Donna pietosa e di novella etate,
 adorna assai di gentilezze umane,
 ch'era là 'v'io chiamava spesso Morte,
 veggendo li occhi miei pien di pietate,
 e ascoltando le parole vane,
 si mosse con paura a pianger forte.
 E altre donne, che si fuoro accorte
 di me per quella che meco piangia,
 fecer lei partir via,
 e appressarsi per farmi sentire.
 Qual dicea: «Non dormire»,
 e qual dicea: «Perché sì ti sconforte?»
 Allor lassai la nova fantasia,
 chiamando il nome de la donna mia. 14

Era la voce mia sì dolorosa
 e rotta sì da l'angoscia del pianto,
 ch'io solo intesi il nome nel mio core;
 e con tutta la vista vergognosa
 ch'era nel viso mio giunta cotanto,
 mi fece verso lor volgere Amore.
 Elli era tale a veder mio colore,
 che facea ragionar di morte altrui:
 «Deh, consoliam costui»

¹⁹⁹ *Comento*, 380.

pregava l'una l'altra umilmente;
 e dicevan sovente:
 «Che vedestù, che tu non hai valore?»
 E quando un poco confortato fui,
 io dissi: «Donne, dicerollo a vui. 28

Mentr'io pensava la mia frale vita,
 e vedea 'l suo durar com'è leggiere,
 piansemi Amor nel core, ove dimora;
 per che l'anima mia fu sì smarrita,
 che sospirando dicea nel pensiero:
 – Ben converrà che la mia donna mora. –
 Io presi tanto smarrimento allora,
 ch'io chiusi li occhi vilmente gravati,
 e furon sì smagati
 li spirti miei, che ciascun giva errando;
 e poscia imaginando,
 di caunoscenza e di verità fora,
 visi di donne m'apparver crucciati,
 che mi dicean pur: – Morra'ti, morra'ti. – 42

Poi vidi cose dubitose molte,
 nel vano imaginare ov'io entrai;
 ed esser mi pareva non so in qual loco,
 e veder donne andar per via disciolte,
 qual lagrimando, e qual traendo guai,
 che di tristizia saettavan foco.
 Poi mi parve vedere a poco a poco
 turbar lo sole e apparir la stella,
 e pianger elli ed ella;
 cader li augelli volando per l'are,
 e la terra tremare;
 ed omo apparve scolorito e fioco,
 dicendomi: – Che fai? Non sai novella?
 morta è la donna tua, ch'era sì bella. – 56

Levava li occhi miei bagnati in pianti,
 e vedea, che parean pioggia di manna,
 li angeli che tornavan suso in cielo,
 e una nuvoletta avean davanti,
 dopo la qual gridavan tutti: «Osanna»;
 e s'altro avesser detto, a voi dire'lo.
 Allor diceva Amor: – Più nol ti celo;
 vieni a veder nostra donna che giace. –
 Lo imaginar fallace
 mi condusse a veder madonna morta;

e quand'io l'avea scorta,
vedea che donne la covrian d'un velo;
ed avea seco umilità verace,
che pareva che dicesse: – Io sono in pace. – 70

Io divenia nel dolor sì umile,
veggendo in lei tanta umiltà formata,
ch'io dicea: – Morte, assai dolce ti tegno;
tu dei omai esser cosa gentile,
poi che tu se' ne la mia donna stata,
e dei aver pietate e non disdegno.
Vedi che sì desideroso vegno
d'esser de' tuoi, ch'io ti somiglio in fede.
Vieni, ché 'l cor te chiede. –
Poi mi partia, consumato ogne duolo;
e quand'io era solo,
dicea, guardando verso l'alto regno:
– Beato, anima bella, chi te vede! –
Voi mi chiamaste allor, vostra merzede». 84

More so than other poetic components of Dante's *Vita nuova*, this canzone relates a story that parallels the actions narrated in the prose. This characteristic does not indicate a lack of philosophical content within the poem; it simply describes more physical action than Dante's other poems in the *Vita nuova*, the exegesis of which typically provided the broader narrative context for a doctrinal poem. The corresponding narrative action between the canzone and commentary may suggest that this poem was penned specifically to be included in the *Vita Nuova*.²⁰⁰ At this point in the narrative, Dante has been gravely ill for nine days; in his miserable state he is acutely aware of the fragility of mortality and comes to realize that, at some point, Beatrice must die: "Ben converrà che la mia donna mora" (34). This idea torments him, and he even imagines that a friend visits him to tell him of Beatrice's death. With this news, Dante, too desires death.

²⁰⁰ For a note on the parallel narrative structure of "Donna pietosa e di novella etate" and its accompanying prose, see Boyde and Foster, 114. For additional comments on the manuscript tradition that lend some support to the idea that Dante may have composed this canzone even after its accompanying prose, see De Robertis, *Il libro della Vita Nuova*, 154-5.

The notions of love, loss, and mortality in Dante's canzone serve as a backdrop for Lorenzo's discussion of the same topics in "Quando el sol giù dall'orizzonte scende" and its commentary. In particular, in his commentary, Lorenzo cites the experience of the "nuovo Clizia" – the Petrarchan lover who has lost his beloved. Lorenzo states: "[...] Questo nuovo Clizia, cioè lo amatore degli occhi suoi, debbe tenere gli occhi fissi e fermi, venendo in considerazione che ciascuna cosa mortale, ancora che bella e eccellentissima, di necessità muore."²⁰¹ This argument relates directly to Dante's recognition of Beatrice's mortality; however, instead of bringing great torment, Lorenzo believes this notion to be consolatory – a "grande e efficace remedio a consolare ogni dolore."²⁰² For Lorenzo, the question of death and loss orients his perspective to love "cose mortali" as finite beings for whom death is a necessity (for both beloved and lover). Lorenzo adopts a tone regarding death that differs from both Dante and Petrarch because he speaks of death in terms of ascending beyond his senses.

Lorenzo utilizes this occasion of Simonetta's death and the discussion of mortality (with comparisons to Petrarch and Dante) as an opportunity to view death through a Ficinian lens. At the conclusion of his commentary on "Quando el sol giù dall'orizzonte scende," Lorenzo posits: "perché allora l'anima, sciolta dal corpo, potrà considerare la bellezza dell'anima di costei, molto più bella che quella la quale era prima visibile agli occhi, perché la luce degli occhi umani è come ombra rispetto alla luce dell'anima."²⁰³ Death, in this sense, refers to a death of sensory perception, beyond which he can ascend to a vision (beyond his "occhi umani") of his lady's "true" beauty.

²⁰¹ *Comento*, 381.

²⁰² *Comento*, 381.

²⁰³ *Comento*, 381.

Lorenzo prepares his readers to consider death in this manner through his treatment of Simonetta in the *Argomento*. He begins with death – commencing the narrative with Simonetta's death, even marking the narrative's incipit with the word "Mori." He describes her as one adorned with "bellezza e gentilezza *umana*" (emphasis mine). Lorenzo notably begins his commentary on "Quando el sol giù dall'orizzonte scende" with *Mori*: "Mori questa eccellentissima donna del mese d'aprile, nel quale tempo la terra si suole vestire di diversi colori di fiori molto vaghi agli occhi e di grande recreazione all'animo."²⁰⁴ Beginning again with death, Lorenzo also highlights the earth's beauty; by referencing many colors and their beauty to the eyes, he emphasizes sensory perception of terrestrial splendor. As a symbol of earthly beauty, Simonetta's operative role in the text is to die and to lead, through death, Lorenzo to a higher realm of beauty, one that is "di grande recreazione all'animo." Death leads to "grande recreazione" which is not just rejuvenation, but re-creation: death brings a new dawn, a new life, a new vision of "true" beauty.

The addition of Lorenzo's Neoplatonic layer to this reading of death invites us to reread Petrarch's and Dante's poems through the same lens.²⁰⁵ At first blush, both Petrarch's and Dante's declarations that they must die to see Laura and Beatrice appear to invoke a supernatural encounter with their beloved ladies in terms of the Christian afterlife. However, with a Ficinian concept of love in the vein of a Laurentian rereading, Petrarch's focus on a visual description of Aurora (Laura) in the first quatrain of "Quand'io veggio dal ciel scender l'Aurora" – "veggio," "fronte di rose et co' crin d'oro," "io mi discoloro" – indicates an emphasis on sensory perception.

²⁰⁴ *Comento*, 379.

²⁰⁵ See Chapter One, pages 38-42 of this dissertation for a summary of Ficinian philosophical tenets, especially the role of contemplation in metaphysical ascension.

Then the eighth verse – "ché se 'l vo' riveder, conven ch'io mora" – indicates the necessity of a death to the senses in the lover to "truly" see his beautiful beloved.

This notion of death to the senses also appears in a Laurentian rereading of Dante's "Donna pietosa e di novella etate." At the midpoint of this canzone, Dante enters a vision wherein he sees disheveled women weeping, a dimming sun and stars that weep, and birds falling to a trembling earth. Within this vision, a man appears and tells Dante that Beatrice has died. Dante described this vision as a "vano imaginare" (44). This vain imagining represents the empty and desolate perception of the earthly realm. Immediately prior to this vision, the ladies that had come to comfort a grief-stricken Dante told him that he will die: "Morra'ti, morra'ti" (42). That death – a death to the vain imaginings of his senses – occurs immediately after his vision in verse fifty-seven. Dante *lifts* his eyes – "Levava li occhi miei bagnati in pianti" – indicating that he has ascended above or beyond the immediate sensory perception of this earthly realm. Indeed, he then sees angels crying "Osanna" and Love invites him to come see his lady. Dante summarizes how he arrived at this glorious vision: "Lo imaginar fallace / mi condusse a veder madonna morta" (65-66). Certainly Dante's experience suits a framework of a vision of the Christian afterlife in which Beatrice's death leads to her peace in Christ (70); but it also corresponds aptly to the notion of a death to the senses – that Ficinian conceit which Lorenzo has established in his *Comento*. With Lorenzo's treatment of vain images in mind, a re-reading of this canzone demonstrates the value of these vain images that can be viewed with human eyes because they lead to or spur a contemplative vision of "true" beauty. In Dante's case, he was conducted to a vision of Beatrice and her "true" humility – *umiltà verace* (69).

As an heir to Dante's and Petrarch's glory, Lorenzo recovers the poetry of Florence's prolific history; by incorporating them within his Ficinian love sonnets, Lorenzo indicates a new

course for what constitutes authentic *fiorentinità* with respect to poetry. In addition to combining Petrarchan and Dantean elements in "Quando el sole giù dall'orizzonte scende" and its commentary, Lorenzo also vacillates between describing actual events and theoretical concepts. By attempting to describe both, Lorenzo seeks to universalize his personal experience in order to establish a sympathetic connection with his readers, while also setting forth the philosophical and diegetical role of Simonetta's death in his narrative.

Lorenzo's sonnet and commentary reflect both a singular and an enduring experience. Although he does not emphasize this construction, there are four verbs in the sonnet that appear in the first person – *rimiro*, *piango*, *ringrazio*, and *io non so* – making Lorenzo a principal agent of action. This use of the first person draws attention to the poet's personal experience. The commentary begins in the preterit – *Morì* – and Lorenzo proceeds to recount that while walking one evening he saw – *vidi* – this sunflower. The use of the past tense, particularly the preterit, lends concreteness to these past events. However, Lorenzo employs solely the present tense in his sonnet, which grants a timelessness to the action of the poem. And given that the action described centers on the lover's repeated loss each time the sun sets, the sonnet adopts a cyclical, non-finite temporality.

Lorenzo's description of the origins of his sonnet demonstrates a universal application of his own experience. In his exegesis, Lorenzo states that his thoughts sprang from an observation of flowers in his field, making his description appear to be one of an actual experience. Looking from flower to flower he spotted "*questo* amoroso fiore" (emphasis mine); the demonstrative pronoun *questo* emphases the singularity of the sunflower to forward the allegorical reading of the poem and commentary, representing both the mythical tale of the transformation of Clyzia, who loved the sun, and symbolizing a lover who remains without the opportunity to gaze on the

eyes of his beloved. Lorenzo thus grounds his sonnet in a personal experience and he also includes universalizing elements, such as a sunflower that represents a specific mythical figure and that represents any lover whose beloved is absent.

In the commentary, Lorenzo also demonstrates a shift from a description of his own experience to sententious remarks of universal application; lining his commentary with these sentential statements helps him establish common ground with his readers. Giving thanks to the eastern horizon for returning the sunflower's beloved each subsequent day, Lorenzo alludes to natural Boccaccian humaneness: "è cosa molto naturale e umana avere compassione agli aflitti."²⁰⁶ This Boccaccian allusion demonstrates a specific maneuver to turn Lorenzo's personal experience into a collective one. Boccaccio's *sententia* describes compassion as a caring or humane act and in Lorenzo's setting it is also a *human* act that indicates a bond between all members of the human family. Lorenzo's use of Boccaccio's statement indicates his desire to identify shared experience with his readers and to highlight the common ground between them. In case he has been unclear, Lorenzo adds a qualifying statement to draw in the reader: "è cosa molto naturale e umana avere compassione agli aflitti, massime a quelli che hanno qualche similitudine d'afflizione *con noi*" (emphasis mine). Lorenzo counts himself among all those who have been troubled by love. With this appeal to natural compassion and motion of solidarity with anyone who has been afflicted by love, Lorenzo positions himself to gain empathy from his readers just as he did in his statement of common experience when *tutto el populo fiorentino* mourned Simonetta's death. This rhetorical link between author and reader engages Lorenzo's readers in the poetic enterprise of the *Comento and*, more importantly for Lorenzo, it represents his attempts to gain the reader's sympathies in the political arena.

²⁰⁶ *Comento*, 380.

Moving to a philosophical reading of Lorenzo's sonnet, we may recall from the *Argomento* that all of Florence mourned Simonetta's death – "Mori [...] nella città nostra una donna, la quale se mosse a compassione generalmente tutto el populo fiorentino" – and that she was not only beautiful, but that she possessed "bellezza e gentilezza umana," an emblem of all that was beautiful in human form. Lorenzo embraces Simonetta's renowned beauty and the universal mourning of her death in order to represent human experience – an experience that he surpasses: "perché allora l'anima, sciolta dal corpo, potrà considerare la bellezza dell'anima di costei, molto più bella che quella la quale era prima visibile agli occhi, perché la luce degli occhi umani è come ombra rispetto alla luce dell'anima."²⁰⁷ Lorenzo seeks to see beyond human eyes; Simonetta's death marks the death of an earthly beauty of human experience and a passing to "true" beauty represented by his lady of the *Nuovo argomento*.

Lorenzo's sonnet "In quale parte andrò io ch'io non truovi" is the fourth component of the *Comento* and the final entry in his initial *Argomento*; it too demonstrates Lorenzo's drive to draw from Petrarch and Dante, to include Ficinian-Neoplatonic elements, and to universalize his personal experience. This sonnet indicates an accumulation of Lorenzo's sorrow and weeping at the absence of Simonetta. It reads:

In quale parte andrò io ch'io non truovi,
trista memoria? In quale oscuro speco
fuggirò io, che sempre non sie meco,
trista memoria, ch'al mio mal sol giovi?

Se in prato, lo qual germini i fior' nuovi,
se all'ombra d'arbuce' verdi m'arreo,
veggo un corrente rivo, io piango seco:
che cosa è, ch'e mie piante non rinnuovi?

S'io torno allo infelice patrio nido,
tra mille cure qesta in mezzo siede

²⁰⁷ *Comento*, 381.

del cor che, come suo, consuma e rode.

Che debb'io fare omai? A che mi fido?
Lasso, che sol sperare posso merzede
da morte, che ormai troppo tardi ode!

In the first quatrain, Lorenzo states that there is no place he can go where he would not encounter the sad memory of his lady. To underscore the ubiquity of her memory, Lorenzo repeats "trista memoria" in the second and fourth verses. This sad memory acts as the sole treatment for his sorrows caused by his lady's absence. In the second quatrain, he notes that if he were led to a meadow of flowers or the shade of trees with a flowing stream, his tears would flow with the stream. In the first tercet, Lorenzo claims that if he returned to Florence to his thousands of cares, this sad memory would continue to gnaw at his heart. In the final tercet, he exasperatedly asks what he should do and in whom/what he should trust. His proposed answer is that his hope for mercy lies in death.

This sonnet's tone and themes epitomize a Petrarchan psychological condition in which the poet utilizes memory as treatment for the pain caused by his lady's absence. Simonetta's haunting memory and Lorenzo's suggestion that it would follow were he to enter a field of flowers, or a wooded shade with a flowing stream evoke the imagery in Petrarch's famed *canzone* "Chiare, fresche et dolci acque." In the very first verse, Lorenzo draws upon Petrarch to establish his sorrow and the accompanying memory of his lady. "In qual parte" cites the first verse of Petrarch's sonnet "In qual parte del ciel, in quale idea" (component CLIX of his *Canzoniere*) and the notion of her permeating sad memory replicates the pervasive memory of Laura throughout his collection. His first verse also contains an allusion to Dante's sonnet "Tutti li miei penser parlan d'Amore" in the thirteenth section of his *Vita Nuova*; the context of Dante's sonnet differs since it describes how Beatrice and Love crowd his thoughts in a period when

Beatrice is alive. Thoughts of painful love occupy *all* of Dante's thoughts, as does the persistent misery of Lorenzo's memory of Simonetta.

In addition to drawing upon both Petrarch and Dante with textual and thematic allusions, a metaphorical reading of "In quale parte andrò io ch'io non truovi" reveals elements of Ficinian Neoplatonism, just as in "Quando il sol giù dall'orizzonte scende." In verses thirteen and fourteen, Lorenzo expresses that his sole hope for relief from his sorrow is through a merciful death: "Lasso che sol sperar posso merzede / da morte." In his commentary for this sonnet, Lorenzo notes how he feeds on pain in sorrow. Lorenzo has couched his desire for death in terms of seeking consolation or release from his misery. With an eye on the greater diegetical structure of his *Comento* and the permeating philosophy of death that begets life, this desire for death assumes a Ficinian-Neoplatonic significance as a death to the senses and a spur to ascend to a vision of "true" beauty. This sonnet concludes the *Argomento* as the fourth and final component treating the death of Simonetta Cattaneo. Thus it is fitting that prior to advancing to the *Nuovo Argomento* in which Lorenzo turns his gaze to *his* lady (not Simonetta, the representative of *human* beauty whose death had sorrowed *all* Florentines) that there be a death of the prior *argomento*. In this case, the celebration of Simonetta's death and Lorenzo's desire for death represent a passage from terrestrial beauty to a metaphysical "true" beauty in Ficinian and Neoplatonic terms.

Lorenzo also demonstrates a Ficinian-Neoplatonic description of love in his commentary on this sonnet. He begins his commentary with a claim that contradictory passions and affectations in his poems are normal for love poetry: "Perché, non essendo amore altro che una gentile passione, sarebbe più presto maraviglia che uno amante avessi mai punto di quiete o vita

uniforme."²⁰⁸ This definition of love as a *gentile passione* that renders a range of polar states from misery to pleasure echoes similar approaches found in the lyrics of Dante and Petrarch cited above. Though just as likely an influence on Lorenzo's definition is Ficino's mention of the passions of love in the sixth chapter of the second book in *El Libro dell'Amore*.²⁰⁹ Ficino notes the shifts from hot to cold and from timid to audacious in passionate lovers. That Lorenzo defines love in his collection of love sonnets that frequently draw upon and combine Petrarchan and Dantean elements in Ficinian terms gives us yet another motive to read his sonnets with a Ficinian lens.

Another aspect of Lorenzo's commentary that aids our understanding of this poem refers to Ficinian thought as well – the notion of a loss of taste. In the commentary, Lorenzo compares his experience with Simonetta's ever-present memory to an illness that corrupts one's sense of taste and renders all foods the same flavor: "che converte la dolcezza di que' cibi in amaritudine."²¹⁰ No matter the circumstances, whether in a solitary site, green field, by a flowing stream, or in a shaded wood, the sad memory of her death makes everything a bitter experience, just as Ficino had noted that an infirm tongue loses the capacity to taste.²¹¹

As in "Quando el sol giù dall'orizzonte scende," Lorenzo demonstrates a shift from personal to universal experience in "In quale parte andrò io ch'io non truovi" and its commentary

²⁰⁸ *Comento*, 384.

²⁰⁹ In II.VI.8-10 Ficino explains how man's desire for celestial majesty without knowing God himself leads to confusion in which man does not know well what he desires or why he suffers. He notes: "Accade ancora che quegli che sono presi dal laccio d'amore alcuna volta sospirano, alcuna volta s'allegnano. [...] Sentono scambievolmente gli amanti or caldo or freddo. [...] Di frigidità nasce timidità, di calidità nasce audacia; però gl'innamorati altra volta timidi sono e altra volta audaci." The passions of lovers fluctuate often because the lovers alternate between the realizations of destroying themselves and becoming something better.

²¹⁰ *Comento*, 385.

²¹¹ Zanato first makes this connection in *Saggio sul Comento*, 205. He cites Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 713: "Quemadmodum paralytici lingua oppressa quodam humore, certum gustum saporis amittit."

in order to theorize Simonetta's death. An emphasis on individual experience permeates the sonnet through Lorenzo's constant use of first person pronouns. The subject pronoun *io* appears six times, including twice in the opening line, with three additional appearances of *mi* or *me* and two occurrences of the first person possessive adjective *mio*. Lorenzo's language insists on the self and the repetition of the pronouns and adjectives leaves little doubt as to the personalized nature of his tormented experience as he seeks relief from the memory of his lady. His bewildered rhetorical question in verse twelve – "Che debb'io fare omai?" – even alludes to Petrarch's introspection and exploration of the self.²¹²

His commentary, however, demonstrates a theoretical purpose to his poem, more than an individual experience. In the fifth line of his commentary, Lorenzo notes that this sonnet has attempted to flee the memory of her death:

Pare il presente sonetto molto contrario al precedente, perché, come quello fugge ogni generazione di consolazione e pare si pasca e del presente dolore e della speranza d'averlo ancora maggiore, questo mostra avere cerco diverse ragioni di consolazione, e, se bene indarno, molte cose aver provato perché questa acerbissima memoria della morte di colei fuggissi dall'animo.²¹³

Lorenzo's construction of this quoted passage curiously opposes the tendency in the sonnet to accentuate the first person. Lorenzo does not refer to his own memory of her death, but the general or collective memory of her death. More emphatically, he establishes the sonnet itself as the grammatical subject: the preceding sonnet flees consolation while the present sonnet tries many things so that her memory would flee. Referring to the sonnets as agents of action in this manner privileges the poetic exercise over biographical experience.

²¹² The notion of self-reflection and examination runs throughout Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. This particular question cites Petrarch's inquiry in the first verse of component CCLXVIII: "Che debb'io far? che mi consigli, Amore?"

²¹³ *Comento*, 385.

Besides a theoretical experience, the highly subjective distress and action of the sonnet becomes a communal experience in the language of the commentary. His first line of commentary indicates a universal explication of the text:

Non si maraviglierà alcuno, el cuore del quale è suto d'amoroso fuoco acceso, trovando in questi versi diverse passioni e affetti molto l'uno all'altro contrarii. Perché, non essendo amore altro che una gentile passione, sarebbe più presto maraviglia che uno amante avessi mai punto di quiete o vita uniforme.²¹⁴

While demonstrating personalized anguish in the sonnet, Lorenzo reveals its common application to all those whose hearts have burned with love. He notes that it would be more marvelous if a lover, not Lorenzo himself, but *un amante* in general, were to have any moment of serenity.

Lorenzo continues in a vein of shared experience in the subsequent paragraph: "Chi sente eccessivo dolore, comunemente in due modi fa prova di mitigarlo."²¹⁵ The universal response to one who feels pain is to diminish that pain by either assuaging the sorrow with sweetness or driving it away by giving attention to some serious and important matter: "E comunemente s'elegge prima quello rimedio che è più facile e dolce."²¹⁶ This generalized response to pain and repeated indication of "common" experience indicates Lorenzo's move towards universalized explication of the subjective condition of his verse. Again Lorenzo seeks not to vaunt himself above others but to co-participate in the experiences of love.

Lorenzo acknowledges his universalizing tendency in the four poems that constitute the *Argomento* in an explanation at the beginning of his *Nuovo argomento*. These initial four sonnets deal with his sorrow at Simonetta's death, but her death was a shared loss:

²¹⁴ *Comento*, 384.

²¹⁵ *Comento*, 385.

²¹⁶ *Comento*, 385.

Fu adunque la vita e morte di colei che abbiamo detto a me notizia universale de amore e cognizione in confuso che cosa fussi amorosa passione; per la quale universale cognizione divenni poi alla cognizione particolare della mia dolcissima e amorosa pena, come diremmo apresso.²¹⁷

For Lorenzo, Simonetta represented love in a universal manner and understanding a love for Simonetta (his love and collective love) led him to an understanding of his particular painful and sweet love for *his* lady, a move from universal to the particular:

Né è dubio alcuno essere di più facile cognizione le cose in genere che in spezie e particolare; dico secondo il discorso dell'umana intelligenza, la quale non può avere vera diffinitione d'alcuna cosa, se prima non procede la notizia universale di quella.²¹⁸

With this statement it appears that his first four poems intended to present what constitutes amorous passion, in order to better understand it, before moving to his particular experience. Lorenzo has flipped our expectations of a subjective experience of Petrarchan love poetry and turned these sonnets into a primer for love poetry in general. In this light, inverting natural order by beginning with death, a novel feature of Lorenzo's collection of sonnets, is paradoxically also normal and natural.

Lorenzo also describes a purpose for rendering his subjective experience in terms applicable to all men. He states:

E se bene nelli precedenti sonetti sono scritte alcune cose che più tosto paiano di privata e grande passione dettate, mi sforzai, per meglio soddisfare a me medesimo e a quelli che grandissima e privata passione avevono della sua morte, propormi inanzi agli occhi di avere ancora io perduto una carissima cosa e introdurre nella mia fantasia tutti gli affetti che fussino atti a muovere me medesimo, per potere meglio muovere altri.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ *Comento*, 388.

²¹⁸ *Comento*, 388.

²¹⁹ *Comento*, 388.

Lorenzo invokes his personal affections and private passion in order to stir passions in others (as they also mourned). According to this note, the repeated emphasis on the self, as indicated in the discussion of sonnet IV, stirs a communal response in his readers as they relate to his anguished experience. This quotation indicates Lorenzo's conception of a social role of his poetry and further supports the notion that he seeks personal/political empathy from his readers. The sonnets serve as a vehicle of personal experience in order to find common ground with his fellow citizens. In the proem he claims to present his own commentary in order to relieve others of the burden and especially because he knew best the meaning of his poems. Lorenzo instead has created a vehicle for sharing a common experience through universal application of his personal experiences rather than providing singular meaning to his verse.

Returning to the commentary on "In quale parte andrò io ch'io non truovi," after a number of instances of universalizing thoughts, Lorenzo then suddenly reverts to a personal voice: "E però, sentendo *io* l'acerbità di questa memoria, andavo cercando o qualche luogo solitario e ombroso o l'amenità di qualche verde prato... o mi poneva presso a qualche chiara e corrente acqua o all'ombra di qualche verde arbuscello" (emphasis mine).²²⁰ He restates his condition found in verses 5-8 in which the recourse to nature was of no use in alleviating the bitterness that *he* felt. He then applies the Ficinian platitude of the infirm tongue that cannot taste to his own experience, since the memory of his lady did not provide sweetness. He notes as well that driving out the memory of her proves similarly ineffective.

Lorenzo's shift back to a personal mode serves a diegetical and theoretical purpose when he expresses his desire for death (as he did in verses 13-14 of the sonnet). He demonstrates the futility of the common means of relieving bitterness. Thus, only death remained: "E però, non

²²⁰ *Comento*, 385.

potendo né con l'uno né con l'altro modo levarmi da tanta amaritudine e acerbità, non mi restava altro rimedio e speranza che quella della morte."²²¹ Lorenzo's commentary in this sonnet indicated a communal experience because all of Florence shared a love for Simonetta. Lorenzo rendered it a theoretical experience because loving her was not his own biographical experience, but an opportunity to comment on a human experience with earthly beauty. Lorenzo sought for death here at the conclusion of the *Argomento* not as an exit from misery, but as a means of moving beyond earthly beauty, which had become flavorless. More significantly, his desire for death to this experience signals his move forward in his own experience with his lady in subsequent sonnets in his collection.

In the *Nuovo argomento*, Lorenzo wanders through an incomplete set of sonnets that lack a fully cohesive interpretation like those of the *Argomento*. We do find, however, an emphasis on his particular lady, Lucrezia Donati, instead of the popularly beloved Simonetta. In these sonnets, though, he continues a practice that we observed in his first section: combining Petrarchan and Dantean citations and characteristics within a Ficinian frame. These features appear in his sixth sonnet – "Spesso mi torna a mente, anzi già mai" – in addition to the beginning of a new attention on his lady's eyes in the commentary.

Spesso mi torna a mente, anzi già mai
 si può parir della memoria mia,
 l'abito, el tempo, e 'l loco quando pria
 la mia donna gentil fiso mirai.

Quel che paressi allora, Amor, tu 'l sai,
 che con lei sempre fusti in compagnia:
 quanto vaga, gentil, leggiadra e pia,
 né si può dir né imaginare assai.

Quando sopra e nevosi e alti monti
 Apollo spande el suo bel lume addorno,

²²¹ *Comento*, 386.

tali e crin' suoi sopra alla bianca gonna.

El tempo e 'l loco non conviene ch'io conti,
ché dove è sì bel sole è sempre giorno
e paradiso ov'è sì bella donna.

Lorenzo's sonnet recounts the first encounter he had with his lady, a moment that can never leave his memory, which evokes Petrarch's "Benedetto sia 'l giorno, e 'l mese, e l'anno," component LXI of his *Canzoniere*. This returning memory of his lady and their first meeting, an extolling of her spiritual beauty – her unimaginable loveliness, gentleness, gracefulness, and piety (7), a physical description emphasizing her hair (11), and an employment of polysyndeton in the service of describing Lorenzo's encounter all highlight the Petrarchan nature of the sonnet.²²²

Even with this unmistakably Petrarchan imprint, Lorenzo's first verse also echoes the first verse of the sixteenth component of Dante's *Vita Nuova*: "Spesse fiate vengonmi a la mente." In the commentary, Lorenzo specifically cites the second canzone of Dante's *Convivio* (verses 59-60) to corroborate his claim of his lady's ineffable beauty: "Quello che paressi agli occhi miei era a me molto difficile o immaginare o referire, perché le bellezze sue, come dice Dante, 'soverchiono lo nostro intelletto, come raggio di sole in fraile viso'".²²³ Directly quoting Dante, and even mentioning him by name, in the commentary of his Petrarchan-modeled sonnet

²²² In Lorenzo's sonnet, the use of polysyndeton appears in the third verse in which Lorenzo relates that her dress, the time, and the place of this encounter cannot leave his mind. Orvieto presents the verse as "l'abito, el tempo, e 'l loco quando pria / la mia donna gentil fiso mirai." In this case, I prefer Zanato's rendition in his critical edition from 1991: "l'abito e il tempo e il loco dove pria / la mia donna gentil fiso mirai." This version, with an additional conjunction, more closely renders the structural similarity with Petrarch's abundance of conjunctions in "Benedetto sia 'l giorno e 'l mese et l'anno" and also mirrors the use of conjunctions in the commentary: "Erano adunque nella memoria mia quasi perpetuamente presenti lo abito, del quale era adorna la mia donna, e el luogo e 'l tempo quando prima fiso mirai negli occhi suoi" (396).

²²³ *Comento*, 397.

demonstrates Lorenzo's persistent desire to foreground these Florentine masters and to fuse elements of their work into his own.

Evidence of Lorenzo's Ficinian philosophical approach is more apparent in the commentary to "Spesso mi torna a mente, anzi già mai" rather than within the sonnet itself. Lorenzo states that he had seen his lady's eyes on previous occasions, but he hadn't "known" them because he had not yet gazed upon them. He continues: "E quando prima gli mirai fiso, fu dopo la cognizione di tanto bene, dopo la quale *immediate* e necessariamente tutto di loro m'accesi, perché prima precede la cognizione e poi lo amore."²²⁴ This statement of order – one first gains knowledge of something before he can love it – represents a simple Platonic hierarchy that Ficino relates in *El libro dell'Amore*.²²⁵ This process of knowing and then loving informs Lorenzo's experience of his first opportunity to gaze upon his lady as reported in his sonnet; it also demonstrates how he sets that sonnet, with its Petrarchan theme and Dantean references, within a Ficinian-Neoplatonic philosophical frame.

The function of eyes in Lorenzo's experience with his beloved emerges as another key Ficinian-Neoplatonic element in "Spesso mi torna a mente, anzi già mai." The sonnet centers on the poet's gaze; the memory that often returns to Lorenzo is of the dress, time, and place of the first time he truly gazed upon his beloved. As just discussed, this focus on his gaze has a philosophical root in the process of knowing and loving his lady; yet it is unexpected to find the focus in the sonnet on the function of the poet's eyes since in his poetic model the lady's eyes prove more operative. Petrarch blesses the occasion in which Laura's eyes are the active agent

²²⁴ *Comento*, 397.

²²⁵ In IV.VI.6-7, Ficino states this sequence in rather convoluted terms: "Quegli che cognoscono Iddio non gli piacciono però per questo, se poi non l'amano. Quegli che lo cognoscono e amano sono amati da Dio, non perché lo cognoschino ma perché l'amano." For Ficino, knowing and loving pair together, but knowledge comes first.

that has bound him: "[...] duo begli occhi che legato m'anno" (4). It is further surprising to notice no mention of Lucrezia's eyes within Lorenzo's sonnet considering he mentions them directly six times within the commentary: repeating the memory of her dress, the time and place of the first time he gazed upon her, adding that he gazed into her eyes; stating that he already knew of the beauty of her eyes; mentioning that he had seen her eyes previously, but had not gazed into them; claiming that Love resided in her eyes; extolling the splendor of her hair, while noting how much more brightly shone her eyes; and comparing her eyes to the sun. Despite mentioning the power of her eyes, Lorenzo does not describe that power or the role of his lady's eyes other than as a locus of beauty.

The *Nuovo argomento* offers some insights on the emphasis Lorenzo places on his beloved's eyes as a place of Love and death. In this introduction to the second part of his collection, Lorenzo narrates his quest to find a lady worthy of a true and constant love. At a public festival there was one among the ladies whose *somma bellezza* and *dolci e attrattivi sembianti* captured his attention and led him to declare: "Se questa fussi di quella dilicatezza, ingegno e modi che fu quella morta che abbiamo detta, certo in costei e la bellezza e vaghezza e forza degli occhi è molto maggiore."²²⁶ Lorenzo includes another witness that confirmed the extreme beauty of her eyes and claims that they verify Dante's statement in the second canzone of his *Convivio*: "Ella vi reca amor come a suo loco." The key to my reading of Lorenzo's emphasis on his lady's eyes appears in the next line: "Veramente quando la natura gli creò, non fece solamente dua occhi, ma el vero luogo dove stessi Amore e insieme la morte." This claim that her eyes hold both Love and death emblemizes the Neoplatonic experience of Lorenzo's love sonnets in the second part of his *Comento*. Death to the physical world (or to the sensations

²²⁶ *Comento*, 389.

of the physical world) precedes ascension to a higher experience with "true" or divine beauty. In sonnet XII – "Poscia che 'l bene avventurato core" – Lorenzo explains that his lady's eyes enact this death to superficial experience.

In "Poscia che 'l bene avventurato core," Lorenzo recounts how desire for the beauty of his beloved tormented his heart, which had caused him to heave so many sighs. Lorenzo had just concluded the preceding sonnet, "Se il fortunato cor, quando è più presso," by claiming that the nature of sighs is to cool the heart of a man who yearns to die: "per refrigerio a quel che morir brama" (14). This desire for death – again, a death to a base, physical world as an access route to "true" beauty – is enacted by his lady's eyes, as Lorenzo describes their effect on his heart in "Poscia che 'l bene avventurato core:"

Il cor, dagli occhi a questo bene eletto,
fatto è per lor virtù tanto gentile,
che più cosa mortal non brama o prezza.

E benché abbin cacciato fuor del petto
quelli occhi ogni pensier vulgare e vile,
né torna a me, né brama altra bellezza. (9-14)

His lady's eyes purified his heart so that it no longer craved or valued that which is mortal, removing all vulgar and vile thoughts. Lorenzo repeats *bramare* in verses eleven and fourteen to emphasize this natural appetite or craving that he has overcome. His heart yearned for his lady's "true" beauty. Lorenzo's focus on his lady's eyes surfaces repeatedly in his *Comento*, and this Ficinian-Neoplatonic conceit of a death to the sense that precedes ascension to "true" beauty underlies the structure of his collection.²²⁷

²²⁷ In sonnets VII, VIII, and IX Lorenzo extols the beauty and power of his lady's eyes. Sonnet VII, "Occhi, voi siate pur dentro al mio core" begins with his lady's eyes and Lorenzo expresses his desire to send her eyes away from his heart and to carry a message of his paradoxical torment and solace to Lucrezia. In Sonnet VIII, "Quel che il proprio valore e forza eccede," Lorenzo laments that pity does not accompany her powerful glance. In Sonnet IX, "Occhi, io sospiro come vuole Amore," Lorenzo addresses his own eyes and laments his heart's misery because it cannot possess the object of its desire whereas his eyes delight at seeing *his lady's eyes*, which are the most excellent

The notion of a death to the natural senses recurs in sonnets XXII and XXIII. Sonnet XXII, "Ponete modo al pianto, occhi mia lassi," consists of a dialogue between the sonnet itself and Lorenzo's eyes. The sonnet tells his eyes not to weep or be fearful since they soon will see that angelic face of his lady. His eyes respond by affirming the power of her eyes, comparing them to the power of the eyes of a basilisk – if they rest upon him, they will either turn him to stone or cause his death. The sonnet questions his hesitancy and desire to which his eyes respond that it is natural to fear death, but this death will be sweet. Lorenzo repeats the awe of the power of his lady's eyes in the commentary: "...così dubitano gli occhi miei non potere sopportare lo sguardo della donna mia, la quale, se fiso gli mirassi, o farebbe priete degli occhi come del resto del corpo, o converria l'anima expirassi e la vita si partissi."²²⁸ In this sonnet and its commentary, Lorenzo affirms the capacity of his lady's eyes to kill with their glance. In his commentary, Lorenzo suggests that seeking this sweet death is emblematic of the process of the lover becoming the beloved, but it also represents the necessary step of abandoning a sensual experience of the physical realm.

Lorenzo's commentary to sonnet XXIII reiterates that death leads to life. His sonnet, "Sì dolcemente la mia donna chiama," makes multiple references to Dante's *Vita Nuova* and Petrarch's *Canzoniere* as he explains how sweetly his lady calls upon death and how it relieves his soul of base desires. In the commentary, Lorenzo states explicitly that this death of which he speaks in the sonnet will lead to life:

E a me è paruto dovere fare questa preparazione nella esposizione del presente sonetto, avendo a narrare una cosa che forse pare impossibile, e nondimento è

object they could hope to see.

²²⁸ *Comento*, 463.

vera; perché il sonetto non intende altro che provare come el desiderio della morte è cagione *immediate* della vita.²²⁹ (emphasis Lorenzo's)

Abandoning corruptible desires of what is experienced through the senses leads to new experience or new life. This notion of death to the physical senses that leads to ascension to the Platonic realm provides both the structure and content of much of Lorenzo's collection. It dovetails well with the concept of the lover's interior image of his lady, another Ficinian-Neoplatonic conceit that we discussed in the previous chapter on Lorenzo's sonnets in the *Raccolta Aragonese* and that appears within his *Comento* as well.

Lorenzo makes brief mention of an interior image of his lady when describing the purification process that his beloved's powerful eyes wrought on his heart in the commentary to sonnet XII - "Poscia che 'l bene avventurato core." Lorenzo explains how her eyes ennobled his roughly hewn heart and rid himself of baseness: "Per muoverlo a questo purgai la mente e el petto mio di ogni cosa vile e vulgare per mezzo pure di quelli occhi, la perfezione de' quali, portata in me dagli occhi miei, si restò nella imaginazione."²³⁰ As Cook notes, *imaginazione* refers to a process of creating an image of the beloved lady that remains within or imprinted on the heart of the lover.²³¹

Ficino describes this procedure of making an image in *El libro dell'Amore* VI.VI, which discusses the process of becoming enamored:

Piglia ancora per gli instrumenti de' sensi le imagine de' corpi di fuori, le quali imagine non si possono appiccare nell'anima, però che la sustantia incorporea, che è più eccellente ch'e corpi, non può essere formata dalloro per la receptione delle imagine, ma l'anima, essendo presente allo spirito in ogni parte, agevolmente vede le imagine de' corpi come in uno specchio in esso rilucenti... Le imagine

²²⁹ *Comento*, 467.

²³⁰ *Comento*, 417-78.

²³¹ Cook, 115.

concepute in questo luogo conserva la memoria, e per queste è spesso incitato l'occhio dello intellecto a riguardare le idee universali di tutte le cose, le quali in sé contiene.

By use of his senses, a lover can receive the image of his beloved and create an interior image of her that can remain in his memory and that can incite his intellect to consider universal ideas (i.e. not just *her* beauty, but the highest beauty of God). Lorenzo demonstrates that he has performed this process of creating an image of his lady at the onset of his commentary on "Occhi, voi siate pur dentro al mio cuore," sonnet VII of his collection: "Era già per li occhi miei discesa al core la imagine delle bellezza di costei, e gli occhi suoi avevono fatto in esso tale impressione, che sempre gli erono presenti."²³² Lorenzo had received an image of his lady's beauty that descended to his heart; with the power of her eyes, that image affixed itself (even made an impression) so that her eyes, her beauty, and her image were always present within him. This interior image of his lady plays a vital role in components XXIV, XXVI, and XXXV in which Lorenzo demonstrates another aspect of the Ficinian-Neoplatonic foundation of his love sonnets.

In these sonnets, Lorenzo vacillates between whether this interior image of his lady is a representation of her natural, mortal form or a metaphysical Neoplatonic ideal. His approach leaves me more inclined to judge it not as indecision but as both – a conjunction of two representations. An analysis of sonnet 24 – "Allor ch'io penso di dolermi alquanto" – illustrates this conjunction of representations in the interior image:

Allor ch'io penso di dolermi alquanto
de' pianti e de' sospir' mia teco, Amore,
mirando per pietà l'afflitto core,
l'imagin veggo di quel viso santo.

E parmi allor sì bella e dolce tanto,
che vergognoso el primo pensier more:

²³² *Comento*, 399.

nascene uno altro poi, ch'è un ardore
di ringraziarla, e le sue laude canto.

La bella imagin che laudar si sente,
come dice il pensier che lei sol mira,
sen fa più bella e più pietosa assai.

Quinci surge un disio nuovo in la mente
di veder quella che ode, parla e spira,
e torno a voi, lucenti e dolci rai.

In the first quatrain, Lorenzo tells Love that at times when he thinks of regretting his cries and sighs, he gazes upon his afflicted heart and sees the image of that holy face. We find an emphasis on sight in these verses with two verbs – *mirando* and *veggo* – directly referring to Lorenzo looking and a reference to the interior image – *l'imagin* – of his beloved in his heart. With *core* and *amore* in rhyme, Lorenzo focuses our attention on the locus of the image of his lady and on him who has brought her there. *Santo* as modifier, in rhyme position at the end of the quatrain, suggests the gravity of the role of the image of his lady's face and also multiplies the reference of *quel viso* to more than just one face.

In the second quatrain, Lorenzo explains how his original thought – regret for the lamentable state of his afflicted heart – dies and a greater thought is born. This new thought fills him with ardor to thank the image of his lady and to sing her praises. With *more* in rhyming position with *ardore*, Lorenzo again emphasizes this notion of death to a lower level of experience as a step toward a higher plane. In this case, Lorenzo's self-pity and anguish die and he ascends to a new focus of care and thought on his beloved. By concluding the quatrain with a self-referential statement like "e le sue laude canto," Lorenzo includes the process of creating this love sonnet as an expression of his gratitude and extolling of his beloved.

The turn of the sonnet lacks a clear rhetorical marker such as "but" or "alas;" instead, Lorenzo shifts the subject of the sonnet from the first person singular to the interior image. He

begins this first tercet with a verse – "La bella imagin che laudar si sente" – that Orvieto considers to be a clear reference to verse five of Dante's "Tanto gentile e tanto onesto pare" in his Vita Nuova: "Ella si va, sentendosi laudare." Dante's beloved and the interior image of Lorenzo's lady both experience or hear their praises sung. In Lorenzo's case, his thought focused solely on the image of his lady renders it/her even more lovely and merciful.

In the final tercet, a new desire surges in his mind – an intellectualized desire or contemplation – to see his actual lady (she who hears, speaks, and breathes), instead of her image. In the concluding verse, Lorenzo addresses his lady's eyes – *lucenti e dolci rai* – and states that he returns to them. Perhaps as we may expect after finding a reference to Dantean verse in the previous tercet, this tercet concludes with an allusion to verse twenty-five of component XXII of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*: "Prima ch'i' torni a voi, lucenti stelle."

The reference in verse four to *quel viso santo* indicates that the interior image of Lorenzo's lady is a reflection of more than one source of beauty. In the commentary to the sonnet, Lorenzo refers to his lady's face as the source of the interior image:

E se bene nel cuore erano dipinte molte passioni e tormenti, pure maggiore impressione aveva fatto in esso la imagine del viso della madonna mia; el quale, essendo bellissimo e, sì come era il vero, molto lucente e chiaro, e per la bellezza e per la luce tirò gli occhi miei e gli sforzò a rimirare quella immagine, levando loro la visione delle pene del cuore.²³³

Noting that Lorenzo refers to the "true" form of his lady's face – *il vero* – then we might justifiably conclude that it is the Neoplatonic ideal form of his lady's beauty that his interior image reflects (not her mortal face) and that causes his regret and pain to die, inspiring gratitude and praise. In addition, *quel viso santo* also refers to the holy face of God. The beauty of the "true" form of Lorenzo's lady is in harmony with and reflects God's supreme beauty.

²³³ *Comento*, 471.

Lorenzo's inclusion of the role of his mortal lady in forming this image and in stoking Lorenzo's desire adds another compelling source of the interior image of his lady. Throughout his *Comento*, Lorenzo has cast the experience of his senses and of mortality as a crude experience to be overcome. In the commentary of just two sonnets prior – XXII "Ponete modo al pianto, occhi mia lassi" – Lorenzo addresses the combined torment and joy of amorous thoughts, his view that the world is composed of opposites, and especially the notion that our intellects and our bodies are always at odds: "... credo sia facile ad intendere che sempre la mente e intelletto nostro ha oppositi e inimici e sensi e le passioni corporali (che così conviene che sia, essendo di natura molto contrarii lo intelletto e il corpo)."²³⁴ However, in sonnet XXIV he describes a surging desire to see his mortal lady – she who hears, speaks, and breathes. We must note that this desire to see his mortal lady springs from his mind (12), thus implying a process of sensing and then intellectualizing the beauty of his mortal lady in order to create the interior image of her. Ficino describes just such a process in the sixth chapter of the sixth book of *El libro dell'amore*: the image of mortal beauty enters into the soul of the lover through the eyes and the lover forms an image of her beauty in his heart, recognizing the congruence with the image of its creator – the supreme beauty of God.

This desire to see his living and breathing lady rehabilitates the role of mortal beauty within Lorenzo's *Comento*. That one must die in terms of the senses does not necessarily relegate mortal things to the dustbin of the vulgar and worthless – mortal beauty can prompt ascension to "true" beauty. Curiously, the interior image of his lady incites a desire within Lorenzo to want to see both her true beauty and her mortal beauty. Lorenzo refers to both forms of beauty when explaining this desire in his commentary: "Questo nuovo disire adunque mi

²³⁴ *Comento*, 461.

muove a vedere la donna mia viva e vera."²³⁵ I consider the conjunction "and" in the expression *viva e vera* to refer to living, mortal donna (*viva*) and to her ideal form (*vera*) instead of an accumulative conjunction of two modifiers for one form of her beauty. Both of these forms of beauty are reflected in the interior image of his lady, which Lorenzo describes as "dolcissimo essempla" of the supreme beauty of God, which beauty the interior image of his lady spurred him to see: "mi mosse a vedere quella bellissima cosa."²³⁶ Indeed, his desire to see his living lady indicates a desire to catch another fleeting glimpse of supreme beauty. In the final verse of the sonnet, after stating the desire of his mind to see *quella che ode, parla e spira*, Lorenzo addresses and returns to his lady's eyes – those same eyes that initiate the process of dying to things of the senses (stimulating contemplative ascension).

Lorenzo also employs the concept of the interior image of his lady in sonnet XXVI; like in sonnet XXIV, this image of his lady increases his desire to see her "true" beauty in ideal form. In sonnet XXVI – "Quando la bella imagine Amore pose" – Lorenzo explains that the virtues and grace of this interior image have driven out other yearnings. After vain attempts to see her eyes, he retreats to his thoughts, which graciously reveal to him his lady in the center of his heart. The strength of his sighs mitigates the flame that would otherwise turn his heart to ash.

As we have come to expect for sonnets centering on the interior image of his beloved, Lorenzo privileges this image on his heart, however, he does so without disparaging his mortal experience. Indeed, Lorenzo seeks his lady's presence: "Lasso or se con le luci lacrimose / invan cerco le luci che ho perdute / dalli occhi al pensier fuggo" (5-7). In her absence, Lorenzo turns inward to contemplate the image of his lady on his heart. He first sought out, however, her

²³⁵ *Comento*, 473.

²³⁶ *Comento*, 473.

presence, to behold her mortal eyes. As mentioned previously, gazing on her eyes begins a process in which Lorenzo abandons his senses and glimpses her ideal beauty. In this case, lacking that possibility, Lorenzo turns his thoughts to the image on his heart. Similar to seeing his mortal lady, thinking on her image in his heart increases his desire to see her "true" beauty: "... la immagine della cosa amata multiplica el desiderio della vera."²³⁷

In sonnet XXXV – "Se io volgo or qua or là gli occhi miei lassi" – Lorenzo looks to the image in his heart as the spur to his ascension to view her ideal beauty. His tormented eyes never find peace without seeing his lady, "quel ben che sol mi piace" (2). Lorenzo's response to the absence of his lady is to focus his thoughts:

Onde pel meglio e lacrimosi e bassi
li tengo, e la mia lingua afflitta tace,
e 'l piè nel primo suo vestigio iace,
ciascun pensiero al cor restretto stassi. (5-8)

He lowers his eyes, stops walking, and utters no words – indicating a withdrawal from the physical realm as he focuses every thought on his heart. Just as he searched "qua or là" to find her with his eyes, Lorenzo displays considerable diligence to find his lady in thought. Lorenzo finds his lady (her image) through extinguishing the external and giving more strength to his thoughts. He comments on how this interior image reflects her "true" beauty: "E però quasi di necessità e pensieri miei, ristretti al core, contemplavano la donna mia, nel core da Amore scolpita, nel quale la vedevano e bellissima e gentile, come era veramente."²³⁸ Just as in sonnets XXIV and XXVI, Lorenzo notes that his desire to see his lady's ideal beauty grew from a contemplation of her image: "perché la bellezza della donna mia, che nel core a' miei pensieri si

²³⁷ *Comento*, 479.

²³⁸ *Comento*, 509.

mostrava, faceva nascere el desiderio della vera."²³⁹ In the concluding tercet, Lorenzo experiences a death to his senses and a fleeting glimpse of his beloved's "true" beauty as he contemplates her image in his heart:

Tacito e solo il mio bel cor vagheggio;
e in quel si parte e fugge con la vita;
né vivo resto o morto allor, ma peggio. (12-14)

That fleeting glimpse of his beloved leaves him neither fully dead nor completely alive, but worse, as he remains in a state of torment due to her physical absence and the short-lived ascension that her image initiated.

Lorenzo's interior image of his lady is an ambiguous representation of multiple sources of beauty that proves to be a fruitful conceit for portraying complex philosophical notions within the constrained parameters of a sonnet. It also serves as another example of Lorenzo's tendency to conjoin disparate approaches or concepts – in this case, mortal and "true" forms of beauty. The tradition of an interior image of a lady on the lover's heart comes to Lorenzo through a long line of Italian poets, many of them stilnovists; however, by employing it within a Ficinian-Neoplatonic philosophical framework, he has innovated within that tradition. It is possible that Lorenzo's treatment of the interior image, and especially the notion that Lucrezia's mortal beauty could spur contemplation and ascent to divine beauty, within his Ficinian-Neoplatonic lens had even been subdued to a degree in late revisions of his *Comento* to deemphasize this conjunction of the mortal and sublime.²⁴⁰ Regardless, this connection remains an essential part of Lorenzo's

²³⁹ *Comento*, 510.

²⁴⁰ Orvieto proposes the possibility of a different (even more Neoplatonic) version of the *Comento* than the version available to us now. He suggests that the Neoplatonic contemplation of God enabled by an earthly spur may have been diluted in the last decade of Lorenzo's life in order to represent a more orthodox Christian view. See "Nota introduttiva," *Comento*, 341-52.

work, as does the integral process of dying (as to physical things that can be sensed) in order to live.

The *Comento* contains many examples of the unnatural process of death leading to life, but I would like to return again to a quotation from Lorenzo's commentary to sonnet XXIII – "Si dolcemente la mia donna chiama." He mentions how often we see things occur that seemed impossible, yet are true. He cites as an example the improbability that out of a tiny grape seed a grapevine may emerge full of colorful and odiferous fruit. With love, he claims, we must believe that miracles are possible. With this introduction, he claims for himself an experience that appears impossible:

E a me è paruto dovere fare questa preparazione nella esposizione del presente sonetto, avendo a narrare una cosa che forse pare impossibile, e nondimeno è vera; perché il sonetto non intende altro che provare come el desiderio della morte è cagione *immediate* della vita.²⁴¹

Indeed, in the sonnet, his lady's amorous sighs kindle within Lorenzo a desire for death – a death that yields a communion with "true" beauty.

Lorenzo's explanation of this phenomenon in terms of *impossibilia* emphasizes the chasm between life and death that he overcomes by reversing their natural order. I argue that this combination of disparate concepts is a hallmark of Lorenzo's *Comento* and the Ficinian-Neoplatonic philosophical basis of his love sonnets. Lorenzo draws upon disparate poetic models, from Dante and Petrarch, by adopting structural elements such as Petrarch's subjective sonnets and Dante's exegetical commentary on love lyrics. He draws upon these Florentine greats, but places them in a new philosophical context. Lorenzo draws upon what appears to be personal experience in his verses, but seeks universal application in his commentary in an attempt to establish a shared experience with his audience. Simonetta's heralded mortal beauty

leads to Lucrezia's supernatural beauty. The interior image of Lorenzo's beloved reflects both the mortal beauty of his lady that he has internalized and the ideal or "true" beauty of his lady (itself a reflection of God's supreme beauty). These combinations of contrasting experiences and qualities are accounted for within a Ficinian-Neoplatonic philosophical approach in Lorenzo's love sonnets that bridges the lacunae between these concepts.

In a less expected sense of overcoming what Machiavelli claimed was an impossible conjunction of Lorenzo's roles as poet and politician, Lorenzo's *Comento* represents the utilization of metaphysical love sonnets for practical and self-serving political benefit. After the governmental reforms he initiated in 1480, Lorenzo had taken on near-dictatorial control of Florentine affairs. He needed to eradicate any tyrannical imagery that could be associated with such political power and he utilized Ficinian love sonnets to do it. Instead of attempting to distract his fellow citizens with metaphysical contemplation or seeking their acquiescence to him as a philosopher-king, Lorenzo rooted his metaphysical poetry in terms of a shared experience with love and in his own service to the state.²⁴² Lorenzo applied otherworldly poetry to his pressing domestic political concern of not appearing to exalt himself above other Florentines in the ruling class.

²⁴¹ *Comento*, 467.

²⁴² In his dissertation, James Coleman posits that Lorenzo's turn to Ficinian poetry in his philosophical poem *De Summo Bono* (1473-74) and especially in his treatment of Ficinian solar theology in *Selve* (1473-74, 1486) indicated a loose association to Lorenzo's projection of himself as an enlightened philosopher-king that would appeal to the intellectual elite of Florence. James Keil Coleman, "Orphic Poetics and the Intellectual Life of Lorenzo de' Medici's Circle" Diss. (Yale University, 2010) 66-131. I, instead, have argued that Lorenzo employed his Ficinian sonnets and their commentary in order to appeal to the democratic ideals of Florence's citizenry.

Conclusion

Lorenzo de' Medici spent his life in the limelight. He had been groomed from birth to fulfill his family's dynastic ambitions and to become the leading citizen of Florence. He had been the public face of the Medici since a very young age. Because his family had risen to the ranks of the most prestigious Florentine families, because he provided the youthful promise of the Medici family's future, and because he had become the "hope of the city" at his grandfather's death, his public deeds were political statements. With respect to literary, linguistic, philosophical, and artistic culture, he was able to maintain and advance the renowned and honored traditions of the past and attempted to redirect the trajectory of those traditions into the future with Medici branding.

In *Nencia da Barberino*, Lorenzo described the passionate desires of a shepherd from the Mugello region to the north of Florence. His deft combination of a naturalistic depiction of a shepherd's lifestyle with a parody of courtly love poetry emblemizes his approach of adopting and then altering the path of a literary tradition. He took the enamored shepherd out of the idealized *locus amoenus*, placed him in a country setting with the daily chores of a shepherd, and added parodic effusive praise of the shepherd's love interest through outlandish comparisons. His new combination spawned an offshoot genre of the pastoral tradition that encompassed two hundred years of popular rustic poetry all inspired by and deriving from *Nencia da Barberino*.

Throughout *Nencia da Barberino*, Lorenzo presents his elite Florentine readers with a choice, either to sympathize with the obsessive and amiable shepherd and his lovely lady or to laugh scornfully at their lack of sophistication. At the conclusion of the poem, the reality of the responsibilities of country life requires the shepherd to leave the sight of his muse to tend to his flocks and herds. It appears that the hegemonic culture of cultivated love poetry had tidily

tucked away this uncouth outsider. In the *Raccolta Aragonese*, Lorenzo attempted to appropriate that cultural hegemony for which Florence is revered and utilize it for his personal political gain.

In his own poems included in the *Raccolta Aragonese* Lorenzo combined allusions to Petrarchan and Dantean styles, themes, and forms in order to build his poetic authority. To put his mark on the tradition of vernacular love poetry, he adapted his poetic models to a framework of Ficinian Neoplatonic philosophy. Lorenzo's new approach did not lastingly alter the trends of vernacular lyric poetry, but the artifact of the collection of poems still contributed to forming Lorenzo's poetic and political authority. Lorenzo had assembled a collection of the greatest Florentine love poetry and inserted his own poems; he appropriated Florence's illustrious poetic tradition and fused it with his own identity.

This collection that he sent outside the confines of Tuscany to Federico d'Aragona in the Neapolitan court was a representation of Lorenzo's public persona in which he had identified himself with Florence's prestigious cultural reputation. As a private citizen in a republican government, Lorenzo possessed no title of nobility. Florence's cultural prestige – which he appropriated as *his* prestige – provided the personal political cachet that compensated for Lorenzo's lack of a noble title. Lorenzo did not simply assemble a collection of the greatest Tuscan vernacular love poetry to oblige his friend in Naples; the collection served to raise his own profile by association. Within the city of Florence, though, instead of appearing to be the ruler of a grand center of cultural riches, Lorenzo needed to avoid the appearance of exalting himself above his peers in the patrician class. Hence his utilization of *Comento de' miei sonetti* to emphasize his service to the state and to bond with his readers as fellow sufferers of love's afflictions.

Lorenzo's *Comento de' miei sonetti* displayed a curious combination of poetic

models: Petrarchan sonnets with Dantesque self-exegesis. Insofar as Lorenzo models his sonnets in the *Comento* on the stylistic form and existential itinerary of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, Lorenzo's enterprise can be characterized as a "poetics of self." At the same time, the poet's commentary on his verses aspired towards a universal application of personal experience, integrating what I call a "poetics of state." In this sense, Lorenzo's universalizing commentary on his subjective poetry projected Lorenzo the individual as an embodiment of the Florentine state, but for domestic political purposes.

In a context in which Lorenzo had obtained more power within the Florentine government, his *Comento* manifests an active pursuit of portraying the image of a normal citizen to balance the potential despotic stench that might accompany his increased control. He sought to fashion an accessible personality by openly explicating his thoughts and experiences captured in his sonnets. He was not seeking to elevate himself; the universalizing drive in his commentary served to equate him with all members of Florence's governing class. His explanations of love's torment elicited empathy from all who had experienced love's pain and by recounting the Pazzi Conspiracy, he sought sympathy for the pain he had experienced because of his love for the state.

Lorenzo de' Medici's relationship to the poetic tradition was not solely aesthetic, but political. I characterize his approach as an appropriation of the renown and the authority of past Florentine greats and a redirection of that tradition with innovative touches of his own. By doing so, I have argued that Lorenzo sought to integrate the cultural identity of Florence with his own identity for his political gain. How might others have perceived his combination of the poetic and the political, and the personal and the collective, in an attempt to embody the state and its cultural prestige? To address this question, let us return to where we began – Machiavelli's

assessment of Lorenzo's *impossibile congiunzione* of his political and poetic personas.

Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine* consists of a description of previous republics; it loosely covers the period from the decline of the Roman Republic through the fifteenth century. Each of the eight chapters begins with a general introduction that serves less as historical context than as an opportunity to praise ancient virtues and to lament their absence in the period addressed in the chapter. In chapter eight, Machiavelli recounts Florentine affairs under the direction of Lorenzo de' Medici, and he focuses on the military ineptitude of Florence and her territories while demonstrating Lorenzo's abilities to maintain peace and gain the affection of the Florentine people. The final section of this concluding chapter praises Lorenzo by describing how he made himself, and his city, great. Machiavelli described the marriages and other opportunities Lorenzo aligned for his family; he also indicated the projects Lorenzo ordered to make the city even more beautiful, including Lorenzo's love of art, architecture, music and poetry and how he sponsored artists and men of letters. Machiavelli indicated that Lorenzo was praised for his prudence, eloquence, wisdom, and decisiveness, and no vice hindered his virtues; all of his enterprises were prosperous, and he was admired in Florence, throughout Italy, and beyond. This entire section seems perfectly appropriate for an encomium of a great Florentine ruler.

Machiavelli continued by stating that Lorenzo often joined with his children in their amusements: "Tantoché, a considerare in quello e la vita leggera e la grave, si vedeva in lui essere due persone diverse quasi con impossibile congiunzione congiunte." Within this context, it appears that Machiavelli praised Lorenzo for his rare ability to conjoin seriousness and amusement. Beyond the surface this seemingly innocuous comment becomes a much more critical statement. This conjunction of two personages – one of *vita leggera* and another of *vita grave* – represents a more significant combination that represents a blending of political and

artistic pursuits (or, with more specific regard to Lorenzo's own production, political and poetic pursuits).²⁴³

Superficially, Machiavelli appears to laud Lorenzo, but it does not prove to be a very explicit commendation. The term *quasi* first raises doubts about the magnitude and the sincerity of the praise. As an adverb of similitude, *quasi* suggests that Lorenzo appeared "as though" two personages combined in one. But *quasi* may also suggest that the combination is not complete, thus weakening the statement. Adding *quasi* to the stated impossibility of the combination of *leggera* and *grave* personas undercuts the statement as a compliment; instead of the connotation of *impossibile* as the rare and phenomenal instance of possibility, it reads more like Machiavelli, in fact, does not believe in the possibility of their combination. To claim that these two personas are "conjoined" further underscores a disconnect between them. A *congiunzione* connotes that the personas remain separate entities that are placed together; no unity of the two is implied. The result is a craftily composed declaration that purposefully undercuts its apparent praise.

An intricate statement such as this one contrasts the straightforward style often associated with Machiavelli's writings.²⁴⁴ Various factors might contribute to Machiavelli's unexpected

²⁴³ As a footnote to Machiavelli's text, Alessandro Montevercchi states: "È questo il principale elemento critico e vivace di un ritratto che è complessivamente improntato alla più intensa retorica elogiativa, di schietta estrazione umanistica. È anche ben colta la complessità polivalente di questo perfetto uomo di stato e umanista" (759). I am not convinced that Machiavelli's judgment describes Lorenzo as the perfect "uomo di stato e umanista." His statement is too equivocal to claim such praise.

²⁴⁴ Fredi Chiappelli, a scholar of Machiavelli's language usage, attests to this point with regards to Machiavelli's theoretical works and to his official correspondence: "I più frequenti moduli di costruito che il Machiavelli tende a prescegliere per incanalare il suo pensiero, sul piano della proposizione singola, mostrano una tendenza generale commune, che è quella di esprimere un dato nella forma ad un tempo più assoluta e più concreta." Chiappelli, *Nuovi studi sul linguaggio del Machiavelli*, (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1969) 72. For a work like *Il Principe*, a concrete and absolutizing language mirrors Machiavelli's intention to focus on what is real and not on what ought to be with his advice. Machiavelli's theoretical writing espouses a dilemmatic approach, signaling extreme possibilities with no middle ground. Federico Chabod characterizes this style with the expression *tertium non datur* and claims: "si trapassa da una soluzione e da un metodo al metodo e alla soluzione opposti, senza compromessi." Chabod, *Scritti sul Machiavelli, Opere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1964) 200. Mario Puppo indicates that the resultant prose acquires a dichotomous style. Puppo, "Appunti sulla sintassi del Machiavelli," *Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medievale*. 7 (1965) 911. The same holds true even in hypothetical situations in *Il Principe* for which Machiavelli may only suggest two completely divergent possible courses of action in order to prescribe the one "correct" choice. Nancy

style in his praise for Lorenzo, but I believe that the possibility that *Istorie fiorentine* is incomplete and that the tension created by the history's commission account for and elucidate Machiavelli's equivocal stance.²⁴⁵

In the eighth chapter, Machiavelli presented the Pazzi Conspiracy and its aftermath. While discussing Giuliano de' Medici's death, Machiavelli mentioned his son that he left behind – Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, who commissioned the *Istorie fiorentine*; Machiavelli suggests that he will greatly demonstrate how all the world knows Giulio when he arrives at present matters.²⁴⁶ Machiavelli clearly alluded to arriving at the present time with his history; however, he never arrived at the “presenti cose” to which he alluded. This small clue of a missing conclusion to Machiavelli's work increases the difficulty in defining the purposes of the text, especially if one conjectures that a discussion of “presenti cose” might indeed welcome the application of political theory that would otherwise not fit in an historical account.

Struever suggests that Machiavelli's argumentation in *Il Principe* and in his letters to Francesco Vettori problematizes and hypothesizes sometimes to absurd lengths which produce structural complexity in his writing, but all for the purpose of precision and reducing ambiguity. Struever, “Machiavelli: Narrative as Argument,” *Theory as Practice: Ethical Inquiry in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 159. Furthermore, she adds, although his dilemmatic approach suggests options, it is actually starkly black and white – a dialogue that does not accept dissent. Struever, 173-174. Even when dealing with the realm of the hypothetical, Machiavelli's writing style in his theoretical works does not even allow for theoretical counterpoints. It appears, then, that Machiavelli's prose in *Istorie fiorentine*, or at least in this very statement, is a stylistic outlier among his oeuvre.

²⁴⁵ Felix Gilbert notes the uniqueness of Machiavelli's commission because a republic had never before employed a public historiographer for a salary. Historiographers might be appointed, but most composed their accounts as an homage, as part of their duties as chancellors, in order to gain political favor, or a combination of these motives. Despite this novelty, Gilbert suggests that we might not anticipate impacts on the style of the work. I, however, consider this financial arrangement as part of the strange circumstances of the commission that, I think, account for Machiavelli's ambiguous statement on Lorenzo. Gilbert, “Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*: An Essay in Interpretation,” *Machiavelli and Republicanism*. ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 77. Gilbert also suggests some difficulty in accounting for the style of *Istorie fiorentine* among Machiavelli's works because it spans the boundaries between historiography and political science. Gilbert, “Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*,” 75.

²⁴⁶ “Rimase di lui uno figliuolo naturale il quale, dopo a pochi mesi che fu morto, nacque e fu chiamato Giulio; il quale fu di quella virtù e fortuna ripieno che in questi presenti tempi tutto il mondo cognosce e che da noi, quando alle presenti cose perverremo, concedendone Iddio vita, sarà largamente dimostro.” (719)

I assert, however, that the principal difficulty in determining the true nature and aims of the work rests in the tension between Machiavelli's own ends and meeting the requirements of a work commissioned by Giulio de' Medici. This tension created between Machiavelli's own intentions and the exigencies of a work commissioned by a member of the most influential and powerful family in recent Florentine history manifests itself at the very beginning of the *Istorie Fiorentine* in the dedicatory letter to Giulio when Machiavelli claims that he cannot be accused of flattery.²⁴⁷ Machiavelli attempted to render his impartiality clear when writing about Giulio's ancestors: "E perché dalla V. S. Beatitudine mi fu imposto particolarmente e comandato che io scrivessi in modo le cose fatte da' Suoi maggiori, che si vedessi che io fossi da ogni adulazione discosto."²⁴⁸ And he made yet another note of his honest pursuit in his dedicatory letter: "[...] perché, in tutte le mie narrazioni io non ho mai voluto una disonesta opera con una onesta cagione ricoprire, né una lodevole opera, come fatta a uno contrario fine, oscurare."²⁴⁹ He also noted that when he does praise the Medici family, he will do so to be true to the record.

Machiavelli's repeated statements against any tendency to flatter seem to render his dedicatory letter to Giulio exceptionally anti-encomiastic. It appears that he was attempting to distance himself completely from any obligations or influence of the commission were it not for the one example of adulation that we do find when he suggests that Giuliano's greatest feat in life was creating his son Giulio.: "Nondimeno assai grandi e magnifiche furono l'opere [di Giuliano], avendo generato la S. V.; la quale opera a tutte quelle de' suoi maggiori di gran lunga contrapresa, e più secoli gli aggiugnerà di fama che la malvagia sua fortuna non gli tolse anni di

²⁴⁷ "Non puote adunque alcuno che rettamente consideri gli scritti miei come adulatore riprendermi." (278)

²⁴⁸ *Istorie fiorentine*, 278.

²⁴⁹ *Istorie fiorentine*, 278.

vita” (279). Such platitudinous praise seems more fitting for dedicatory remarks than the posturing Machiavelli otherwise provided. It is also fair to speculate that Machiavelli's account of the present day Florentine situation, at which Machiavelli hinted, might have included encomiastic gestures as well.

The repetition of declarations of impartiality may simply demonstrate Machiavelli's recognition of the strain flattery places in a commissioned work. These instances are magnified when one considers what Donato Giannotti claims Machiavelli shared with him many times regarding the *Istorie fiorentine*. Giannotti report that Machiavelli said:

Io non posso scrivere questa historia da che Cosimo prese lo Stato persino alla morte di Lorenzo come io la scriverei se io fossi libero da tutti i rispetti; le azioni saranno vere, et non pretermetterò cosa alchuna, solamente lascerò indrieto il discorrere le cause universali delle cose; verbi gratia, io dirò gli eventi et gli casi che successero quando Cosimo prese lo Stato; lascerò stare indrieto il discorrere in che modo, et con che mezzi et astutie uno pervenga a tanta altezza, et chi vorrà anco intendere questo, noti molto bene quello ch'io farò dire ai suoi adversarii, perchè quello che non vorrò dire io come da me, lo farò dire ai suoi adversarii.²⁵⁰

Machiavelli could not overtly display his true feelings so he would manifest them in the speeches of the Medici's adversaries.²⁵¹ Ironically, a severe condemnation comes from within; Machiavelli placed a speech in the mouth of Piero de' Medici that criticized the greediness of his own supporters. This comment reported by Giannotti, though, exhibits the difficulty with which Machiavelli combined his distaste for Medici rule and the obligations of fulfilling his

²⁵⁰ Donato Giannotti was a playwright who also wrote theoretical political works on republicanism. He was exiled upon the Medici's return to Florence and died in Rome in 1573. Giannotti's statement appears in Luigi Ferrai, “Lettere inedite di Donato Giannotti,” *Atti del R. Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* 6.3 (1884-1885) 1582.

²⁵¹ Gisela Bock cautions against wholesale adoption of this approach. Using the speeches of Medici enemies as a representation of Machiavelli's political thought necessitates the consideration of context – both of the historical narrative and of the sequences of speeches. Bock, “Civil Discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*,” *Machiavelli and Republicanism*. ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 186-87. Even with these precautions, Machiavelli's statement to Giannotti implies the author's sanction to seek his true thoughts within the speeches of those who oppose the Medici.

commission from Giulio.²⁵²

Machiavelli could not state directly his apparent displeasure with the Medici family and the political decline enacted during their watch because of the nature of the commission. Those same personal feelings seem to prohibit him from fully praising Lorenzo's dual personas. Furthermore, after displaying Florence's military shortcomings throughout this final chapter, a convoluted statement regarding a combination of political and artistic acumen – while disregarding military prowess – may have been all he could bear in his praise. Whether it is one reason or, more likely, a combination of these motives, the discordant tone of Machiavelli's statement on Lorenzo's *impossibile congiunzione* stands out.

A discordant tone, however, aligns thematically with Machiavelli's interest in the *Istorie fiorentine* with civil discord and political divisions. He told his readers that he intended to begin his account in 1434 (when Cosimo the Elder established his regime), but after having read Leonardo Bruni's and Poggio Bracciolini's histories, he decided it was necessary to give a fuller recounting that included the "civili discordie" and "intrinseche inimicizie" and their effects that they had ignored.²⁵³ The more realistic historical treatment from Machiavelli seems to parallel his realistic approach to government. Also, there appear to be consistencies between this theme

²⁵² Gilbert suggests that Machiavelli's feelings designate themselves in the way he mixed praise and glory for Florence with themes of corruption in Medici governance throughout the *Quattrocento*. At the heart of the issue was Cosimo the Elder's ascendance to power due to private wealth – seen as altogether harmful to a healthy republic. Regarding Medici rule, Gilbert claims: "Machiavelli's entire account of this period is meant to demonstrate the abasement of Florentine political life under the Medici." Gilbert, "Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*," 86. Themes of corruption within the account support Gilbert's claim, as do the speeches of Medici enemies.

²⁵³ Gisela Bock notes that in this manner, Machiavelli's project differs from *Il Principe* which dealt with the actions of great men; in the *Istorie fiorentine*, Machiavelli concerns himself with events and actions that appeared unimportant and overlooked by history, but that took him back to Florence's foundation – a republic fraught with divisions. Bock, 181. Gilbert suggests that Machiavelli's exploration of factional struggles – as well as military failures – indicates the lone departure from the humanist style of historiography, which typically idealized great achievements and virtues in order to rouse a patriotic sentiment among contemporary citizens. Gilbert, "Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*," 80.

and his description of Lorenzo which demonstrates Machiavelli's desire for unified political effort that concentrates on military strength.

Civil discord had long been associated with bad government. In the prologue, Machiavelli acknowledged the understandable division that arises between nobles and plebes (present even in the great republics of ancient Rome and Athens), but notes that Florence possesses many more fragments. Despite its many factions, Florence always became greater.²⁵⁴ For Machiavelli, the fact that Florence continued to thrive notwithstanding its many divisions indicated the greatness of its republic and greatness of its citizens. However, even accounting for the *ingegno* and *animo* of its citizens, Machiavelli knew that Florence needed unity. Hence his stated desire in the prologue: "se niuna lezione è utile a' cittadini che governono le repubbliche, è quella che dimostra le cagione degli odi e delle divisioni della città, acciò possino, con il pericolo d'altri diventati savi, mantenersi uniti."²⁵⁵ Machiavelli's hope rested in a detailed exhibition of divisions in order to spur wisdom in his readers to move toward unity.

Because he featured Florence's divisions in his realistic portrayal, Machiavelli's vocabulary teemed with fragmentary terms: *discordia (civile)*, *divisione*, *odio*, *inimicizie*, *disunione*, *disordine*, *disparere*, *parti*, *sètte*, and occasionally *fazioni* and *contentzioni*.²⁵⁶ The similarity in these descriptors of Florence and Machiavelli's pronouncement on its famous leader – Lorenzo de' Medici – must not go unnoticed. To me, "due persone diverse quasi con

²⁵⁴ "E veramente, secondo il giudizio mio, mi pare che niuno altro esempio tanto la Potenza della nostra città dimostri, quanto quello che da queste divisioni dipende, le quali arieno avuto forza di annullare ogni grande e potentissima città. Nondimeno la nostra pareva che sempre ne diventasse maggiore: tanta era la virtù di quegli cittadini e la potenza dello ingegno e animo loro a fare sé e la loro patria grande, che quelli tanti che rimanevano liberi da tanti mali potevano più con la virtù loro esaltarla che non aveva potuto la malignità di quegli accidenti, che gli avieno diminuiti, opprimerla." *Istorie fiorentine*, 91-92.

²⁵⁵ *Istorie fiorentine*, 91.

impossibile congiunzione congiunte” seems more strongly associated with the description of actual Florence rather than with the vision of an ordered city. Two personages that are *almost impossibly conjoined* do not indicate a *unione* of the political and poetic sides of Lorenzo’s personality. Just as Lorenzo sought to fashion an image of himself as an embodiment of Florence's cultural hegemony, Machiavelli presented him and his dual personas as an exemplification of Florence's political culture as a subtle way to demonstrate his disapproval of the political state of Florence under Medici rule. Francesco Guicciardini, on the other hand, seems to have captured both viewpoints regarding Lorenzo's nature in his *Storie fiorentine*: "non era spezie di una città libera e di uno cittadino privato, ma di uno tiranno e di una città che servissi [...] nondimeno che sarebbe impossibile avessi avuto un tiranno migliore e più piacevole."²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Bock indicates this vocabulary of discord and suggests that Machiavelli's image of an ordered city is described by: *unione, amicizia, quiete, pace, stabilità, amore* and *amore della patria*. Bock, 182-83.

²⁵⁷ Francesco Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine dal 1378 al 1509*, ed. Roberto Palmarocchi (Bari: Laterza, 1931) 80.

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