

SIMONETTA CATTANEO VESPUCCI:
BEAUTY, POLITICS, LITERATURE AND ART
IN EARLY RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

by

JUDITH RACHEL ALLAN

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Modern Languages
School of Languages, Cultures, Art History and Music
College of Arts and Law
University of Birmingham
September 2014

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

ABSTRACT

My thesis offers the first full exploration of the literature and art associated with the Genoese noblewoman Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci (1453-1476). Simonetta has gone down in legend as a model of Sandro Botticelli, and most scholarly discussions of her significance are principally concerned with either proving or disproving this theory. My point of departure, rather, is the series of vernacular poems that were written about Simonetta just before and shortly after her early death. I use them to tell a new story, that of the transformation of the historical *monna* Simonetta into a cultural icon, a literary and visual construct who served the political, aesthetic and pecuniary agendas of her poets and artists. It is an account of the Florentine circles that used women to forge a collective sense of identity, of the emergence of Simonetta and her equally idealised peers as touchstones in contemporary debates regarding beauty and love, and of their corresponding lack of importance as ‘real’ women in the conservative republic in which they lived. In doing this, my thesis makes an important contribution to our understanding of how and why female beauty was commodified in the poetry and art of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to a great number of people, all of whom have had an impact on my thesis and have made my five years of research an extremely valuable experience.

My primary thanks must go to my supervisor, Dr Ita Mac Carthy. Whilst never being less than academically rigorous, she has been unfailingly kind, encouraging and supportive, providing inspiration and reassurance in equal measure. Generous with her time, constructive in her criticism, and remarkably tolerant of unreasonable requests and multiple emails, it has been a pleasure to be supervised by her.

I am similarly grateful to my co-supervisor, David Hemsoll, who has been instrumental in shaping my approach to the paintings and sculptures that are analysed in this thesis. I have happy memories of discussions that changed the course of my research and gave me a confidence that I once thought impossible. Welcoming from the first, David has always made me feel that I have something important to contribute, and I have greatly enjoyed sharing information and methodologies.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding my research, and to express my gratitude to the University of Birmingham, the Royal Historical Society and the AHRC for the grants that allowed me to spend two months in the libraries and archives of Italy, and to attend conferences in the UK and the United States.

Prof. Judith Bryce and Prof. Simon Gilson deserve a special mention, too, not only for the letters of reference that they have kindly written on my behalf but for their continued interest in and support for my research, which means a great deal to me.

I have relied on the generosity of other scholars in ways too numerous to list here. I would, however, like to extend my particular thanks to the following: Fabio Barricalla, Jane Bridgeman, Duncan Bull, Jill Burke, Rebekah Compton, Virginia Cox, Alessandra Curti, Maria DePrano, Lynn Dicks, Arjan van Dixhoorn, Jane Everson, Geetha Ganapathy-Doré, Dave Goulson, Julia L. Hairston, Cath King, Victoria Kirkham, Katell Laveant, Alison Luchs, the late Eugenio Marino, Samuel Mareel, Nicholas Martin, Brian Maxson, Federica Pich, Jennifer Ramkalawon, Irina Rasmussen Goloubeva, Francis L. W. Ratnieks, Brian Richardson, Corinna Salvadori Lonergan, Lisa Sampson, Monika Schmitter, Paul Taylor, Matthew Treherne, Jane Tylus and Gur Zak.

I am also grateful for the assistance that I have been offered by librarians and archivists in the UK and Italy. I owe a particular debt to Emilio Panella of the monastery of Santa Maria Novella, who was most generous with his time and expertise, and to the staff of the Biblioteca Riccardiana, the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze and the Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana. I have spent much of the last two years in the Barber Fine Art Library, and would like to thank the staff for their friendliness, helpfulness and forbearance in fielding odd requests.

I have been similarly lucky in my dealings with curators, many of whom have been very accommodating in helping me to obtain reproductions of the artworks discussed in this thesis.

I would to extend my especial thanks to Bastian Eclercy (Städel Museum, Frankfurt), Nicole Garnier (Musée Condé, Chantilly), Alessandro Martoni (Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice), Anna Jolly (Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg) and Amy Taylor (Ashmolean, Oxford), along with the other museums and galleries that made their images available for free.

In the near-decade that I have spent at the University of Birmingham it has been a pleasure to be taught by and to work with members of the Italian Studies department past and present; thank you for your patience and encouragement, and for making me feel welcome from the very beginning.

To the many friends that I have made in the postgraduate community at Birmingham and beyond: you are a large part of the reason why being a postgraduate has been such a fantastic experience. Again, there is not the space to describe all of the ways in which you have helped and supported me and generally made my life better but, in strictly alphabetical order, many thanks to: Carla Aloè, Stephanie Appleton, Klazina Botke, Helen Coy, Paule Desmoulière, Jamie Edwards, James Green, Cory Hazlehurst, Helen Hunter, Nicky Jolly, Lisa Kranzer, Luca Malici, Irene Mariani, Elizabeth Moore, Claire Peters, Emily Rozier, Mike Rush, Federica Signoriello, Beth Spacey, Alex Standen, Sandra Toffolo and Clare Watters.

I do not have the words to thank my family, who have all been simply amazing. My parents have been infinitely supportive throughout my twenty-three years of education, including nine years at university, uncomplainingly putting up with my anxieties, stresses and increasingly unreasonable proof-reading requests. They introduced me to literature, art and Italy at an early age, without which I would never have got this far, and their love and enthusiasm means the world to me. Finally, to my husband Robin, whom I married in the course of writing and researching this thesis: your unwavering love and belief in me make my day, every day.

Grazie mille a tutti quanti.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One

Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci: An Introduction	1
---	---

Chapter Two

From Genoese Wife to Florentine Ideal: The Iconisation of Simonetta

Introduction	40
Poliziano, Simonetta and Florentine Poetics in the Laurentian Era	41
i) Civic Icon and Muse	41
ii) <i>Dama</i> and Nymph	58
Post-Mortem Poetics	64
The Iconisation of Women in Late-Fifteenth Century Florence	70
Poliziano: A Case Study	87
Conclusion	93

Chapter Three

Politics, Patronage, Competition, Collaboration: Simonetta's Election as Poetic Muse

Introduction	94
Depictions of Simonetta and Cultural Trends in 1470s Florence	95
Cultural Capital and the Search for a Patron	102
The Relationship Between the 'Simonetta poets'	119
Conclusion	126
Coda: Tommaso Sardi and the Pleasures and Pitfalls of Patronage	127

Chapter Four

From Laurentian Star to Savonarolan Serpent:

The Impact of Political, Religious and Cultural Change on Representations of Simonetta

Introduction	136
1475-1477: The Emergence of Simonetta	137
The (Poetic) Aftermath of the Pazzi Conspiracy	147
1494-1515: Savonarola, the Reinvented Republic, and the Return of the Medici	158
Conclusion	166
Coda: Girolamo Benivieni and the Mysterious Case of the Vanishing Simonetta	167

Chapter Five

Simonetta, Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo:

The Commodification of Beauty in Early Renaissance Florence

Introduction	180
Poliziano, Botticelli and Imitation	184
Botticelli's 'Ideal Heads'	202
Piero di Cosimo's <i>Simonetta</i>	215
Conclusion	226

Conclusion	228
-------------------	-----

Appendix One: The 'Simonetta Poems'	243
--	-----

a) Girolamo Benivieni	243
b) Lorenzo de' Medici	246
c) Angelo Poliziano	253
d) Bernardo Pulci	259

e) Luigi Pulci	265
f) Tommaso Sardi	265
g) Francesco Nursio Timideo	272
h) Baccio Ugolini	275
Appendix Two: Illustrations	276
Bibliography	316

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

(Appendix Two)

Fig. 1: Leonardo da Vinci, *Ginevra de' Benci* (obverse), circa 1474-1478, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, p. 276.

Fig. 2: Attributed to Niccolò Fiorentino, *Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni*, circa 1486, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection, Luciano 2001a: 130, p. 277.

Fig. 3: Niccolò Fiorentino, *Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni* (reverse: *Venus as Diana*), circa 1486, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection, Randolph 2002: 212, p. 277.

Fig. 4: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Birth of St. John the Baptist*, circa 1486-1490, Cappella Tornabuoni, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Bridgeman, p. 278.

Fig. 5: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Birth of St. John the Baptist* (detail), circa 1486-1490, Cappella Tornabuoni, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Bridgeman, p. 278.

Fig. 6: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Visitation*, circa 1486-1490, Cappella Tornabuoni, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Bridgeman, p. 279.

Fig. 7: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Visitation* (detail), circa 1486-1490, Cappella Tornabuoni, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Weppelmann 2011: 69, p. 279.

Fig. 8: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni*, circa 1488, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid, Bridgeman, p. 280.

Fig. 9: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Confirmation of the Rule*, circa 1483-1485, Cappella Sassetti, Santa Trinità, Florence, Bridgeman, p. 280.

Fig. 10: Attributed to the workshop of Attavante degli Attavanti, MS Banco Rari 17, 24r, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. Courtesy of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo/ Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, p. 281.

Fig. 11: Attributed to the workshop of Attavante degli Attavanti, MS Banco Rari 17, 81r, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. Courtesy of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo/ Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, p. 282.

Fig. 12: Attributed to the workshop of Attavante degli Attavanti, MS Banco Rari 17, 154r, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. Courtesy of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo/ Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, p. 283.

Fig. 13: Attributed to Attavante degli Attavanti, MS 55 K 1, 13r, Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Paoluzzi 2002: 265, **p. 284**.

Fig. 14: Attributed to Attavante degli Attavanti, MS 55 K 1, 96r, Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Paoluzzi 2002: 267, **p. 285**.

Fig. 15: Attributed to Attavante degli Attavanti, MS 55 K 1, 154v, Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Paoluzzi 2002: 268, **p. 286**.

Fig. 16: Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera* (detail), circa 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman, **p. 287**.

Fig. 17: Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, circa 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman, **p. 288**.

Fig. 18: Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera* (detail), circa 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman, **p. 288**.

Fig. 19: Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman, **p. 289**.

Fig. 20: Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus* (detail), circa 1485, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman, **p. 289**.

Fig. 21: Follower of Sandro Botticelli, *A Lady in Profile*, circa 1490, National Gallery, London. © The National Gallery, London, **p. 290**.

Fig. 22: Workshop of Sandro Botticelli, *Ideal Portrait of a Young Woman*, circa 1475-1480, Marubeni Collection, Tokyo, Körner 2009: 69, **p. 291**.

Fig. 23: Sandro Botticelli, *Profile Portrait of a Young Woman*, circa 1475-1480, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. © Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, **p. 292**.

Fig. 24: Sandro Botticelli, *Idealised Portrait of a Lady*, circa 1480, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, **p. 293**.

Fig. 25: Workshop of Sandro Botticelli, *Allegorical Portrait of a Woman*, circa 1476, Kisters Collection, Kreuzlingen, Schumacher (2009d): 161, **p. 294**.

Fig. 26: Piero di Cosimo, *Simonetta*, circa 1480, Musée Condé, Chantilly. © RMN-Grand Palais (domaine de Chantilly)/Adrien Didierjean, **p. 295**.

Fig. 27: Giorgione, *Laura*, circa 1506, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Bridgeman, **p. 296**.

Fig. 28: Italian, Florentine, *An Allegory*, circa 1500, National Gallery, London. © The National Gallery, London, **p. 297**.

Fig. 29: Workshop of Sandro Botticelli, *Venus and Three Putti*, late-fifteenth century, Musée du Louvre-Lens, Lens, Pas-de-Calais. © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Tony Querrec, **p. 297**.

Figs. 30-31: Attributed to the Master of the Judgement of Paris, *Daphne Pursued by Apollo/ The Metamorphosis of Daphne*, circa 1450, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham. © The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, **p. 298**.

Fig. 32: Antonio del Pollaiuolo, *Apollo and Daphne*, circa 1470-1480, National Gallery, London. © The National Gallery, London, **p. 299**.

Fig. 33: Lorenzo Ghiberti, *The Baptism of Christ*, circa 1403, panel for the North Doors of the Baptistery, Florence, Bridgeman, **p. 300**.

Fig. 34: Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci, *The Baptism of Christ*, circa 1475, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman, **p. 301**.

Fig. 35: Sandro Botticelli and his workshop, *The Judgement of Paris*, circa 1483-1485, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Galleria di Palazzo Cini a San Vio, Venice, **p. 302**.

Fig. 36: Sandro Botticelli, *Venus and the Three Graces Offer Gifts to a Young Woman*, circa 1483, Musée du Louvre, Paris. © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais Angèle Dequier, **p. 302**.

Fig. 37: Follower of Sandro Botticelli, *A Lady in Profile* (reverse: *Allegory*), circa 1490, National Gallery, London. © The National Gallery, London, **p. 303**.

Fig. 38: Sandro Botticelli, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, circa 1475, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Bridgeman, **p. 304**.

Fig. 39: After Sandro Botticelli, Recto: *La Bella Simonetta* (WA1863.613), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, **p. 305**.

Fig. 40: Sandro Botticelli, *Fortitude*, 1470, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman, **p. 306**.

Fig. 41: Sandro Botticelli, *The Return of Judith*, circa 1467, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman, **p. 307**.

Fig. 42: Sandro Botticelli, *Venus and Mars*, circa 1485, National Gallery, London. © The National Gallery, London, **p. 307**.

Fig. 43: Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera* (detail), circa 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman, **p. 308**.

Fig. 44: Sandro Botticelli, *The Purification of the Leper and the Temptation of Christ* (detail), circa 1480-1482, Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, Bridgeman, **p. 308**.

Fig. 45: Bartolomeo di Giovanni, *Apollo and Venus*, circa 1486, Private Collection, Bayer 2008b: 304, **p. 309**.

Fig. 46: Attributed to Baccio Baldini, *Judith and the Head of Holofernes* (no. 1852,0301.3), circa 1460-1485, British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum, **p. 309**.

Fig. 47: Attributed to Andrea del Verrocchio, *Head of a Girl*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Pope-Hennessy and Lightbown 1964b: 123, **p. 310**.

Fig. 48: Tullio Lombardo, *Double Portrait*, circa 1490, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice, Luchs 1989: 231, **p. 310**.

Fig. 49: Tullio Lombardo, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, circa 1505, Kuntshistorisches Museum, Vienna, Baldass 1926: 111, **p. 310**.

Fig. 50: Copy after Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Venus with Cupid the Honey Thief*, circa 1580-1620, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, www.metmuseum.org, **p. 311**.

Fig. 51: Attributed to Baccio Baldini, *Venus and her Children* (no. 1845,0825.467), circa 1464, British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum, **p. 312**.

Fig. 52: Attributed to Baccio Baldini, *A Pair of Dancers* (no. 1852,0301.1), circa 1465-1480, British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum, **p. 313**.

Fig. 53: *Pomona/Flora*, first-century AD, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Warburg 1999: 127, **p. 314**.

Fig. 54: Piero di Cosimo, *Allegory*, circa 1500, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, **p. 314**.

Fig. 55: Jacopo del Sellaio, *Story of Cupid and Psyche*, circa 1490, Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg. © Abegg-Stiftung, CH 3132 Riggisberg (Photo: Christoph von Viràg), **p. 315**.

Fig. 56: Jacopo del Sellaio, *Story of Cupid and Psyche* (detail), circa 1490, Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg. © Abegg-Stiftung, CH 3132 Riggisberg (Photo: Christoph von Viràg), **p. 315**.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASFi	Archivio di Stato di Firenze
ASMN	Archivio di Santa Maria Novella
BCA	Biblioteca Città di Arezzo
Bibl. Cors.	Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana
BML	Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana
BNCRM	Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma
BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
BNCF	Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze
B.Pal.Pr.	Biblioteca Palatina
BR	Banco Rari
BRF	Biblioteca Riccardiana
MAP	Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato
<i>St. f.</i>	<i>Stile fiorentino</i>
<i>S. c.</i>	<i>Stile comune</i>

CHAPTER ONE

SIMONETTA CATTANEO VESPUCCI: AN INTRODUCTION¹

Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci (1453-1476), the subject of this thesis, was a Genoese noblewoman who spent her brief adult life in Florence. For one so long dead, she has a lively web presence. A brief internet search brings to light hundreds of blog posts, videos and Wikipedia entries, all convinced that she was the model and muse of Botticelli, beloved both of the artist and of Giuliano de' Medici, brother of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and that she was the most beautiful woman ever to grace Renaissance Italy. She even has her own Facebook page,² and was recently the subject of a report on *Atlantide*, LA7's cultural affairs programme, during which she was defined as 'la musa del Rinascimento', and 'la Venere del Botticelli'.³ This is the image of Simonetta that, ever since she was 'rediscovered' in the nineteenth century, has become fixed in the popular imagination. It is so deeply ingrained, in fact, that scholars tend to assume not only that her significance has remained largely unchanged over the centuries, but that to her late-fifteenth century Florentine peers she represented a timeless ideal of loveliness that transcended the baser concerns that powered the city's complex political and social life. Giovanna Lazzi and Paola Ventrone neatly encapsulate this approach to her life and cultural legacy in their assertion that Simonetta became the feminine ideal of the second half of the fifteenth century, and that her myth continues to this day, reappearing periodically 'come un fenomeno carsico' (2007: 1).

¹ Part of this chapter was adapted for my article, Lorenzo's Star and Savonarola's Serpent. Changing Representations of Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci (2014). *Italian Studies*, 69(1), 4-23.

² Simonetta Cattaneo-Vespucci, available online: <<https://www.facebook.com/#!/simonetta.cattaneovespucci?ref=ts>> [accessed 8 November 2012].

³ Simonetta Vespucci, *Atlantide*, 21 March 2012, available online: <<http://www.la7.it/atlantide/pvideo-stream?id=i527995>> [accessed 30 October 2012].

In this thesis I turn such assumptions on their head. It is not a biography of ‘la bella Simonetta’, as she has been known since the nineteenth century⁴; nor does it seek simply to dispense with the myths that have grown up around her. Rather, it tells a new story, that of the transformation of the historical *monna* Simonetta into a cultural icon, a literary and visual construct who served the ideological, aesthetic and pecuniary agendas of her poets and artists. It is an account of the Florentine circles that used women to forge a collective sense of identity, of the emergence of Simonetta and her equally idealised peers as touchstones in contemporary debates regarding beauty and love, and of their corresponding lack of importance as ‘real’ women in the conservative republic in which they lived. What it does not do is attempt to reanimate Simonetta’s corpse, or to give a voice to the voiceless. Such a project would have its allure were it not for the fact that, despite her impressive poetic legacy, barely a trace of Simonetta’s lived experience has survived. Biographies, such as they are, tend to skirt around the problem by talking about everyone and everything except their supposed subject. Eleven of the sixteen chapter headings of Rachele Farina’s 2001 *Simonetta, Una donna alla corte dei Medici*, for example, manage to avoid any reference to the noblewoman.

To reveal the extent to which accounts of her life rely on misunderstandings, romanticisation and partial readings of literary texts, it is necessary at the outset of this thesis to resort to the biographical approach that it shuns elsewhere, and to clarify exactly what we know about the Simonetta who resided in Florence for seven short years. The difficulties begin immediately. No record of her birth or baptism has survived, leaving us dependent on the Florentine *catasto* of 1469-1470, and its declaration that ‘Marco di Piero di Giuliano

⁴ Although most modern accounts of Simonetta’s life refer to her having been awarded this epithet by her peers, I have found very little evidence that this was the case. Indeed, beyond one passing reference by Poliziano in his *Stanze per la giostra* (‘[. . .] ch’i’ gli ho nel cor diritta una saetta/ dagli occhi della bella Simonetta’, II. 10.7-8), I have never come across it in any Renaissance text that mentions Simonetta.

Vespucii età d'anni XVI' and 'Simonetta di messer Guasparri Catani sua donna d'anni XVI' were living together in the household of Piero Vespucci, Simonetta's father-in-law (Neri 1885: 132). Simonetta, in other words, was born in around 1453 to Gaspare Cattaneo, twice nominated *anziano* of the Genovese republic, and Caterina (Cattocchia) Violante Spinola di Obizzo, formerly the widow of Battista Campofregoso, *doge* of Genova for a day in 1437 (Farina 2001: 14; Tognarini 2002: 10). Where exactly this happy event occurred is uncertain. Thanks to Angelo Poliziano we know that her 'natal patria' was 'nella aspra Liguria' (*Stanze*, I.51.5-8), whilst Bernardo Pulci refers to Genoa as being left 'mesta' by her untimely death ('Venite, sacre e gloriose dive', 47). This might be taken as conclusive proof of her birthplace were it not for Poliziano's mysterious pronouncement that she was born 'in grembo a Venere' (I.53.8), a turn of phrase that has led some critics to identify the small coastal town of Portovenere as her first home (Farina 2001: 14- 17; Carrai 2007: 89). Given the range of interpretations that have been attached to the expression, from the philosophical to the geographical (see Puccini 2004: 48, n. 8 for a brief summary), there is no way either to verify or reject such claims.

Whatever her original surroundings, Simonetta could not have enjoyed them for long. The Campofregoso clan was exiled from Genoa and its territories *circa* 1457 in the midst of the political unrest that would eventually lead to the murder in 1459 of Simonetta's half-brother, and deeply unpopular *doge*, Pietro Campofregoso (Farina 2001: 24- 25; Tognarini 2002: 10; Lazzi and Ventrone 2007: 66). This may explain why we next have word of Simonetta from Piombino, a small coastal city-state sandwiched between the republics of Florence and Siena. What apparently drew the family to seek refuge there was the presence of Battistina Campofregoso, fruit of Cattocchia's first marriage and consort of Piombino's *signore*, Jacopo III Appiani, who was later petitioned by Genoa to extradite the outcasts (Farina 2001: 26;

Tognarini 2002: 10; Lazzi and Ventrone 2007: 65; Brooke Ertle 2008: 4). We know nothing of Simonetta's time at their court save for the negotiations that saw her leave it as a bride, if indeed she did remain there for the entirety of the eleven years between the presumed arrival of the Cattaneos in Piombino and her betrothal.⁵ We would, in fact, have been deprived even of this information were it not for Achille Neri's incomplete transcription of the now-lost contract in which Jacopo granted Simonetta a quantity of Elban iron as a dowry for her marriage to Marco Vespucci (Neri 1885: 133; Farina 2001: 28).⁶

Simonetta's entry into the Vespucci offered sound political advantages to all those involved. Piero being a noted maritime merchant and diplomat, it was in his interests to further the (seemingly) friendly trading relations that he enjoyed with the lord of Piombino, particularly since it meant winning prestige and riches for his son (Bryce 2002: 17-18; Tognarini 2002: 30-31). Jacopo, for his part, must have had his eye on the Vespuccis' close alliance with the Medici. The iron ore mines that he controlled on Elba were a highly profitable and important resource, but they left him vulnerable to attack from the peninsula's more powerful states and constantly burdened by the need to placate likely aggressors (Lazzi and Ventrone 2007: 65). Simonetta's Florentine nuptials were therefore devised with a view to establishing firmer ties with the city's most powerful family (Lazzi and Ventrone 2007: 66). The significance of such cooperation between Florence and Piombino is given added weight by the proposed match between Giuliano de' Medici and Semiramide Appiani, Jacopo's daughter and Simonetta's niece. Allusions to this *parentado* coincide with Jacopo's awarding to the Medici of a five-year contract to work the iron mines, surely not a coincidence (Bryce

⁵ A letter written to Lorenzo on 30 October 1477 by Simonetta's mother, Cattocchia, seems to imply that, although she had taken up residence in Piombino to care for her orphaned granddaughter, Semiramide, she was in the 'gienesatico' when Lorenzo travelled that way whilst returning from Milan, presumably after one of his visits to the city in 1465 and 1469 (cited in Neri 1885: 130, n. 1).

⁶ Elba and its iron ore mines were part of the dominions of Piombino (Lazzi and Ventrone 2007: 65).

2002: 22). When the marriage plan was thwarted by Giuliano's assassination in the Pazzi Conspiracy, Lorenzo was not prepared to let matters lie but saw to it that Semiramide married his cousin, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici (Tognarini 2002: 33). In addition, if a frustratingly under-referenced claim by Brooke Ertle is to be believed (2008: 4), Simonetta was initially pledged to another Medicean, namely Luigi della Stufa. Both women, it seems, were always destined to be pawns in Florence-Piombino politicking (Bryce 2002: 27).

Much, then, is known about the reasons for the election of Marco Vespucci as Simonetta's spouse. Yet this, beyond a few tantalising morsels, is where our information ends. We have no evidence as to precisely when they were wed in 1468-1469; neither can we be absolutely sure as to the location of the Vespucci palace.⁷ Unsurprisingly, not a single letter by or addressed to her has survived. Indeed, we cannot even say for certain whether she could read and write. We can guess at the nature of what must have been a largely secluded, restricted existence from our (somewhat patchy) knowledge of elite women's lives in late-fifteenth century Florence. But Simonetta's own experience is lost to us.

She returns to view, for the most fleeting of moments, in a missive written to Lorenzo de' Medici by Luigi Pulci in early 1474 to inform him of the deaths of Jacopo, Battistina, and a number of their courtiers. Whilst there are no other indications that foul play was involved (see, for example, Meli 2006: 62-65), Simonetta was apparently convinced that they were the victims of poison rather than disease:

⁷ In her forthcoming PhD thesis ('The Vespucci family in context: art patrons in late-fifteenth century Florence', University of Edinburgh, 2014), Irene Mariani uncovers evidence that what is now Via del Porcellana may be the most probable site.

Hoggi in casa Messer Piero [Vespucci] ho inteso da chi vien di là, come sono stati avelenati, et da chi et come, et chi non è morto, morrà. Et più, che la Simonetta dice, è più settimane gli fu detto la sua sorella era morta di questo, et come tutti morrebbono senza manco, che avevano beuto.

(1886: 122, Letter XXIX, 21 March 1474 *s.c.*;
Carrai 1985: 88, n. 11)

With this, she retreats from the epistolary record until 1476 and the series of reports on her final illness sent to Lorenzo by Piero Vespucci. On 18 April a worried Piero, harried both by financial difficulties and his ailing daughter-in-law, writes that Simonetta ‘si sta quasi nelli medesimi termini che quando voi partisti et poco v’è di megloramento [*sic*]’. He can only await the arrival of a doctor sent by Lorenzo, a *maestro* Stefano (ASFi, MAP, XXXIII, no. 266; Neri 1885: 136). Two days later, he has better news: ‘[...] per grazia di Dio e virtù di maestro Stefano, mediante voi, è alquanto meglio, che à meno febre [*sic*] e meno rimessione, ed à meno afanno [*sic*] del petto, mangia meglio e dorme meglio’. The medics are convinced that hers will be a lengthy illness, but Piero and Cattocchia remain greatly obliged to Lorenzo ‘della dimostrazione havete fatto di questo suo male’. Piero reminds his patron, however, that the family cannot afford to retain the *maestro*’s services for long, ‘[...] perché non potremo soddisfare chon paghamento tale obrigho per la impossibilità [*sic*] nostra’, and requests that Lorenzo recall the physician and advise him as to what he owes (ASFi, MAP, XXXIII, no. 279; Neri 1885: 136). By 22 April things look much bleaker. Simonetta’s ‘melioramento [...] invero non ha perseverato come io credetti, et come saria stato nostro desiderio’. *Maestro* Stefano is arguing with another doctor, *maestro* Moyse, not only as to the best course of action but even as to the nature of the disease. What is more, Piero has had no word from Lorenzo as to how he should proceed in the light of his ‘incomodità [...] circa alla mercè et

salario di *maestro* Stephano’, and is unwilling to let him stay in his household for longer than the following eight days (ASFi, MAP, XXXIII, no. 290; Neri 1885: 136-137).

Such monetary and temporal considerations were rendered immaterial with Simonetta’s death on 26 April and burial the following day in the church of Ognissanti, as documented in Florence’s *Libro dei Morti*, September 1475- August 1487 (ASFi, Arte dei Medici e Speziali, 246, 8r). Lorenzo was informed of this sad development by his agent, Sforza Bettini, who commented that: ‘La benedetta anima della Simonetta se ne andò a paradiso, come so harete inteso: puossi ben dire che sia stato il second Trionpho della morte, che veramente havendola voi vista così morta come la era, non vi saria parsa manco bella e vezzosa che si fusse in vita’ (ASFi, MAP, XXXIII, no. 311, 27 April 1476; Neri 1885: 137). From this we can gather that Bettini had witnessed Simonetta’s funeral procession, since it was common practice at the time to carry the bodies of the deceased in full view to their place of rest (Strocchia 1992: 2-6). This glimpse of her obsequies is offset by the disappearance of her tomb, and of all records as to its precise location.

This is the entirety of the information that has survived regarding Simonetta’s life and death. It is, of course, entirely possible that more material may be found in the archives. For the time being, however, the reader should use extreme caution when faced with elaborate accounts of Simonetta’s Florentine sojourn. Yes, Giuliano fought in a joust in Piazza Santa Croce on 29 January 1475 and, if we believe Angelo Poliziano’s *Le stanze per la giostra del magnifico Giuliano de’ Medici*, he may have won it at least partly in Simonetta’s honour. It seems fair to assume that she witnessed his victory since, although the *Stanze* breaks off before we reach the tournament itself, Poliziano’s *Sylva in Scabiem* goes some way to filling in the blanks, including an allusion to the presence of an ‘enamoured nymph’ who is surely

supposed to be Simonetta (250-255). We can also look to the *Amica ad magnanimum Iulianum Medicem*, a series of Latin elegies composed by the Riminese poet Giovanni Aurelio Augurelli, in which the unnamed ‘amica’ hails Giuliano’s triumph (Farina 2001: 71-73). Yet it is well known that the principal motivations for its staging were political, the joust being predominantly a celebration of the November 1474 triple alliance between Florence, Venice and Milan, and of the magnificence and beneficent influence of the Medici family. What is more, none of the chroniclers and letter-writers who describe the contest are remotely interested in its amorous connotations, being far more concerned with the extravagance of Giuliano’s attire than his ‘love life’ (Ruggieri 1959: 167-170).

This has not prevented Simonetta from being hailed as the ‘tragic lover’ of Giuliano or, as Vannucci puts it, ‘un’eroina romantica in anteprima’ (2004: 14), a kind of Renaissance Princess Diana or Marilyn Monroe who operatically died of consumption little more than a year after the joust. The fact that Giuliano was assassinated on the second anniversary of Simonetta’s death has only heightened the appeal of this ‘love story’, giving it a satisfyingly Petrarchan twist (Schmitter 1995: 42). In reality, we simply do not, and cannot, know what the nature of their ‘relationship’ was. This is partly because we have frustratingly little testimony as to Simonetta’s role at public gatherings in Florence beyond the *giostra* (Lazzi and Ventrone 2007: 48- 49), and because we lack non-literary accounts of events.⁸ What is more, it is a mistake to assume that our own attitudes towards love and ‘romance’ were also those of

⁸ Piero Vespucci’s oft-debated letter to Lucrezia Tornabuoni, in which he appears to state that he effectively traded Simonetta’s ‘immagine’ and all of her clothes in exchange for money and other favours from Giuliano (Schmitter 1995: 52, n. 28), will be discussed in Chapter Five (180). Suffice it to say here that this flood-damaged missive of early 1480, written by a man pleading for his freedom after being implicated in the escape of one of the Pazzi conspirators, is an intriguing document but one that complicates rather than clarifies the picture. To begin with, even if Giuliano’s admiration for Simonetta was heartfelt, it does not follow that Giuliano held any interest for Simonetta. At the same time, it is entirely possible that his procurement of these tokens was designed to conform to social expectations regarding appropriate conduct for a bereaved ‘lover’. Furthermore, we can hardly rely on the desperate Piero’s retelling of events to be a disinterested one, all the more so because his avowals of affection for Giuliano are somewhat at odds with the behaviour that saw him imprisoned in the first place.

fifteenth-century Florentines. We might view declarations of passion as being motivated by psychological imperatives but, as I explore in depth in Chapter Two (58-63, *et cetera*), late-*Quattrocento* Florence was deeply invested in the performance of courtly love, which made no automatic demands on the emotions of either party (Phillips and Reay 2011: 44). In the words of Judith Bryce, ‘the relationship may have had a basis in personal attachment, whether mutual or on the part of Giuliano alone, or it may have been more of a socio-cultural or literary fiction’ (2002: 19); either, or both, is possible.

It is easy for me now after five years of study to point out the flaws in the popularly accepted narrative of Simonetta’s life and times, to keep a measured yet not overly cynical distance from it, and to put forward alternative approaches to her cultural legacy. When I first began researching her in 2009, however, I was as seduced as many others by this apparently tragic figure, attracted by a desire to prove or disprove the art historical legends that surrounded her and, most of all, in thrall to the beauty of Poliziano’s *Stanze*. Whilst my fascination with Poliziano and his verse has remained a constant, I was originally greatly perturbed by the realisation that much of what had been said about Simonetta was the fruit of the nineteenth century cult of Botticelli (Levey 1960), to which repetition had lent a veneer of fact. I discovered, moreover, that scholars had largely ignored the substantial body of verse written about Simonetta, focusing their efforts on the works of Poliziano and Lorenzo de’ Medici and treating other texts, if they did so at all, as objective accounts of her beauty and virtue. As I progressed in my research, it became increasingly clear that what had drawn me to Simonetta was not the long-silenced *monna* Vespucci herself but a poetic construct rich with cultural allusions, political significance and philosophical charge, and the force of the visual imagery that had been associated with it. Driven by my resistance to the narratives that dominated scholarly and popular discourse on Simonetta, I therefore set out to analyse

holistically the entire corpus of vernacular verse written about her, embedding it in as vivid an historical context as possible, acknowledging the cross-fertilisation of artistic and poetic culture, and putting both into meaningful dialogue with relevant non-literary texts.

This means that my PhD goes far beyond the scope of my MPhil, which focussed on a select number of the ‘Simonetta poems’ in an initial investigation of the ties between poetry and politics in fifteenth-century Florence, and of the creation of an ideal of femininity that expressed the city’s sense of its cultural supremacy. My doctoral thesis develops and nuances these early findings by opening up the field of enquiry to the poems omitted from the MPhil, and to the works of visual art that have been associated with Simonetta. It also introduces a number of new debates, such as Simonetta’s relationship with other ideal Florentine beauties, the rapport (or lack of it) between her poets, and the commodification of female loveliness in literature and painting.

I shall introduce the ‘Simonetta poems’ in greater detail towards the end of this chapter (31-36). Suffice it to say here that, between verse and painting, the body of material concerned is quite substantial, including Poliziano’s *Stanze*, Lorenzo’s *Comento de’ miei sonetti*, two sonnets by Girolamo Benivieni, another by Luigi Pulci, an elegy and sonnet from the pen of Bernardo Pulci, an even longer elegy by Francesco Nursio Timideo, a religious epic by Tommaso Sardi, and a final sonnet by Baccio Ugolini. Botticelli dominates the visual works of art, his *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus* (figures 16-20) accompanied by the series of portrait-like images produced by the artist and his workshop in the 1480s and 1490s, which have long been associated with Simonetta (figures 21-25). Piero di Cosimo’s *Simonetta* (figure 26) is also analysed at length. I quote extensively, moreover, from epistolary

exchanges between the poets and other notable figures, Savonarolan sermons, publication records, and treatises on proper feminine behaviour.

In shifting the perspective of ‘Simonetta Studies’ to investigate what she meant to Florence and how this related to the lot of women in the city, I was faced with a number of key questions: why and how does an historical figure become a cultural icon? Can we make a connection between the portrayal of women in literature and art and the nature of the lives that they led? Why did so many poets and artists invest time and energy in the figure of Simonetta? What can Simonetta tell us about the political, social and cultural motivations that lay behind the production of visual and poetic texts in late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century Florence? If we take seriously the suggestion made by some art historians that Simonetta’s notional role as Botticelli’s muse is a Warburg-inspired fantasy, how else can we explain the correspondence between her characterisation in poetry and the way in which women are depicted in painting and sculpture created contemporaneously? As one attempts to answer these questions, Simonetta becomes a gateway into the cultural, social and political forces that drove the early Renaissance in Florence and beyond and sheds light on many of the major scholarly debates that, in turn, power our understanding of the period.

For one, she has a great deal to tell us about the ‘cult of beauty’ that purportedly defined Renaissance Italy, and which has become a commonplace in discussions of late-*Quattrocento* Florence. If one simply believed the accepted account of Simonetta’s life, it would be easy to assume that the entire city was in thrall to her loveliness and that the poets who composed verse about her were awed by her charms and left grief-stricken by her death. There may even be more than a grain of truth to this interpretation. After all, by modern standards the Florence of the time was a ‘small face-to-face society, whose members constantly crossed paths in the

daily performance of a whole range of activities, both public and private' (Kent 2009: 6), and whose élite must have been well-known to each other. Simonetta may well have been universally acclaimed for her beauty in such a community and her death was, of course, a tragedy. But to exaggerate the communal grief of the Florentine republic when she died is to ignore the complexity of those years. There was very little that could unite the fractious Florentine community and, though many may have mourned Simonetta's passing, there were others who cared far less. Indeed, in poetry from the Savonarolan Florence of the 1490s her outward allure becomes a token of vice rather than virtue, and hints are made that not all were convinced of her moral integrity. Simonetta also helps us question the notion that artists and poets who celebrated beauty in their works were driven primarily by aesthetic concerns, the sacred triumphing over the profane. Again, this is not to deny the significance of such ideological imperatives; philosophical deliberations as to the nature of beauty clearly had an enormous cultural impact in Florence and lent a fresh poetic charge to depictions of love in literature and art. There was, moreover, a real belief in the uplifting power of beauty, a counterfoil to the very difficult circumstances in which many lived. Yet our awareness of these lofty intentions should not lead us to disregard the sensual pleasure that readers and viewers derived from contemplating representations of beautiful women. Female beauty has always been marketable, and in this case it allowed Simonetta's poets to titillate their readers whilst appearing to be high-minded, weaving together sensuality and restraint in a manner that appealed to late fifteenth-century concepts of eroticism.

Simonetta also shows us that the 'cult of beauty' was partly a 'public relations act' through which Florence sold itself to its own inhabitants and the rest of Italy as the flourishing, virtuous and harmonious home of classical and vernacular culture. Indeed, it was political and patriotic incentives, as opposed to philosophical or spiritual agendas, that led to the creation

of the exquisite Simonetta imagery. As the face of modern Florence under the Medici, a new *donna angelicata* for the Laurentian era, she demonstrates how female beauty could be pressed into the service of the state without threatening the republic's conservative stance towards women. Beyond political posturing and campanilistic pride, moreover, she offered poets and artists the opportunity to bask in the reflected glory of her image, and to associate themselves with the city's (supposedly) blossoming cultural landscape.

This should not lead us to believe that Simonetta betokened merely one value for the denizens of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence. In fact, contrary to present-day conceptions of 'la bella Simonetta', she only acquired monolithic meaning in the nineteenth century. For her contemporaries, rather, she represented a myriad of ideas, called upon as inspiration and circumstance dictated. Acknowledging this plurality sheds light on another of the age-old debates about Renaissance Florence, that is to say whether a 'Platonic Academy' really existed. While some critics have identified Simonetta as a 'Neoplatonic icon' (Lazzi and Ventrone 2007: 31) it becomes hard to defend this position when analysing the 'Simonetta poems' as a whole. This mirrors the findings of those, notably James Hankins (2004, *et cetera*), who have questioned the belief that the city's cultural life was utterly dominated by a formalised Academy run by Marsilio Ficino. Setting out his vision of Ficino as an extremely influential figure but one who taught many subjects to a select group of pupils in an 'informal gymnasium' instead of preaching the word of Plato to the entire Florentine intelligentsia, Hankins warns against the 'tendency in some modern scholarship to regard Ficinian Platonism (or worse, Neoplatonism) as a golden key that can be used to unlock the meaning of all the poetry and art of the Laurentian period' (2004: 238, 293). He points out, moreover, that 'the earliest accounts we have of a Laurentian "Academy", from the sixteenth century, speak of it as a *literatorum academia* of which Ficino was only one member and in which

philosophy was but one of many interests', which also included poetry, mathematics and art (2004: 220, 370). My own research provides further ammunition for Hankins and his supporters, since Simonetta emerges from my thesis as a far more complex cultural construct than Lazzi and Ventrone allow. Furthermore, as a loose circle of Medici-affiliated *literati* who were influenced by Ficino but far from subject to him, and who exhibit a variety of different preoccupations and approaches to verse, her poets support Hankins's pluralistic take on the 'Medici Academy' and on Florentine literary, artistic and philosophical culture more widely.

Nor were her poets a completely amicable grouping. Simonetta does demonstrate the collaborative nature of cultural endeavour in fifteenth-century Florence in that the poets often worked together for the greater good of their city's language and literature. They were inspired and motivated by their fellow intellectuals, and they clung together for security and the pleasure of each other's company. This does not mean, however, that they were not desperate to shine more brightly than their 'colleagues'. Indeed, Simonetta takes us to the heart of the 'Renaissance agon', the competition and rivalry that was 'as central to the period as the revival of Ciceronian Latin and classical conceptions of beauty and proportion' (Goffen 2002: 3), and which is regarded as being partially responsible for the upsurge in artistic creativity. What my thesis reveals is that competition between poets and intellectuals for the limited resources on offer was just as lively as it was for their painting, sculpting cousins. In Botticelli's response to the verse in which Simonetta is described, moreover, she proves that visual artists were challenging the perceived supremacy of poetry in Florence even before the ascendancy of Leonardo. She reminds us, too, that whilst poets and painters alike drew heavily on the ancient world, they were not simply imitating their classical predecessors but attempting to surpass them, crafting a greater, Florentine style that expressed the city's manifold achievements.

In contributing to these key themes in Renaissance scholarship, my thesis is a window on the complexity of late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century Florence, a city in which poets and artists were inspired by adoration and suspicion of beauty, by the need to win patronage as much as by patriotic fervour, and by competition as well as comradeship. In reframing our perceptions of Simonetta, providing greater insight into the role that women played in the construction of cultural identity, and thereby contributing to our understanding of Renaissance Italy, I am both indebted to and have reacted against previous scholarship on Simonetta. She has attracted a not inconsiderable amount of critical attention since the late-nineteenth century, which ranges in nature from art historical texts, to literary analyses, to history-based studies. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that the biographical, in some cases almost hagiographical, imperative of which I am wary frequently predominates.

Chief among these biographical accounts is Rachele Farina's aforementioned work, *Simonetta. Una donna alla corte dei Medici* (2001), in which the author sets out to record 'la breve e intensa vicenda della donna dipinta da Piero di Cosimo e dal Botticelli, cantata dal Poliziano e da Lorenzo il Magnifico [...]', as the blurb puts it. From this, it will be evident to the reader that Farina is entranced by the perceived glamour of her subject's life. More than a biography, indeed, her book is a compendium of 'Simonetta myths' from which, as mentioned above, Simonetta remains curiously absent. If Farina's interpretation of events cannot be trusted, her (partial) transcription of obscure primary sources is to be commended. I am grateful, for example, for her publication of a section of Tommaso Sardi's *De Anima Peregrina* (55-58), which contains a highly unusual depiction of Simonetta. By contrast, even at a distance of nearly 130 years Achille Neri's article, *La Simonetta* (1885), stands out for its careful documentation of literary and non-literary texts alike, and continues to be an extremely useful font of information. For example, Neri includes the text of Simonetta's

marriage contract (133), a missive written by her mother to Lorenzo de' Medici in 1475 (134), and the series of letters written by Piero Vespucci to Lorenzo in April 1476, along with the entirety of Bernardo Pulci's poems (141-147) and a section of Francesco Nursio Timideo's elegy (139-140). Perhaps the most useful piece of scholarship for me, however, has been Judith Bryce's 'Lorenzo de' Medici, Piombino, and Naples: Cultural Politics from the *Raccolte Aragonesi* to the *Comento*' (2002), an essay on the 'intricate set of relations involving primarily Florence, Piombino, and Naples', which has 'the aim of producing a denser historical contextualisation of the Simonetta material and of the cultural work directed by Lorenzo towards the Aragonese rulers of Naples' (2002: 11). Exchanging sentimental supposition for detailed historical research, Bryce analyses the 'politics, dynastic interests, diplomacy, and economics that underlie [Lorenzo de' Medici's] continuing exploitation of "Simonetta" in the 1480s' (2002: 26). With its finely-tuned understanding of the political context in which the 'Simonetta poems' were written, the article demonstrates the importance of reassessing Simonetta's cultural legacy. Although I greatly admire Bryce's work and have been deeply influenced by her refusal to bow to the pressure of romanticising precedent, her approach here is principally concerned with the historical record rather than with literature and art, and thus is at some remove from my own.

The art historical texts that deal with Simonetta are equally uneven. Notable amongst these is Monika Schmitter's 'Botticelli's Images of Simonetta Vespucci: Between Portrait and Ideal' (1995). There is much that is praiseworthy in her treatment of five of the artist's 'ideal heads', which are analysed in detail in the fifth chapter of this thesis (201-213). As Schmitter puts it, 'the effect of the images hinges on how they operate between the categories of portrait and ideal', their attraction lying 'in the aloofness and unattainability of the lady' portrayed (1995: 33-34). This examination of the erotic appeal of pure yet sensual women in fifteenth-century

art and society has informed my reading of the ‘Simonetta poems’, especially Poliziano’s *Stanze*, as has Schmitter’s observation that the literary Simonetta is transformed into ‘a kind of civic symbol’ (1995: 42). That said, her assertion that Simonetta becomes ‘a Petrarchan mistress in verse and image’ (1995: 45) does not explain the idiosyncrasies that characterise these complex works, which owe as much to the cultural specificities of the *Quattrocento* and *Cinquecento* as they do to Petrarch. It is with these particularities that my thesis grapples.

Much of the rest of the art history that has been written about Simonetta focuses on assessing whether or not her features can be traced in any surviving work of art, a trend that has been in (and occasionally out of) fashion since Aby Warburg identified her as the ‘Hora of Spring’ in the *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus* and as the subject of two of the images later discussed by Schmitter (1999: 133-136). Mirella Levi d’Ancona, for instance, weaves a complex tale of botanical detective work to ‘prove’ that Simonetta is irrelevant to the *Primavera*, the figure of Flora having been originally intended as a portrait of Fioretta Gorini, the woman who bore Giuliano’s child after his death, in a celebration of their affair (1983: 46, 65). When murder made such a topic unsuitable, the painting was temporarily abandoned and then completed several years later to commemorate the marriage of Semiramide Appiani to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, with Semiramide playing the role of the central Grace (1983: 46). Ivan Tognarini comes to a similar conclusion, albeit by different means. After dwelling in depth on the history of the Campofregoso, Appiani and Vespucci, he argues that, whilst ‘il volto e la figura di Simonetta cominciano a fare la loro comparsa nelle pitture del Botticelli negli anni ottanta’, it is Semiramide who appears in the guise of the Grace Aglaia in the *Primavera* (2002: 40-47). Frank Zöllner, on the other hand, is convinced that Semiramide, as ‘bearer of the Medici fruit’, becomes Botticelli’s Flora, with Simonetta’s influence limited to the ‘portrait type now known as *Bella Simonetta*’ (2005: 58, 74-76). Ross Brooke Ertle,

although admitting that there are few historical documents to validate the myths, remains staunch in his belief in the ‘compelling circumstantial evidence that links Simonetta to [the paintings of Botticelli]’ (2008: 3). Having outlined the case thus far and suggested further lines of research, he concludes that ‘the Vespucci family papers will bear fruit in the ongoing effort to identify the elusive image of “la bella Simonetta”’ (2008: 7). Hans Körner, writing the following year, cautions against over-exaggeration in locating Simonetta in the paintings of Botticelli and his contemporaries, yet is generally hostile to ‘the deconstruction of the myth of the bella Simonetta’ and in favour of its ‘reconstruction’ (2009: 64). Although prepared ‘to regard both Giuliano’s lost tournament banner and the tapestry derived from it [for Count Guy de Baudreuil, abbot of Saint-Martin-aux-Bois] as portraits of Simonetta Vespucci’, along with two drawings associated with them, he is most interested in ‘the ideal of nymphal beauty’ that characterises works connected to her (2009: 64, 69). This recent work has advanced our understanding of Botticelli and widened the debate about Simonetta, but the fact that it focuses exclusively on visual art means that it is at some remove from my own approach, which puts poetry and painting into dialogue.

This is not to say that there have been no previous attempts to create a well-rounded take on Simonetta since Warburg’s ground-breaking analysis of the affinities that bind Botticelli’s mythological paintings to Poliziano’s *Stanze* (1999: 95-139). The first of these is Charles Dempsey’s *The Portrayal of Love. Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (1992), which contains a lengthy section on Simonetta. For Dempsey, ‘that Simonetta or some other lady inevitably *must* appear [in the *Primavera*] follows, not only from the comparison of the painting with the *Stanze*, but also from the general laws of the vernacular tradition of love poetry that Lorenzo and Politian worked to revive and transform, and to which Botticelli made appeal in conceiving his

invention' (123-124). According to this reading, both Poliziano and Botticelli portray Simonetta in her 'festival dress', thereby conforming to conventions as to the 'positing of a real and particular *donna* in whom each lover identifies his aspirations, each knight his honour, and each poet his ideal of love' (131). But Simonetta, who takes on the 'subsidiary role' of Flora, is merely the 'secondary and superseded *donna* of a larger Laurentian myth' of Lucrezia Donati, Lorenzo's 'beloved' and the *Primavera*'s Venus (134). More than this, in the *Comento* Lorenzo signals 'his own *renovatio* in the idea of love by contrasting the youthful, courtly, and erotic idea figured in Simonetta with the more abstract and Neoplatonic idea embodied in his newly conceived *donna*, the renewed and altered Lucrezia Donati' (140). The Simonetta of the *Stanze*, meanwhile, 'appears in a much darker and [...] even menacing guise, as a cold and unstable Fortune tempting Giuliano in a false dream of glory [...] that ends in his destruction, bringing with it the corresponding end to the ideal figured in Simonetta' (145). Whilst acknowledging Dempsey's significance in bringing the idealised women of *Quattrocento* Florence to scholarly attention, I argue that Simonetta, far from being a subordinate offshoot of a Lucrezia Donati-inspired 'über-myth', played a number of distinct roles in Florentine poetry and art. My thesis draws out these complexities, demonstrating that Lorenzo's Simonetta is a very different creature from that of Poliziano, and that Botticelli had his own agendas.

Paola Ventrone, writing in *Simonetta Vespucci. La nascita della Venere fiorentina* (2007), also believes that Botticelli, Lorenzo and Poliziano were working in synchronicity via the figure of Simonetta. The difference here is that Ventrone sees Simonetta as the embodiment of an entirely separate archetype of beauty from that exemplified by Lucrezia, namely as nymph and 'modello eccellente di bellezza neoplatonica' rather than chivalric *dama* (25- 27, 30-31). From this point of view, in which 'il simbolo, sia letterario che figurativa, di quella nuova

maniera di vivere il neoplatonismo fu [...] la figura della ninfa' (29-30), the 1475 joust provided the impetus by which the nymph reached its 'pienezza semantica e simbolica', fusing together philosophy, literature and art 'per attribuire a quel simbolo il medesimo significato e la medesima funzione iniziatica' (40). For this, we have Poliziano, Lorenzo and Botticelli to thank, all three of whom ensured that it was Simonetta who became the face of this new ideal; the first in the *Stanze*, the second in his sonnets and *Comento*, and the last via Giuliano's banner, 'primo di una lunga serie' of images of Simonetta (40). It was not, however, 'la particolare bellezza di Simonetta a conferirle lo statuto di icona neoplatonica' (47) but 'la rapidità della successione degli avvenimenti [...] dalla idealizzazione iniziatica della giostra alla morte improvvisa poco più di un anno dopo, che ne proiettò l'acerba imagine in un mondo ultraterreno [...]' (48). It is no mere chance, according to Ventrone, that we know so little of Simonetta's life: 'perfetta per essere solo la rappresentazione di un'idea platonica' (48). As proof of this interpretation of events, she cites the contrast between 'la pudica riservatezza della breve vita fiorentina della bella Vespuccia, e la sua ridondante visibilità postuma', which saw her become Botticelli's obsession (48-49).

After setting the historical and cultural scene, Giovanna Lazzi continues the story of how 'la storia diventa leggenda e [...] si viene a creare un mito, per cui Simonetta diventa "la bella Simonetta"' (70). Lazzi admits that 'nonostante tutti i ritratti in cui si vuole identificare Simonetta, niente di certo resta a documentare il suo reale aspetto' (71), but this does not stop her from discussing the paintings to which Simonetta has been connected and stating that their model, 'nel vero o nel falso, è la giovane bionda' (96). In tracing the development of this 'precisa tipologia femminile' (96), Lazzi excitedly identifies Simonetta in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (112), *Venus and Mars* (116), and *Nastagio degli Onesti* panels (114). She then briefly considers the poems written to mark Simonetta's death, viewing them as being part of the

creation of an icon, ‘una santa tutta profana da venerare, ninfa della mitologia classica, lume sacrale della divinità, via luminosa della conoscenza’ (133). Piero di Cosimo’s *Simonetta* is viewed from much the same perspective (136). Similar arguments predominate in her 2005 article, ‘Simonetta Vespucci, modella e modello’.

Lazzi and Ventrone’s book was one of the first studies of Simonetta that I encountered as I prepared my MPhil applications and, as such, has been an important influence on my research. It could also claim to be the only monograph-length examination of Simonetta, and remains one of the few works with her name in the title to merit serious scholarly attention. Those who have read *La nascita della Venere fiorentina* will, furthermore, recognise something of the authors’ interest in Florentine myth-making in my own thesis (see, for example, 2007: 48-49 and 130), and will note the impact of Ventrone’s social history-based methodology in tracking ‘le metamorfosi dell’immagine della donna nella Firenze dei primi Medici’ (5). That said, Lazzi and Ventrone’s narrative cannot do justice to Simonetta’s multifaceted manifestations in poetry and art. Its focus, too, is largely art historical, and frequently privileges what I call ‘Simonetta spotting’ over close textual and pictorial analysis. My research has depended as much on these silences as on Lazzi and Ventrone’s conclusions, using all of the sources available to weave a more complex account of Simonetta’s cultural heritage that counters the hegemonic approach exemplified by my immediate predecessors. It is worth pointing out, moreover, that my thesis focuses in greater detail on the circumstances in which the ‘Simonetta poems’ were produced, meaning that its remit is considerably broader than that of *La nascita della Venere fiorentina*, taking in *Quattrocento* Florence’s literary circles and politics as well as the spheres in which Simonetta circulated.

One of the trends that Lazzi and Ventrone wholeheartedly endorse is the tendency to discuss Simonetta in terms of her adherence (or lack of it) to a Neoplatonic code, which has dominated much of the secondary literature on the verse in which she appears. Since I deal with this subject at length in the following chapter (46-58) I shall limit myself here to observing that this fixation has narrowed considerably the field of debate, particularly as far as Poliziano is concerned. Stefano Carrai's brief chapter in Tatiana Crivelli's *Selvagge e Angeliche. Personaggi Femminili della Tradizione Letteraria Italiana* (2007) appears to offer a more well-rounded take on the 'Simonetta poems', mentioning most of the verse that refers to Simonetta and adding, as a coda, a couple of paragraphs on her more recent appeal to writers of verse and historical fiction (94). The majority of the study, though, is devoted to the Simonettas of Poliziano and Lorenzo, from which Carrai quotes at length. He displays a philological interest in the sources of the former (87) and comments on the philosophical import of the latter (92-93), but the wider literary and political implications of Simonetta's poetic transfiguration remain unexplored.

In the light of this, works that analyse broader cultural and political currents in late-*Quattrocento* Florentine literature, especially in the verse of Lorenzo, have been of especial interest to me. For example, Thomas Greene (1982) and, most particularly, Martin McLaughlin's (1995) analyses of eclectic imitation in Renaissance culture have been fundamental to my interpretations of Poliziano and Botticelli. Similarly, Simon Gilson's comments on the role that Lorenzo played in 'intensifying efforts to promote Tuscan' in 'a cultural project that linked the *volgare* to the political standing and intellectual prestige of the Florentine state' (2009: 134) have been essential. The same can be said of Mario Martelli's (1995: 41) and Francesco Bausi's (2006: 27) observations on the imperatives that drove Lorenzo to lay claim to the city's vernacular traditions. I am also indebted to William J.

Kennedy's political readings (1989; 2003) of Lorenzo's portrayal of himself as a Petrarchan lover, '[identifying] Petrarch's plight with his own' to 'elicit sympathy [...] as a victim who has sacrificed everything for his beloved and for the commune that he serves' (2003: 64, 62). In the same vein, Francis W. Kent's examination of how Lorenzo used women such as Simonetta and Lucrezia Donati to '[cast] himself as a man of precocious intelligence in a city famous for, and self-congratulatory about, the genius of its inhabitants' (2013a: 54) has been extremely useful reading. Likewise, I owe a great deal to the seminal studies of Lorenzo produced by Kent (2004) and Melissa M. Bullard (1994).

Alongside the biographical (or pseudo-biographical) literature on Simonetta; the studies of the art and literature that feature her; and the broader-focused cultural studies of *Quattrocento* Florence, Lorenzo de' Medici and Poliziano, another body of literature that has informed my thesis has been, of course, the critical editions and philological studies of the secondary material on 'Simonetta poems and poets' beyond Lorenzo and Poliziano. Without Carrai (1985: 86-91) we would have no critical edition of Luigi Pulci's sonnet on Simonetta, whilst Fabio Barricalla (2007) has done equally sterling philological work on the elegy and sonnet composed by Bernardo, Luigi's younger brother. I have drawn, in addition, on Roberto Leporatti's edition of Girolamo Benivieni's *Canzone e sonetti* (2008), which has proved indispensable, along with his 2002 essay on Benivieni's changing attitudes to love (2002). There is also a surprising amount of material available on Tommaso Sardi, one of the most obscure 'Simonetta poets'. There was, for no clearly discernible reason, a veritable rash of publications on Sardi in 2002, which included Eugenio Marino's 'Girolamo Savonarola ed il poeta Feo Belcari nel poema dantesco "Anima Peregrina" del domenicano fra Tommaso Sardi', Chiara Nardello's '*Anima Peregrina. Il Viaggio Dantesco Del Domenicano Tommaso Sardi*', and Maria Cristina Paoluzzi's essay on one of the manuscript copies of *De Anima*

Peregrina in Antonio Cadei's *Il trionfo sul tempo. Manoscritti illustrati dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*. Although none of these has much space, if any at all, for Simonetta, they offer important information on Sardi's poem, the forms in which it was circulated, and the religious and intellectual context from which it sprang. Even though she is not aware of his contribution to the 'Simonetta poems', Alessandra Curti has also left a mark on this thesis with her near single-handed investigation of Baccio Ugolini's life and works (1998; 1995), which have saved me an inordinate amount of time and effort.

The one work, though, which has had the greatest impact on my thesis is Judith Bryce's 2009 'The Faces of Ginevra de' Benci: Homosocial Agendas and Female Subjectivity in Later Quattrocento Florence'. In this essay, Bryce examines "'Ginevra'" as 'a cultural construct of the feminine rather than a historical subject', who was 'put to use in the management of complex and sometimes conflictual relationships between individuals, or groups of individuals, in the Florence of the 1470s' (132-133). It is her contention that "'Ginevra'" (like "Simonetta") functions as a cult object of this exchange, symbolically offered by Florentine males to [her 'lover', Bernardo Bembo] in the service of a complex array of both private and public interests' (138-139). "'Ginevra'", she concludes, is 'an essentially fictional construct enmeshed in the processes of masculine self-exploration and/or self-(re)presentation, while her own subjective experience remains elusive' (147). The notion that women lauded in the art and poetry of the era were 'cultural constructs' has been the starting point for my own research, and has allowed me to leave behind much of the romanticisation and descriptiveness that has dogged accounts of Simonetta.

Acknowledging this debt does not mean that I have simply copied Bryce's feminist approach to her source material. Rather, a full-scale study of so multifaceted a figure as

Simonetta has required a fittingly complex and unique methodology to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of such an undertaking. Like Bryce's, my work has been driven by a feminist outlook on history, culture and society, but the methodological tools that best served her purposes were not always the most appropriate for mine. What my work does share with Bryce's, though, is the conviction that challenging hegemonic readings of the past has an important impact on how we comprehend the present and women's role within it. By liberating Simonetta from the mists of sentimentality that have clouded our perceptions of her, I critique the imposition on the Renaissance of present-day conceptions of romance and 'appropriate' male-female relations, which create a false sense of similitude with the past and encourage the idea that a 'natural' state of gender affairs exists. Ever since feminist scholars began to critique Jacob Burckhardt's insistence on women's equal standing in Renaissance Italy (1960: 279-283) a welter of evidence has emerged to suggest that, far from being honoured and respected on the same footing as men, even female members of the élite lived an extremely restricted existence. This is particularly true of conservative, republican Florence, in which the emergence of openly powerful, humanistically-educated women would have been viewed as dangerously monarchical (Cox 2008: 13-14). The extent of women's oppression and seclusion in Florence can be overstated, essential as their presence was at church and at a range of public events (see, for example, Bryce 2001). But it is extremely anachronistic to view Simonetta through romance-inflected lenses as a beacon of adoration, worshipped as a higher being by men who treated women as their equals if not superiors. The situation was, as I shall explore, far more complicated than that.

The reader of this thesis will frequently find references to feminist scholars as diverse as Elisabeth Bronfen, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Lisa Jardine, Mary Rogers, Patricia Simons, Marina Warner and, of course, Judith Bryce. Indeed, an awareness of feminist

historiography, literary criticism and art history has been essential in a text that pieces together how male-authored images of Simonetta were created, why they were exchanged, and the implications of all of this for our understanding of the lives that women led in early modern Italy. In this sense, it takes its place in a long line of works that, from those of Joan Kelly-Gadol (1977) onwards, have questioned the position of women in Renaissance society. What it is not, however, is a work of feminist ‘archaeology’ that explores works by and about women. This puts it at odds with the prevailing trends in feminist treatments of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, which privilege restoring and reinterpreting the voices of the female literary élite (see, for example, the recent studies of early modern women’s writing by Virginia Cox and *The Other Voice* series), and may make it seem outdated. The impact of Cox’s seminal studies of women’s writing in early modern Italy can clearly be felt in my thesis, especially in the following chapter’s analysis of the status of women in Florence relative to the rest of the peninsula (86-93). Yet it is also an influence that I have had to work against, since Cox, along with critics such as Toril Moi, seems convinced that the shift from investigating images of women to dealing with texts written by them is an inevitable and welcome progression and the only way forward for women studies (Moi 2002: 49-50). Yet this stance is challenged by the many scholars who have produced ground-breaking, gendered interpretations of male-authored works. Of especial significance here is Elizabeth Cropper, whose focus on the role played by beauty and visual pleasure in Italian Renaissance art demonstrates just how progressive and insightful such a methodology can be. Drawing on Cropper’s insistence that beauty in art be viewed as a legitimate form of enquiry (1976: 376; 1995: 204-205), along with Jill Burke’s more recent contributions to the field,⁹ the narrative

⁹ See, for example, her current research project, ‘Beauty by Design: Fashioning the Renaissance’ ([http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/beauty-by-design\(c5ba2e95-a894-4ee6-bb23-571dc66d60b4\).html](http://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/beauty-by-design(c5ba2e95-a894-4ee6-bb23-571dc66d60b4).html)), her ‘Making up the Renaissance’ website (<https://sites.eca.ed.ac.uk/renaissancecosmetics/>), and her much-visited blog (<http://renresearch.wordpress.com>).

that I create has as valid a story to relate as more popular feminist approaches to Renaissance Italy: that of the commodification of women through culture in a precise historical context. Such an approach has, I demonstrate, the potential to be as revealing and as radical in its conclusions as more accepted feminist methodologies. More than this, for a figure as lost to us as Simonetta it is the only way to alter perceptions of her significance, and thus has as much to tell us about the role of women in Renaissance society as texts written in ‘the other voice’. Feminism is, to paraphrase Clare Hemmings, a multiplicity (2011: 15-16); this approach to writing literary, artistic and social history is no less a ‘feminist activity’ (Spongberg 2002: 8) than any other.

As Gerda Lerner put it in 1979, though, ‘rational scepticism of handed-down doctrine’ must be combined with the recognition that ‘no single methodology and conceptual framework can fit the complexities of the historical experience of all women’ (59, 158). Indeed, no one methodology can adequately encompass the breadth of material and range of subject matters with which Simonetta presents us, meaning that it is vital to create a more holistic approach. Given that my thesis revolves around the series of vernacular poems that describe Simonetta, close textual analysis forms the backbone of my research and has been one of my main tools in getting to grips with their themes, forms and preoccupations. Similarly, I have read and made use of a great number of art historical studies, also essential given the quantity of paintings that have been associated with Simonetta and that have required scrutiny. Whilst this has involved formal analysis, my principal point of departure has been the synthesis of visual and literary culture pioneered by Aby Warburg, which has allowed me to think critically about the kinship between the ‘Simonetta poems and paintings’ and to reach original conclusions about the representation of women in both media.

At the same time, since my project is grounded in social history and makes use of non-literary records such as letters, chronicles and books of the dead, it has been necessary to hone my archival and palaeographical skills in order to work with fifteenth- and sixteenth-century documents. More than this, I have used my time in libraries and archives in Italy, the United Kingdom and France to seek out manuscript and early print copies of the verse on Simonetta. If I had not done so I would not have had access to several poems and self-commentaries but, beyond this imperative and the possibility of uncovering valuable marginalia, it has been vital to study the few surviving gift copies of the ‘Simonetta poems’. This is because, inspired by the work of critics such as Natalie Zemon Davis (2000) and Abigail Brundin (2008), I have relied on gift theory to understand the significance that such works held as objects dedicated to particular individuals. To quote Zemon Davis, throughout the medieval and early modern periods ‘gift exchange [persisted] as an essential relational mode, a repertoire of behaviour, a register with its own rules, language, etiquette, and gestures’ (2000: 14-15). It is not enough, in other words, to study the language of the ‘Simonetta poems’ when there is the possibility of analysing their original material form, particularly since manuscripts made such excellent gifts (Richardson 2009: 5-6). Indeed, without handling these artefacts it would have been impossible to appreciate the magnificence of Bibl. Cors. MS 55 K 1, Tommaso Sardi’s richly illuminated offering to Pope Leo X, or to note its telling similarities to and differences from the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze’s MS BR 17, an earlier copy of the same work presented to Piero Soderini. This is all, of course, bound up with patronage studies, another important context for my research since nearly all of the ‘Simonetta verse’ was addressed to one would-be Maecenas or another, and the majority of the poets belonged to Medici circles. Likewise, it has been useful to develop an understanding of manuscript and scribal culture, the first port of call being Brian Richardson’s *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy* (2009). As he points

out, manuscript circulation of verse not only allowed a poet to honour a social superior but fostered a sense of solidarity and close communication among groups of likeminded people (2-6). Since one strand of my project has been to assess the ties that bound the ‘Simonetta poets’ together, be they amicable or agonistic, Richardson’s observations on the reciprocal nature of manuscript exchange have been an important context for my research.

The same could be said of the methodological insights provided by new historicism and cultural materialism. Both movements refute the notion that texts should be read as an exact mirror of any particular historical reality. Instead, they view history and literature as being involved in a complex dialogue, and so choose to study ‘not literature and its history, but rather literature *in* history’, and to treat texts as a ‘constitutive and inseparable part of history in the making’ (Brannigan 1998: 3-4). This intentionally goes against formalist and ahistorical approaches to literature, which focus on the study of ‘great’ writers (1998: 37). For new historicist critics, ‘major works of art remain centrally important, but they are jostled [...] by an array of other texts and images’ (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000: 9-10). These include works of literature previously considered too ‘minor’ to merit attention, alongside texts regarded as non-literary (2000: 9-10). As Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt explain, this not only means rediscovering works that are of interest in themselves, but also changing our understanding of canonical texts by examining them in the light of their lesser-known counterparts (2000: 9-10). My own research has taken much from this. First, the antipathy of cultural materialists and new historicists towards approaches to literature that do not take adequate account of historical specificities has powered my rejection of romanticised readings of the ‘Simonetta poems’. Their insistence on analysing literature in conjunction with obscure and non-literary works has been equally instructive, providing a theoretical framework for my amalgamation of social and literary history, and for my broadening of the corpus of poetry

associated with Simonetta. I have, furthermore, depended on the concept of ‘literature in history’ to demonstrate how images of women in Renaissance Florence were simultaneously informed by and used to mould contemporary political realities and attitudes to womankind.

Maintaining an awareness of the traits that divide cultural materialism from new historicism has also been a worthwhile endeavour. For example, its specific engagement with, to quote Raymond Williams, “‘the construction and function of culture within the material fabric of society’” (cited in Brannigan 1998: 96) has lent it a role in my methodology not unlike that played by gift theory. In addition, its focus on how present-day power relations affect the way in which texts are read, ‘[developing] specific strategies for reading the way in which contemporary politics and culture preserves, re-presents and remakes the past’ (Brannigan 1998: 13), has impacted on my desire to use Simonetta to critique the conservative agendas that continue to inform the way in which we respond to Renaissance representations of women.

In combining all of these approaches to form a composite methodology capable of doing justice to Simonetta’s complexities, I have crafted a solid yet flexible framework for analysing the corpus of poems and paintings upon which my thesis depends. As I explain my selection of artworks at the outset of Chapter Five (181-182) I shall not go over them in detail here. For the time being I shall limit myself to the observation that, since my task is to reflect on the commodification of women between pen and paintbrush rather than to assess whether Simonetta’s features were ever traced by the latter, I have focused on the images that have the closest thematic and iconographical ties to the verse that describes her. This means that I concentrate exclusively on the mythological works and ‘ideal heads’ of Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo whilst disregarding the other paintings and sculptures that have been tentatively

connected to her but are not relevant to my arguments. My choice of poetry requires more immediate explanation, in particular my decision to restrict myself to texts composed in the *volgare* at the expense of the twelve Latin epigrams and eulogies that lament Simonetta's passing.¹⁰ Whilst practicality was a factor, the quantity and variety of the vernacular 'Simonetta poems' being more than great enough to sustain a study of this size, it also made sound methodological sense to use her as a window on the revitalisation of the Florentine *volgare* that took place during the Laurentian era. As the reader will discover, Simonetta became an important instrument for the *Quattrocento* reinvention of the Dantean-Petrarchan *donna angelicata*, especially as far as funerary verse is concerned. It should therefore come as no surprise that she features in the work of late-fifteenth century Florence's chief vernacular poets.

The most famous of these remain Angelo Poliziano and Lorenzo de' Medici. The former, later to be one of the foremost intellectuals of his age, was at the outset of his career as Medici scholar-secretary and poet when he composed the *Stanze de messer Angelo Politiano cominciate per la giostra del magnifico Giuliano di Pietro de' Medici in circa 1475-1478*. Written, as the title suggests, to celebrate Giuliano's victory in the joust of January 1475, this unfinished epyllion combines classical tradition and Tuscan convention to tell the story of 'Iulio's' passage from immature youth to ardent lover and epic-style hero after his meeting with Simonetta. Lorenzo's *Comento de' miei sonetti*, a self-commentary on his verse compiled in the 1480s and 1490s (Zanato 1992: 556), also needs little in the way of introduction. Simonetta's role here, in the form of the four sonnets that Lorenzo composed in the wake of her death, is to provide the material for the opening 'Argumento' section, becoming the 'star'

¹⁰ These Latin components were composed by Tommaso Baldinotti, Francesco Barsellino, Alessandro Cortese, Piero di Francesco Dovizi da Bibbiena, Michele Marullo, Naldo Naldi, and Angelo Poliziano. I do on occasion refer to the epigrams of Naldi (see 99 and 115) and Poliziano (99), and to a number of other Latin texts, but only to illuminate my understanding of vernacular poetry.

who opens Lorenzo's eyes to the beneficent power of love and allows him to find his own beloved. Both of these works have been widely discussed and are easy to obtain in a number of modern critical editions. They have also left a well-documented manuscript and early-print legacy that, in the case of the *Comento*, includes a probable autograph copy (Martelli 1996: 240) and, in that of the *Stanze*, comprises three fifteenth-century manuscripts (Pernicone 1952: 16-18) and nine surviving copies of the original printed edition of 1494.¹¹

The other poems were, by and large, more of a challenge to track down. Among the least problematic was the famous *Quattrocento* poet Luigi Pulci's sonnet, 'Com'hai tu, crudel Morte, un sì bel viso', presumably written in around 1476 since it mourns Simonetta's passing. We are lucky that it has been transcribed in its entirety by Stefano Carrai (1985: 89-91) since only one manuscript documents its existence, namely the Biblioteca Città di Arezzo's MS Arezzo 181 under the title 'In mortem Symonetae Cathaniae Pro Duce Calab. Aloy. Pulc.' (21r). It was, in other words, written for Alfonso, Duke of Calabria and heir to the Neapolitan throne, a fact upon which I comment at length in the course of this thesis. The elegy, 'Venite, sacre e gloriose dive', and sonnet, 'Se viva e morta io ti dove' far guerra' (*circa* 1476), composed by Bernardo, Luigi's lesser-known brother, can also be traced without too much trouble. There are, as far as I am aware, three manuscript copies of the works, two in Florence in the Biblioteca Riccardiana's MS Riccardiano 2823 (156v- 160r, 185v) and the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana's MS Acquisti e Doni 288 (69r- 74r), and the third in Parma in the Biblioteca Palatina's MS Parmense 201 (54v, 186v-190v). Beyond this, both elegy and sonnet were selected to be part of the *Bucoliche elegantissime composte*, which teamed up Bernardo's translation of Virgil's *Bucolics* with original vernacular pastoral verse by Francesco Arsocchi, Girolamo Benivieni and Jacopo Fiorino de' Boninsegni, and three of

¹¹ As recorded by the British Library's Incunabula Short Title Catalogue.

Bernardo's funerary poems, including those on Simonetta. Published by the printer Antonio Miscomini in February 1481 (*st. f.*) and then in a second edition datable to April 1494, the poems are to be found on pages f2r-f6r and e1v-e5r respectively, under the titles 'Bernardus Pulcius florentinus de obitu divae Simonettae ad Iulianum Medicem' / 'Elegia di Bernardo Pulci fiorentino della morte della diva Simonetta a Iuliano de' Medici' and 'Diva Simonetta ad Iulianum Medicem' / 'La diva Simonetta a Iuliano de' Medici'. These early printed editions form the basis for the two more recent transcriptions of the works. The first of these, part of Achille Neri's article, 'La Simonetta' (1885: 141-147), provided my original encounter with 'Venite, sacre e gloriose dive' and 'Se viva e morta io ti dove' far guerra', and remains the most readily accessible copy. I have, however, used the annotated text provided by Fabio Barricalla in his 2007 thesis, 'L'*Elegia* di Bernardo Pulci per la morte di Simonetta Cattaneo secondo la lezione della stampa Miscomini, Firenze 1481 (*st. f.*)' (18-33, 35-37). Until a critical edition of the 'Simonetta poems' is produced (not the aim of this thesis), we must rely on Barricalla's rendering of the elegy and sonnet, which is the most thorough and reliable available.

Whilst he may have been superseded by Barricalla as far as Bernardo Pulci is concerned, we have Neri to thank for transmitting 'Motor del cielo et re degli emisperi', the elegy written by the obscure Veronese poet Francesco Nursio Timideo, later secretary to Caterina Cornaro (1885: 138-140; Giuliani 1881: 212-213). It is unfortunate that Neri's evident disdain for the work prevented him from transcribing it in its entirety, since it is otherwise confined to two manuscripts, the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze's MS II II 75 (192v-202v) and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's MS Ital. 1543 (199r-207r), in which it is given the title 'Francisci Nursii timidei veronensis regii secretarii carmen auster in funere Symonette

Vespucchie Florentine ad illuxtrissimus Alphonsum Calabrie ducem'.¹² Distinguished by its unusual length, declarations of love and despair, and dedication to Alfonso, the poem is rarely discussed and has never been edited in its entirety. For reasons of practicality, I have therefore used the Florentine version in conjunction with Neri's transcription.

The two sonnets by Girolamo Benivieni, in his day an esteemed and remarkably long-lived vernacular poet, pose a different set of problems. This is due, in part, to Benivieni's longevity but also to his conversion to Savonarolism in the 1490s, which saw him rewrite much of his *oeuvre* at different points in his life. The result is that there are two different versions of 'Se morta vive ancor colei che in vita' and three of 'Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è 'l chiaro sole', all of which form part of my analysis of Simonetta's changing representations in Chapter Four and thus had to be located. The poems, which were presumably written *circa* 1476, initially appear in Benivieni's early *canzoniere*, *Canzone e Sonetti di Girolamo Benivieni fiorentino*, a critical edition of which was published by Roberto Leporatti in 2008. In this collection, circulated in around 1489 and otherwise only available in the Biblioteca Palatina's MS Parmense 3070 (3r) and the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma's MS Sessoriano 413 (414v-415r), the sonnets appear, respectively, as 'Ad Giuliano de' Medici. Consolazione per la morte de Simonetta' and 'Per la morte della Simonetta. In persona de Giuliano de' Medici' (Leporatti 2008: 218-219). 'Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è 'l chiaro sole' is then included in Benivieni's 1500 *Commento di Hieronymo B. sopra a piú sue canzone et sonetti dello amore et della bellezza [sic] divina*, with the addition of a commentary (46v- 47r). When Benivieni and his grand-nephew, Lorenzo, came to re-edit the *Commento*, probably in the 1530s, they subtly adapted the poem and its explanation for its new context (Leporatti 2008:

¹² 'Bitter poem on the death of the Florentine Simonetta Vespucci, by Francesco Nursio Timideo of Verona, royal secretary, to the most illustrious Alfonso, Duke of Calabria'.

147; Jayne 1984: 160-161; Ridolfi 1964: 228). ‘Se morta vive ancor colei che in vita’, for its part, surfaces in Benivieni’s 1519 *Opere*, in the guise of a ‘Consolatoria a sé medesimo per la morte di messer Domenico suo fratello’ (115v- 116r). Although Leporatti has transcribed the 1500 version of ‘Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è ’l chiaro sole’ and the 1519 ‘Se morta vive ancor colei che in vita’ (2008: 281-282), it was still necessary to locate the originals for the sake of commentaries and context. This was not too difficult a task in terms of the early *Commento* because, although the commentary has never been transcribed, the work was print-published and has survived in numerous copies, not to mention being freely accessible in more than one digital database. The same is true of the *Opere*. The later version of the *Commento*, however, can only be found in the Biblioteca Riccardiana’s MS 2811 and, whilst it has been partially transcribed by Sears Jayne (1984: 161-179), the ‘Simonetta poem’ and accompanying commentary have until now remained more or less forgotten. Gathering together and transcribing all of the Benivieni material was therefore an important undertaking.

The Dominican monk Tommaso Sardi’s Dantesque epic *De Anima Peregrina* (1493-1515), or *On the Journeying Soul*, provided a true palaeographical challenge. Simonetta makes an appearance in the thirteenth chapter of the first book of this strange, abstruse work. Given that Book One is the only section of *De Anima Peregrina* to have been transcribed in its totality (by Margaret Rooke in 1929), one would have thought that this would make its interpretation easier. Unfortunately, the language that Sardi uses is so obscure that it is impossible to understand it without recourse to his self-commentary, the only copy of which is located in the archive of the monastery of Santa Maria Novella (ASMN MS IB 59), where I duly spent several days struggling with Sardi’s minute handwriting. Despite these difficulties, exploring *De Anima Peregrina* has been an extremely rewarding experience, all the more so for its being a more or less unknown quantity. We can also be thankful for the many manuscript

copies that Sardi had prepared as gifts, which make tracing the poem's history all the more fascinating (see Nardello 2002: 152-155).

There has been little doubt as to the attribution of all the aforementioned works. This is not the case, however, when we reach the final poem in the series, 'Quanto studio poté natura et arte'. It is awarded a brief mention by Paul Oskar Kristeller in the first volume of his *Iter Italicum* (1963: 223). Yet otherwise this anonymous sonnet had been overlooked, despite being recorded under the title 'Simonetta moriente flebile carmen in mortem' in BRF MS Riccardiano 2823, on the very same page as its copy of 'Se viva e morta io ti dove' far guerra' (185v). Yet, as I discovered, it had had a previous life in a 1474 printed anthology of poems lamenting the death of an entirely different historical figure, where it had been attributed to the Florentine poet and musician Baccio Ugolini. On the other hand, MS Arezzo 181 (BCA) states that, in this form, its author was Antonio Maffei, the humanist from Volterra who would later be among the Pazzi conspirators (41v). This is contradicted by B.Pal.Pr. MS Parmense 201, with which we return to the original attribution (50r-50v). The picture remains confused, and yet there is one small clue that suggests that Ugolini is indeed the poet we seek. This is the use of the verb 'stracharsi' in the eighth line of the poem, an atypical expression that also features in a letter that Baccio sent to Lorenzo from Rome on 21 May 1474 (ASFi, MAP, XXX, no. 407; Curti 1995: 74). Given this concurrence in phraseology I have accepted the 'majority opinion' as to Ugolini's authorship of the sonnet. It is not impossible, of course, that an entirely different poet 'borrowed' it when Simonetta died. Even if this were the case, however, the effect would simply be to strengthen my arguments regarding the poem in Chapter Three (107-108).

This completes my corpus of ‘Simonetta poems’, all of which can be linked to her with confidence. The same cannot be said of the one sequence of poems that I have chosen to leave out of my arguments, namely the twelve sonnets that may or may not have been written by Giuliano de’ Medici to mourn Simonetta’s death, which can be found in BRF MS 1166, 88r-89v, and in an appendix of Farina’s biography of Simonetta (2001: 118-125). Whilst there is every possibility that Farina may one day be vindicated in her hope that the Giuliano de’ Medici referred to in the manuscript is Giuliano di Piero and not Giuliano di Lorenzo (2001: 117-118), we have no proof either way. Giuliano was, according to Poliziano, a keen vernacular poet (1958: 64), yet there is nothing within the sonnets to connect them specifically to Simonetta. Until more evidence is uncovered as to their provenance, it seems only wise to set them aside.

There is, in any case, a great deal to discover about the remaining ‘Simonetta poems and paintings’ and their commodification of female beauty. My thesis thus spans a further four chapters, not including the conclusory remarks with which it ends. In Chapter Two, ‘From Genoese Wife to Florentine Ideal: The Iconisation of Simonetta’, I open my arguments by analysing how the Ligurian bride of a relatively unimportant merchant was transformed into a Florentine icon, used to reinvigorate and celebrate the city’s vernacular heritage. I focus in particular on the impact of her early death on this process of idolisation, which was given a substantial boost by her unwitting mimicry of the very *donne angelicate* that she was being used to reinvent. The sensual Simonetta of Poliziano’s *Stanze*, I demonstrate, becomes an increasingly saintly figure following this sad event. The second half of the chapter places Simonetta in the context of the series of young and beautiful women who were lauded by Florence’s poets and artists in the late fifteenth century. Simonetta, I argue, played a unique role in Florentine culture, and yet the similarities that she shares with other ‘beloved’

nobildonne such as Lucrezia Donati and Ginevra de' Benci, all praised for conventional female virtues, are proof that a conservative stance towards women continued to reign in the city. As further evidence of this phenomenon I include a case study of Poliziano, whose exquisite poetic creations were in no way incompatible with an underlying misogyny.

Chapter Three, 'Politics, Patronage, Competition, Collaboration: Simonetta's Election as Poetic Muse', shifts the emphasis of my enquiries from 'how' to 'why' by assessing the reasons behind Simonetta's literary popularity. On the one hand, I argue, she died at precisely the right moment to become an instrument for the development in Florentine vernacular literature that was being promoted by Lorenzo and his associates during the 1470s. On the other, she was a favourite of the Medici family in a society that set great store by its intellectual achievements, meaning that she became an important source of homosocial currency. The third section of the chapter considers the relationship between the poets and its impact on the way in which Simonetta was depicted by them, centring on the simultaneously rivalrous and collaborative nature of cultural production in Renaissance Italy. I round off these debates with a coda focusing on Tommaso Sardi's tragicomic attempts to generate cultural capital via *De Anima Peregrina*, using his representation of Simonetta as an illustration of why he failed to do so.

In Chapter Four, entitled 'From Laurentian Star to Savonarolan Serpent: The Impact of Political, Religious and Cultural Change on Representations of Simonetta', I demonstrate that such alterations in the fabric of Florentine society were a significant factor in how Simonetta was portrayed over the course of her literary afterlife. In doing so, I show that the 'Simonetta poems', which continued to be created and recreated by their authors as late as the 1530s, offer an exceptional window on the influence wrought on Florence's cultural life by the twists

and turns in the city's fate. The main body of my thesis closes with Chapter Five, 'Simonetta, Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo: The Commodification of Female Beauty in Early Renaissance Florentine Art', which examines the affinities between the poetic Simonetta and the works of visual art with which she has been associated. It is divided into three sections. The first deals with Poliziano's Simonetta and Botticelli's *Primavera* and *Birth of Venus*, showing how poet and artist used female figures to fashion an eclectic language of *fiorentinità* that expressed the city's 'flourishing' under Lorenzo; the second studies Botticelli's series of 'ideal heads' in relation to the *Stanze*, and the commodification of female beauty in both; the third takes as its centrepiece Piero di Cosimo's *Simonetta*, analysing its ambivalent approach to love and beauty. It is a fascination with female beauty, I conclude, whether positively or negatively defined, that governs all of the poems and paintings discussed in this thesis.

I conclude my arguments with an analysis of the role that Simonetta plays in Salman Rushdie's 2008 novel, *The Enchantress of Florence*, one of the most recent and ingenious of her modern 'afterlives'. By exploring Rushdie's fascination with the ideal beauties that haunt traditions eastern and western alike, I draw attention to the originality of my thesis, which strips away the myths and legends in which Rushdie delights to return Simonetta to as precise a cultural context as possible.

In sum, my thesis proves that Simonetta, when understood as a cultural construct, has a great deal to tell us about late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century Florence. The fruit of an animated dialogue between poets and artists, she allows us to eavesdrop on this lively conversation, listening in as the ever-changing Simonetta is created and re-created, and as painters and versifiers alike revitalise Florentine culture.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM GENOESE WIFE TO FLORENTINE IDEAL:

THE ICONISATION OF SIMONETTA

Introduction

The *monna* Simonetta who once graced Florence's churches and palaces was merely the wife of a merchant of mediocre social standing, and Genoese to boot. The city's poets were therefore faced with a challenge: how were they to transform her into a specifically Florentine ideal, and what qualities should she exemplify in a city dominated by Lorenzo and his family? The first part of this dilemma was easily resolved, since they could rely on a long and illustrious tradition of Tuscan love poetry to aid them in their endeavour. The verse of the day, indeed, positively resounds with the ecstatic utterances and doleful laments of writers in 'poetic thrall' to chaste, beautiful beloveds modelled on Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura. It required no great stretch of the imagination to describe Simonetta in such terms. The second issue was more complicated, and is thus the focus of this chapter. The solution, I argue, was to transform Simonetta into a civic emblem, reincarnating the *donna angelicata* of Tuscan convention in such a way as to support Lorenzo's ambitions for the vernacular, and celebrate the city's literary heritage and cultural revitalisation. This transfiguration was, as we shall see, enhanced by Simonetta's early death, which made her the perfect latter-day Laura/Beatrice.

What interests me in this part of the thesis, then, is Simonetta's depiction as a Florentine 'idol' and how her death affected the way in which she was portrayed as such. In what follows I delineate the process of iconisation that Simonetta underwent by looking at the three texts

that are most revealing in this regard, namely Poliziano's *Stanze* (1475-1478), Bernardo Pulci's elegy, 'Venite, sacre e gloriose dive' (circa 1476), and Lorenzo's *Comento* (1480s-1490s). I begin with an in-depth analysis of how the (living) Simonetta of the *Stanze* was designed as both icon and sensual fantasy, concentrating in particular on the extent to which she can be said to be an 'icona neoplatonica' (Ventrone 2007: 47). I go on to contrast this decorous, voluptuous image with the increasingly remote and starry persona that Simonetta assumed after her death, as poets eschewed such genteelly erotic connotations in favour of full-on sanctification. What emerges is a history of Simonetta's iconic standing in Florence, tracing a poetic afterlife that saw her morph from nymph to 'stella di Venere' (*Comento*, 611-612). The final section of the chapter places her in the context of the wider idolisation of women in Laurentian Florence, characterised by conservative values that were as unattractive as Simonetta and her 'poetic sisters' were beautiful. Poliziano, 'Simonetta's' originator but by no means a champion of women's rights, provides a telling case study in how it was possible to combine the worship of idealised 'ladies' with outright misogyny.

Poliziano, Simonetta and Florentine Poetics in the Laurentian Era

i) Civic Icon and Muse

The fact that we remember Simonetta at all today is largely due to Poliziano's virtuosic ability to rise to the poetic challenges posed by Lorenzo's Florence. As critics such as Martelli (1995: 41) and Bausi (2006: 27) point out, one of the *de facto* ruler's key cultural concerns in the 1470s lay in wresting 'ownership' of the Florentine *volgare* from the city's traditional oligarchy, for whom the language and its concomitant literary heritage had long been of great importance. If he could claim to have delivered the Florentine vernacular from a century of

relative neglect and to have ennobled it in the process, his position as Florence's 'protector' and 'champion' would be strengthened, and the increasingly side-lined and embittered élite would lose a significant element in its collective identity. Lorenzo dedicated his own very considerable skills to the task of creating a vernacular style that simultaneously embraced the city's far-famed literary traditions and its newfound renown in classical scholarship. It is Poliziano's *Stanze*, however, that provide the supreme example of how this could best be achieved. More than this, Poliziano was evidently aware that the revitalisation of the *volgare* would be incomplete without a rethinking of the ideal women who were so central to Florentine poetic heritage, or was at least spurred to this conclusion by the opportunities presented by Simonetta's status in Florence. A city that made so much of its purported superiority in both ancient learning and vernacular verse, he realised, needed figureheads that could convey all aspects of its cultural successes. His Simonetta becomes just such an icon, the embodiment of Florence's literary, artistic and scholarly accomplishments.

Poliziano, as I explore at length in Chapter Five (182-200), was deeply wedded to the practice of *varietas*, that is, the use of eclectic imitation in verse and prose (McLaughlin 1995: 191-214). This is nowhere more in evidence than in the *Stanze*, in which every octave is made up of a mosaic of references to vernacular and classical works. 'The effect of this subtle and haunting intercontamination of a hundred subtexts is a kind of alchemical quintessence of the European [or, more specifically, Florentine] poetic tradition' (Greene 1982: 158). Whilst Greene argues that 'this integrating structure is Poliziano's artistic response to his own historical solitude', in a text permeated by a sense of loss and destruction (1982: 158; 168-169), the opposite is, in fact, the case. What we have here is no mournful lament for civilisations past, but a poetical manifesto for, and a celebration of, their renewal in a Laurentian Golden Age. It is no coincidence, for example, that the action is set in a timeless

‘Etruria’ (I.51.3) peopled by gods and heroes, in evocation of the ‘First Age of Man’ of ancient legend.

The action begins as Iulio embarks on a hunt in the Tuscan countryside (I.26-I.33), and is lured away from his companions by the machinations of a vengeful Cupid, who places a white deer in his path that leads him to Simonetta (I.33.7- I.38). It is with her appearance that this forested landscape transforms into a true garden of delight, a *locus amoenus* of love and poetry that metaphorically represents the peace and happiness of a Florence sheltered by its ‘Lauro’ (I.4.1-4) (see Cole 1998: 28-29 and Lazzaro 1991: 85-86 on the connections between flowering meadows, love and verse). The fury and desperation of Iulio’s pursuit of the ‘bella fera’ (I.35.5) is swept away in an instant, as suddenly as the doe herself vanishes (I.37-38). The scene that meets the young Medici’s startled eyes is an enchanting Florentine paradise. On a ‘fiorito e verde prato’ (I.37.6), redolent of the legendary flower-filled meadow upon which ‘Fiorenza’ was founded (Bergstein 1991: 679), sits a miraculous vision of womanhood whose every move and attribute shimmers with the combined radiance of the myriad classical and vernacular beauties who make up her poetic aura. For example, when Simonetta rises to her feet ‘con di fior pieno un grembo’ (I.47.8) she is echoing Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* (CXXXVI. 42), Boccaccio’s *Teseida* (III.18.7), and Ovid’s *Fasti* (IV.432) (Puccini 2004: 43, n. 8). When flowers spring up from her ‘dolci passi’ (I.55.7-8) she is walking in the footsteps of the women of Petrarch (CLXV.1-4), Hesiod (*Theogony*, 194-5), Apollonius of Rhodes (*Argonautica*, I.1142-3), Lucretius (*De rerum natura*, I.7-8), Persius (*Satires*, II.38) and Claudian (*Laus serenae reg.*, 89-91) (Puccini 2004: 50, n. 7). She is the eclectic embodiment of the entire western literary tradition, which, in Poliziano’s version of events, has reached its culmination in the new ‘età d’oro’ of Laurentian Florence.

More than this, Poliziano everywhere stresses Simonetta's superhuman demeanour. From the moment of her near-magical apparition onwards, there is a 'non so che divino' (I.42.8) about her, a goddess-like quality enhanced by the poet's comparison of her to Thalia, Minerva and Diana (I.45.1-4). It is a process that reaches its zenith when Iulio and Simonetta begin to converse. At the sound of the young man's supplication, Simonetta does not merely laugh; in Poliziano's words, she 'lights up' with such brilliance that she seems to have the power to move mountains, halt the passage of the sun and make heaven open (I.50.2-4). 'Soave, saggia e di dolceza piena', her voice would make even a siren fall in love with her (I.50.7-8). Her teeth and lips are not merely compared to pearls and violas; they *are*, metaphorically, the 'perle e viole' (I.50.5) through which she 'forms' words, a striking turn of phrase which, as Puccini points out, 'è detto come se fosse un fatto straordinario, ed è straordinario che una creatura sovrumana parli umanamente' (2004: 46, n. 5). Simonetta, in other words, is awe-inspiring and unearthly at one and the same time.

This effect is increased by Iulio's opening gambit, in which he addresses Simonetta as a 'vergin sovrana', a nymph or goddess, perhaps Diana (I.49), in an exchange that is clearly modelled on Anchises' meeting with the goddess of love in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (92-100), and most particularly on Aeneas' amazement at encountering the disguised Venus in the *Aeneid* (Book I, 326-329). Simonetta's insistence that she is not a goddess but a normal married woman (I.51.4) born in Liguria (I.51.5) would, at first glance, appear to negate this implied unearthliness. Nevertheless, her words increase the sense that she is a goddess, since her reply resembles Aphrodite's assertion that she is a mere mortal in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (108-110), and Venus' refusal to be honoured as a god in the *Aeneid* (I.334-5). The more she denies her divinity, in other words, the more ethereal she becomes. Even the rhymes with which she speaks in I.51 are, most unusually for the *Stanze*, trisyllabic, 'quasi ad

allontanare ancora di più la vita di Simonetta nella dimensione del mito' (Puccini 2004: 46, n. 1). There is, moreover, something timeless in the way that she describes her homeland, adopted city and day-to-day habits. She explains her origins, for example, not by alluding to Genoa and Florence by name or by listing their famous monuments but by referring to the river Arno and the Ligurian coast, natural and eternal features in the landscape. Her visits to Church, furthermore, are figured in ambiguous terms, with her references to the 'sacri altar ne' vostri tempi' (I.53.3) as applicable to the classical as to the Christian world. The reader cannot help but agree with Iulio that she is 'fuor di guisa umana' (I.49.5).

Simonetta, in other words, combines the golden beauty of Laura (I.43.3) with the ageless glamour of a classical goddess. As Elizabeth Cropper (1976: 388) points out, moreover, her serenity and joy (I.37.8; I.43.5-8; I.44; I.47.2; I.50; I.55.1-2) and, one might add, wisdom and sweet nature (I.38.8; I.41.5; I.45.7; I.46.4-8; I.50.7-8; I.55; I.56.7) are everywhere stressed. In fact, the terms 'dolcezza', 'dolce' and 'soave' are employed by Poliziano on 14 separate occasions in the space of the twenty octaves in Book I that describe Simonetta, often in conjunction or twice in the same verse (see, in particular, I.50.7-8). To quote Victoria Kirkham, 'Simonetta is a picture of feminine perfection and a font of human virtue' (2001: 56). More than this, she is the dazzling (re)incarnation of everything that is matchless about Florentine culture, the personification (as we shall see in Chapter Four, 138-142, *et cetera*) of a Florence 'flourishing' in virtue, happiness and artistic endeavour under its Lauro.

Inspiring Iulio (II.41-46) and all those who meet her (I.46.5-8) to greater nobility, she is the presiding muse of her idyllic forest glade. Her special connection with the natural world is, indeed, emphasised by Poliziano at every turn, and is in stark contrast to the terror and destruction wrought upon it by Iulio (Tylus 2010: 78-79). Most obvious are her floral dress (I.

43.1-2) and the lapful of flowers that she carries within it (I.47-8), but even her features are described using nature imagery. Her face, for instance, is ‘dipinto di ligustri e rose’ (I.44.6) and, as we have seen, her lips and teeth are depicted as violas and pearls (I.50.5). She self-confessedly delights in the grass, flowers, fresh air, shadows and streams of her woodland haunt (I.52) and her effect on it is miraculous, a fact underlined so often by Poliziano that it becomes one of her defining attributes. From the outset, he depicts the entire forest as laughing around her, and her gaze as calming storms (I.43.5-8). Breezes hush to hear her voice, he continues, whilst birds sing at the sound of it (I.44.7-8). She leaves Iulio ‘con occhi più lieti e più ridenti,/ tal che ’l ciel tutto asserenò d’intorno’, causing the woods to lament and birds to cry, but the grass to blossom beneath her ‘dolci passi’ (I.55). Poliziano twice compares her, moreover, to Diana (I.45.4; I.49.3), virgin huntress and mistress of wild nature (March 2001: 135). In the words of Kirkham, it is ‘as if she were springtime itself, at one with the magical landscape’ (2001: 56). Poliziano even likens her to Thalia, muse of bucolic verse (I.45.1), fitting for a city that had recently seen a revival in vernacular pastoral verse led by the so-called “studio di buccoici” (Carrai 1999: 115-120; see my discussion of Lucrezia Donati in the final section of this chapter, 71-74). Simonetta, in other words, wields a benign yet absolute power over her flower-filled meadow, which can be interpreted as a metaphorical representation of Florence and its beauties. She should therefore be read not only as the new emblem of Laurentian verse but almost as its ruling deity, the apotheosis of all the female icons of Tuscan verse who have gone before her.

Beyond this celebration of poetry, Poliziano is sometimes seen as using Simonetta to vaunt the city’s status as the new home of Platonic philosophy. The extent of this tribute to Marsilio Ficino and his followers has drawn much critical attention and controversy. Mario Martelli’s 1995 allegorical reading of the *Stanze* has been immensely influential in this regard. For

Martelli, the work is chiefly concerned with charting the ‘successive tappe nell’ascesa dalla vita dei sensi a quella contemplativa’ that is characteristic of Ficinian approaches to the divine. At the lower end of this hierarchy, the deer and its forest home represent the sin, sensuality and death inherent to humankind’s baser appetites (Martelli 1995: 95-95; 111; 120). Drawing on the Platonic understanding of the two Venuses, Simonetta becomes symbolic of the active life of earthly virtue, the ‘Venere vulgare’ of Ficino’s *El libro dell’amore* and Pico della Mirandola’s commentary on Benivieni’s *Canzona d’amore* (Martelli 1995: 104-105). She may still be a flesh-and-blood woman, ‘ma in lei risplende pure il raggio della divina bellezza’ (1995: 121). From this clothed, earthbound woman we ascend one step higher in Ficino’s *itinerarium mentis in deum* to behold the naked, immortal ‘Venere celeste’ (1995: 104-105; 130-135).

The majority of critical opinion, both pre- and post-Martelli, has been similarly persuaded of the *Stanze*’s Platonic import. For Arnolfo B. Ferruolo (1955), for example, Simonetta’s association with light is key to understanding the poem, since Iulio’s ‘prayer to Simonetta is moved by love; and this love of his, which is love for the creator through the love for a creature is rewarded by the coming of light’ (17-18). Vittore Branca also finds in the *Stanze* ‘un’impostazione ascensionale, neoplatonicamente trionfale’ (1986: 462), whilst Giuseppe Mazzotta believes that, in all likelihood, the work was ‘conceived from the start as if it were the *Aeneid* of the Neoplatonists, as mapping, that is, the essential direction of the education of the soul’ (2001: 7-8). Martin McLaughlin, too, is convinced that the *Stanze* contains ‘a vertical Neoplatonic ascent’, one which is accompanied by the ‘horizontal, linear gloss’ of a series of Triumphs of *Amore*, *Fortuna* and *Virtù* (2000: 134-136).

Christina Storey (2003) is more wary of such allegorical readings of the *Stanze*. She does not deny that the Poliziano of the 1470s was influenced ‘in some manner’ by Ficino, but criticises those scholars who have searched for ‘direct verbal and thematic echoes’ of the philosopher’s work in the *Stanze* (2003: 603). As she points out, ‘a survey of the secondary literature dealing with Ficinian influence on *Le stanze* can leave one with the impression that Poliziano simply translated Ficinian philosophy into poetry’ (2003: 603). In contrast to the critics mentioned thus far, Storey finds only one plausible textual link between the writings of Ficino and the mini-epic, citing the power that Poliziano’s Venus holds over Mars as resonating with the description of the goddess’s domination of her bellicose lover in *El libro dell’amore* (2003: 615). Even then, she remains far from convinced that Ficino’s tome provides the only source for this imagery, and argues against using it as ‘the pretext for forcing a Ficinian reading of the poem as a whole’ (2003: 615). Rather, ‘we should read the poetry in the “indirect” cultural context of Poliziano’s reception of Ficino’s aesthetic principles and his application of them to a work of poetic art’ (2003: 604).

Paolo Orvieto (2009) takes a very different view. His Poliziano is a man who, from the outset, resisted the pressure to conform to Platonic ways of thought, preferring the ‘verifiable’ and ‘scientific’ methods of Aristotle (2009: 58). As a result, love, as presented in the *Stanze*, becomes a state of ‘humiliating slavery’ that is negatively compared to a more innocent Golden Age (2009: 237). ‘Amore, di per sé, insomma non è causa di progresso etico ed esistenziale- come invece è l’amore ficiniano’, but rather causes a man to lose all faith in himself and to give up his free will ‘al momento in cui pone ogni sua virtù, tutto se stesso, in mano degli alienanti Fortuna e Amore’ (2009: 238). The realm of Venus does not mark the giddy heights of some Ficinian scale of spiritual ascent. Instead, it is ‘il regno della lussuria e della sessualità’, the playground of ‘le caratterizzazioni psico-fisiologiche classiche

dell'innamoramento', such as pleasure, fear, anger, cruelty and desperation (2009: 238-239).

In other words, what we have before us is 'un percorso ascensionale che è tutto terreno e nient'affatto teologico, ben differente da quello ficiniano (e laurenziano)' (2009: 240).

Poliziano may be celebrating the seductive charms of Simonetta and the sentiments that she inspired in Giuliano, 'ma di fatto quell'innamoramento non è che il primo e più basso stadio esistenziale del percorso "trionfale" petrarchesco' of Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time and Eternity (2009: 244). In this poem of earthly suffering, the metamorphoses of Simonetta are not bound by any kind of coherent or logical structure, leaving her as 'una donna per molti aspetti schizofrenica: una ancora fedele a Venere e ad Amore, e l'altra che è passata al servizio di Pallade-Atena; una ancora simbolo erotico e l'altra di integerrima castità' (2009: 246, 248). Immortality, Poliziano contends, can only be assured 'dalla sublimazione dell'effeminato eros in virile eroismo, dalle azioni eroiche concretamente compiute, ma soprattutto dalla Poesia' (2009: 245). Orvieto even goes as far as to suggest that the mini-epic's lack of acceptability to Ficino may explain, in part, why it was never completed (2009: 244).

Orvieto is far from alone in his resistance to Platonic interpretations of the *Stanze*. Emilie Sérís, for example, is convinced that the work owes far more to Epicureanism than to Neoplatonism (2004: 264), identifying Lucretius's *De rerum natura* as its most important source, particularly as far as Venus, her domain, Mars, and Iulio's dream of Simonetta are concerned (2004: 265-270). Similarly, for Ida Maier the *Stanze* are an Epicurean injunction to seize the day, celebrating beauty, grace and light in a fight against the forces that would destroy them (1966: 349). According to Jane Tylus, the central, if incomplete mission of the *Stanze* is 'to masculinise love poetry in the vernacular, making it worthy of Tuscany's greatest men' (2010: 84). Whilst Iulio's initial opinions on love are 'meant to be the misguided assumptions of the young man who resists what he most fears [...] the question about love's

power to chase away masculinity lingers' (2010: 75-78). Simonetta's impact upon him, indeed, contains 'sinister' echoes of Cupid's disastrous possession of Dido in *Aeneid* I, and the poem as a whole is littered with mythological examples of besotted, castrated, cuckolded and domesticated men (2010: 79-80). Yet 'in the framework of Poliziano's poem, [liberty] can be regained; Poliziano's hero finally resists the beautiful, choosing to battle her instead, and epic's realisation is contingent on that ongoing resistance' (2010: 97).

As these radically divergent interpretations of the *Stanze* imply, the poem continues to defy attempts to produce a definitive account of its philosophical *raison(s) d'être*. This may be because Poliziano himself was impatient with such intellectual pigeonholing. This has not, of course, prevented scholars from attempting to identify doctrinal schemes of thought in his 'collected works'. Eugenio Garin (1957), Charles Fantazzi (2001) and Orvieto (2009) are all certain that Ficinian Platonism held no real interest for Poliziano at any stage of his life. Branca's Poliziano, by way of contrast, is a man whose youth and early adulthood were coloured by 'un'adesione alle impostazioni culturali ficiniane' (1986: 460), but who then definitively abandoned Plato for Aristotle after coming into contact with Ermolao Barbaro in Venice (1986: 464-465). Similarly, Mazzotta charts Poliziano's development from enthusiastic Platonist to disillusioned Aristotelian convert (2001: 7-23). Gur Zak, on the other hand, is certain that Poliziano can be most readily identified as a Stoic (2013: 9) whilst, as we have seen, Maier (1966) and Sérís (2004) view him as an Epicurean.

Yet Poliziano never identified himself as a philosopher in the contemporary understanding of the term, not even in the opening oration to his 1492 course on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*, entitled *Lamia*, when his fascination with Aristotle was at its height (Celenza 2010a: ix-x). It is clear that Poliziano disdained Florence's self-proclaimed 'philosophers', the blood-sucking

sorceresses of the title, who criticised his decision, as a ‘mere’ poet and scholar of literature, to teach the works of the Greek master (2010a: ix). He responds to these attacks not by asserting his right to be known as an Aristotelian, Platonist, Stoic or Epicurean, but by redefining the very mission of philosophy (2010a: ix-x). According to Poliziano, a ‘philosopher’s’ right to the name is not proven by his adherence to standard curricula (2010a: ix-x). Rather, he should be a lover of truth, unconcerned by financial gain, and dedicated to self-examination (Celenza 2010b: 32-35). The central tenet of his argument is that, in the face of the intellectually complacent ‘philosophers’ of the day, only the *grammaticus* or philologist can genuinely claim to be seeking wisdom (2010b: 39). Philology, for Poliziano, allows us ‘to sort through knowledge, to divide the diverse expressions of human wisdom into categories, and to delineate the “families” in which so many different varieties of human intellectual activity properly belong’ (2010b: 41). The *grammaticus* therefore has unparalleled access to the entire gamut of human intellectual experience, far outstripping the limited viewpoint of blinkered ‘philosophers’. It is the philologist who is the true philosopher, since only he can ‘examine all evidence, be unimprisoned by disciplinary shackles, and go on to pass dispassionate judgement on the problems life presents’ (2010b: 45).

This is not to say that Poliziano was untutored in more traditional philosophical approaches. All the evidence, in fact, demonstrates that his polymathic intellectual curiosity encompassed Platonism, Aristotelianism and many other schools of thought from his formative years onwards. This is most evident in his 1473 *Elegy* to Bartolomeo Fonzio, in which Poliziano praises Ficino (155-188), but also Andronicus Callistus and his fellow students of Aristotle (194-208), depicting himself as a devotee of both. This is, moreover, far from being the only evidence of sustained contact between Ficino and Poliziano, particularly as far as the 1470s are concerned. Ficino’s letters to Poliziano ‘the Homeric youth’ are

especially worthy of mention, suggesting as they do that the older man recognised the great promise of the younger, and supported him both in his studies and in his progress from ill-starred poverty to Medici-bestowed security (Bettinzoli 2009: 110-111, 18-119; Branca 1986: 460). In his famous letter to Martin Prenninger of 1491-1492, furthermore, Ficino lists Poliziano amongst the friends to whom he would turn for discussion and advice regarding the liberal disciplines (Hankins 2004: 236-237). Poliziano, for his part, began working in the 1470s on a translation of Plato's *Charmides*, in the preface to which he refers to Plato as “di tutti i filosofi senza controversia padre e dio, e di tutta quanta la sapienza” (Bigi 1967: 72-73). He also lauds Ficino for his wisdom, moral integrity and innate virtue in his Epigram XXI (Branca 1986: 460). It seems fair to agree with Attilio Bettinzoli, then, that Ficinian Platonism was ‘una delle linee guida nella formazione intellettuale del giovane Poliziano’ (2009: 118-119).

This, however, is not the same as saying that Platonism or any other philosophical school was ever Poliziano's primary focus, or that he subscribed wholeheartedly to any one form of dogma. For evidence, we can turn to Poliziano's *Miscellaneorum centuria prima* of the mid-late 1480s. Here Poliziano clearly states (if admittedly with the benefit of hindsight) that his enthusiasm as a young man for the teachings of Ficino and the Aristotelian Ioannis Argiropoulos was as nought compared to his fascination with Homeric poetry (Benassi 1994: 121-122). A period of hiatus then ensued, in which he lacked both the time and the interest to revive his former studies beyond an ‘errabondo e inquieto andirivieni’, as Bettinzoli puts it (2009: 158-159). It was only with the arrival in Florence of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Poliziano continues, that his previously ‘sleepy eyes’ were opened to the marvels of philosophy. Poliziano remained, though, first and foremost a philologist and ‘letterato’, as *Lamia* demonstrates (Bigi 1967: 69). It is worth pointing out, moreover, that Pico believed

ferently in the essential concordance of Plato and Aristotle (Bettinzoli 2009: 37), so Poliziano's increasing interest in Aristotelianism in no way entailed a rejection of Platonism.

Poetry and the mechanics of language remained the fulcrum around which Poliziano's scholarly concerns gravitated. It is poetry, rather than philosophy, which emerges time and again in Poliziano's *oeuvre* as the pinnacle of human intellectual endeavour. The most striking expression of this credo is to be found in the last of his *Silvae*, entitled *Nutricia* or *Homage to My Wet Nurse*, a history of poetry composed by Poliziano as an introduction to the courses on literature that he was to teach at the Florentine *Studio* in the academic year 1486-1487. In this version of events it is 'divina Poetica' (69) who rescues the first primitive humans from living like ignorant, wild animals, without laws, customs, religion, marriage, justice or a sense of responsibility for the common good (45-60). It is she who fuels the civilising fires of Prometheus (72-74). In other words, 'è la poesia, non la filosofia, che trasforma l'uomo selvatico in uomo civile e fa nascere in lui la ragione e la virtù [...] La filosofia figlia e alunna della poesia: ecco dunque il messaggio delle *Silvae*' (Mandosio 1994: 142-143). Poliziano was much taken, moreover, with Boccaccio's definition of poetry as a divine fury granted directly from God to an elect few (Sozzi 1994: 15). Poliziano's poet, then, is 'un vate, un rivelatore di più profonde e altrimenti non comunicabili verità' (Orvieto 2009: 113).

Nevertheless, as Poliziano asserts in I.4 of his *Miscellany*, a profound knowledge of philosophy, medicine, law and philology is essential to the understanding and writing of poetry (Garin 1957: 17-18; Orvieto 2009: 200). Philosophy, moreover, retains pride of place amongst these 'lesser Arts', since the works of poets abound with the doctrines of philosophers (Garin 1957: 17-18). Poliziano, then, stood for pluralism over purism, and for the dismantling of conventional hierarchies (Godman 1998: 64), but was persuaded of the

importance of philosophy as an indispensable component of verse. It is therefore far too simplistic to define him as either an Aristotelian or a Platonist. ‘Di certo, vi è nella riflessione di Poliziano a volta a volta l’accentuarsi di temi platonici o aristotelici, secondo quella nuova dimensione della *cultura* che egli va ricercando’ (Benassi 1994: 121). In the last four years of his life, for example, it is evident that he was drawn towards the works of Aristotle, even if, as we have seen, his approach to them was distinctly heterodox. It would also appear that the 1470s, distinguished by the *Elegy to Bartolomeo Fonzio*, the (unfinished) translation of Plato’s *Charmides*, and the prolonged exchange of letters and ideas with Ficino, saw something of a high water mark for Poliziano’s involvement with the Platonic movement (Benassi 1994: 117-118). But, as Ficino’s letter to Martin Prenninger makes clear, Poliziano was an esteemed friend rather than one of his “quasi discipuli” (Hankins 2001: 233). To conclude, Poliziano was never a devotee of Platonism, Aristotelianism or any other philosophical movement; his vocation was for poetry alone.

So what impact does all of this have on our reading of the *Stanze*, and of Simonetta’s role within them? It is worth stating, at the outset, that the fact that Poliziano chose to write at this length about love is, in itself, extremely significant, suggesting that he was involved in the (Platonic) discussions of love that were taking place at the time in Florence. This is most striking when one compares the *Stanze* to Luigi Pulci’s *La Giostra di Lorenzo de’ Medici*, composed to commemorate Lorenzo’s victory in a joust of 1469, and completed shortly before Poliziano began work on his own encomiastic poem (Davie 1989: 42). What is immediately noticeable is the contrast between the prominent role played by Simonetta in the *Stanze* and the relative unimportance of Lorenzo’s ‘lover’, Lucrezia Donati, in the *Giostra*. In three short octaves, Luigi explains how, in the course of the wedding celebrations of Braccio Martelli and Costanza de’ Pazzi, Venus inspires Lucrezia to weave a garland and Lorenzo to

ask for it (VIII.1-3). Lucrezia places it on his head, but makes him promise to wear it for her sake in a joust (VIII.4- IX.4). She then disappears from the work and, beyond the briefest of references in XVII.7 and CLVI.8, takes no further part in the action. It is evident, moreover, that Luigi is far more interested in the joust than in the events that purportedly brought it about, dedicating as he does sixty of the *Giostra*'s 120 stanzas to describing the livery, dress and retinue of the contestants, their displays to the ladies, and the fighting itself (Davie 1989: 44-45). The discrepancy with the *Stanze*, which devotes all 171 of its (admittedly unfinished) octaves to Iulio's *innamoramento*, the realm of Venus and his dream of Simonetta, is vast. Poliziano's decision to focus on Iulio's love for Simonetta was both an original and highly conscious one, and demonstrates the extent to which he was involved in the debates about love and beauty that characterised the era.

This does not mean that the *Stanze* bears the hallmark of one philosophy of love alone. It is, as Orvieto points out (2009: 238, 274), difficult to square Poliziano's depiction of Venus and her garden with Martelli's celestial goddess (1995: 130-135). She may be as naked as Ficino's Venus Urania, but we find her in bed with Mars, covering her lover's adoring face with kisses as the pair luxuriate in a post-coital bliss of showering rose petals and darting cupids (I.122-123). Her kingdom, moreover, is as much the home of Cruelty and Despair as it is of Joy and Delight (I.74-75), and is filled with images of calamitous love, down to the very flowers in I.79 (Zak 2013: 6; Tylus 2010: 79-80). Iulio's fate, meanwhile, from Hippolytus-like youth (I.13-21), via lovesick 'miserello' (I.58.7) to budding champion (II.40-46), hangs in the balance throughout. Additionally, we should not forget that, following the premonition of Simonetta's death, the poem lauds the happy man who 'Da sé sol pende, e 'n se stesso si fida' (II.37.7), in language highly reminiscent of the ancient Stoic writers (Zak 2013: 7-8).

It is, on the other hand, hard to credit the idea that Poliziano was unaware of the Platonic resonances of the ‘love story’ that is central to his work. True, his depiction of Iulio’s sufferings are also of a piece with those recounted by Petrarch and numerous of his followers, it being in any case pointless to draw a clear dividing line between the work’s ‘Petrarchan’ and ‘Platonic’ elements, both being movements that were growing in importance at the time and subject to a high degree of ‘cross-pollination’. But the young Medici’s physical transformation from arrogant youth to trembling, feverish lover whose heart and soul seem to have been ripped from his body (I.57.1-2) has much in common with Ficino’s description of the contradictory sensations and emotions experienced by those in love. As Ficino puts it, ‘accade ancora che quegli che sono presi dal laccio d’amore alcuna volta sospirano, alcuna volta s’allegrano: e’ sospirano perché e’ lasciano sé medesimi e distrugonsi, rallegransi perché in migliore obiecto si transferiscono’ (Ficino 1987: II.4, 35). Just as Iulio is prey at once to a ‘gran foco in tutte le midolle’ and a ‘ghiacciato sudor’ (I.41.1-4), moreover, Ficino describes how ‘gli amanti’ ‘sentono scambievolmente [...] or caldo or freddo’ (1987: II.4, 35).

Beyond this, we have Poliziano’s intriguing reference in the *Lamia* to the search for truth as being like a hunt (Celenza 2010b: 32). In this context, Iulio’s vain attempts to capture the white deer (I.34-37) become a frantic pursuit of a truth that remains just beyond his grasp, with Simonetta and her ‘non so che divino’ (I.42.8) the revelation of love and beauty that rewards him for his struggles. It is Simonetta, indeed, who is the centrepiece of the Platonic elements in the *Stanze*, dazzling Iulio with the light that shines from her. She is, for instance, full of ‘vago splendore’ (I.41.1), and her eyes, in which Cupid hides his burning torches, ‘folgoron [...] d’un dolce sereno’ (I.44.1-2). When she laughs her face lights up so magnificently that, as we have seen, heaven itself appears to open (I.50.1-4). She is, all in all, the human face of divine glory, through which ‘the soul [...] is seized unknowingly [...] and is

drawn upward as by a hook, so that the soul becomes God' (Ficino 1975: 85, Letter XXXXII). This is confirmed by the passage in which Cupid, hidden in Simonetta's eyes, shoots one of his deadly barbs into Iulio (I.40). Although such imagery is hardly alien to stilnovistic, Petrarchan and classical poetry, it is entirely in line with the Neoplatonic concept of love as being not a psychological occurrence but the soul's desire to conjoin itself with a thing of beauty (Ficino 1987: I.5, 15-16); or, at a more profound level, its yearning to return to God, since in its earthly manifestations 'la bellezza è lo splendore del volto di Dio' (1987: V.4, 85). In humans, this divine light is to be found in the spirit, which shines through the body, principally through the eyes 'come per finestre di vetro' (1987: VII.4, 190). It is through staring into another person's eyes, and therefore being wounded by the arrows of light that they transmit, that their spirit enters us and we 'fall in love' (1987: VII.4, 192). It is this divine light with which Simonetta is imbued and by which Iulio is consumed.

Whilst Platonism plays a prominent role in the *Stanze* and especially in how Simonetta is portrayed, we should not lose sight of the philosophical eclecticism of Poliziano's mini-epic. Much as the poem weaves together hundreds of quotations so as to become the essence of the Florentine poetic tradition, it is a *cento* of philosophical and literary approaches to love, each in turn brought to life and laid before Iulio as the maze through which he must navigate so that he can end the work as epic hero rather than callow adolescent. Poetry, Poliziano seems to argue, has more power than philosophy in allowing us to understand and experience both the beauties and dangers of love. It makes sense, in other words, that Platonism should be a part of the *Stanze*, since it was hugely significant to late-fifteenth century Florence and central to the way in which female beauty was portrayed and understood, but this does not mean that it is all-important. To know how far Poliziano 'believed' in it, moreover, is less vital than the awareness that he belonged to a 'social community' in which such ideas were at the centre of

philosophical, artistic and poetic discussion (Celenza 2010b: 15). It is, as we know, this Medicean cultural world to which Poliziano is paying tribute in the *Stanze*, and nowhere more so than in the figure of Simonetta. At once Petrarchan lady, classical goddess and Platonic lover, she is the new *donna angelicata* of a Laurentian Florence that is metaphorically the garden of divinely-inspired poetry, philosophy and beauty, in which any number of ideas, verse forms and debates can thrive and coexist under the beneficent tutelage of the Medici.

ii) *Dama* and Nymph

The appeal of Poliziano's Simonetta, however, was not simply literary. Rather, she was calculated to entice the reader with her more worldly charms, holding up a mirror to the sexual predilections of the era without breaching its notions of what was socially acceptable. In doing so, she becomes at one and the same time the *dama* of courtly tradition, the chaste prize for the gallant and noble lover, and a Boccaccian-style nymph, at once tempting and unattainable. As is well-known, the *Stanze* celebrates Giuliano's victory in the joust of 29 January 1475. Its relation to reality is extremely tenuous at best, but it does reflect the contemporary predilection for chivalric customs, particularly the courting of women, in a city that aped such rituals to assuage its sense of social inferiority as a republic of merchants and bankers (Bryce 2001: 1085). It comes as no surprise that Lorenzo, Giuliano and their *brigata*, with their protocourtly ambitions, should choose to give such displays a new lease of life (see Ventrone 2007: 17-27). By the time of the joust, it was a well-established fashion for young Medicean males publicly to 'woo' the city's beauties and to stage elaborate events in their honour. Indeed, as Rochon points out, epistolary evidence demonstrates that all the young men of Lorenzo's following were courting such ladies (1963: 93). Poliziano, furthermore,

could rely for inspiration on the chivalric romances of the fourteenth and earlier fifteenth centuries, and on the lively tales of heroic paladins recounted in public squares by *canterini*.

The central theme of such spectacles and texts, including the *Stanze*, concerns a knight spurred to valorous deeds by the love of a chaste ‘lady’, whose virtue is beyond reproach. Yet, notwithstanding this ‘official’ version of events, hints remain that there was something ‘sexy’ and even scandalous about these much-courted ‘ladies’ (see Ventrone 2007: 24; Macinghi Strozzi 1914: Letters XLIV, LII, LXVIII; Dempsey 1992: 88- 90, 95; Rochon 1963: 96). Giovan Matteo di Meglio’s pronouncement, in a sonnet ‘in cui ammaestra i mariti a tenere a freno le mogli’, that ‘lor son mogli, non dame:/ amore e fé ed onestà le vesta’ (12-13), conveys the dubious esteem in which such women were held. For the *dame* of fifteenth-century Florence, then, there was a fine line between decorously chivalric behaviour and potential disgrace.

Part of the genius of Poliziano’s *Simonetta* lies in the way in which she combines the sensual appeal of the *dama* with an irreproachable virtue that made her even more attractive to early Renaissance readers. For her male compatriots, it turns out, there was little more erotically thrilling than a woman who embodied both chastity and desirability. This is made clear in an oft-quoted letter from Sigismondo della Stufa to Lorenzo, in which he relays how he came across Lucrezia Donati leaving church following confession during Easter 1466, seemingly ‘completely penitent of her sins, with no fire at all, such that you never saw a thing so beautiful, with her black clothing and head veiled [...]. I do not want to go on saying more, lest you fall into sin in these holy days’ (cited in Dempsey 1992: 98). Purity has become sexually charged (Simons 1995: 309). It is exactly this blend of virtuousness and allure that Poliziano captures to perfection in his *Simonetta*. As he makes clear, ‘ogni dolce virtù l’è in

compagnia' (I.45.7). Indeed, rather than simply stating that she is chaste and noble, he transforms her into the supreme example of such qualities by personifying 'Onestate' and 'Gentilezza' and then picturing *them* as accompanying and learning from *her*. As he puts it, 'con lei va Gentilezza in vista umana,/ e da lei impara il dolce andar soave' (I.46.3-4, emphasis mine).

Cropper is right to note, as the above quote suggests, that it is Simonetta's 'manner that is emphasised' (1976: 388). What she does not remark upon, however, is how this focus upon Simonetta's bearing and demeanour was tailored to correspond to contemporary notions of correct female conduct. As Hemsoll (1998: 68-71) and Fermor (1998: 125-127) point out, both Platonic and Aristotelian systems of thinking about the body regarded movement as the index of moral and social status. For women of the upper classes, the ideal to which to aspire was the even and measured deportment of *leggiadria*, 'an upright, fluid but controlled posture which did not bring into play in any obvious way the mechanics of the body, combined with an appearance of lightness or weightlessness' (Fermor 1998: 129). It is this quality that Poliziano's Simonetta embodies, as the poet himself states in I.45.8., in which 'Biltà la mostra a dito e Leggiadria'. The way in which she is described, moreover, echoes the assertions of Leon Battista Alberti and Francesco Barbaro as to proper female behaviour. For example, just as Simonetta 'nell'atto regalmente è mansueta' (I.43.7), Alberti counsels women to be not 'vezzosa e leziosa, ma molto mansueta e continente' (1994: III,103). Whilst Simonetta, as we have seen, is frequently connected with sweetness, for Alberti the ideal woman must embody 'dolcezza in ogni atto e parole' (1994: III,103). Even when alarmed by the sudden appearance of Iulio, she avoids 'lo andar veloce, il vano aggirar d'occhi, il mover spesso le mani senza proposito, lo scollar del capo et tutti gli altri distorcimenti della persona' (Barbaro 1548: XI, 44r-44v). The epitome of calm and grace, she merely raises her head, rises to her feet (I.

47.5-8) and makes to depart, 'lenta lenta' (I.48.1-2). Simonetta, in other words, is being constructed as the perfect fifteenth-century lady. There is even something of the Virgin Mary about her, an almost sacred aura that stems from the way in which we first see her seated upon the ground (I.47.1) in a style not dissimilar to that of the Madonna of Humility (Warner 1976: 182), and from Iulio's identification of her as a 'vergin sovrana' (I.49.1). As if this were not proof enough of her virtue, Simonetta returns in Book II of the *Stanze* in the guise of the Laura of the 'Trionfo della Pudicizia', wearing Minerva's armour above her white dress, plucking out the bound Cupid's feathers, and breaking his bow and arrows (II. 28; *Tr. Pud.*, 118-125).

Yet, despite all of this, she remains a markedly sensuous figure, at least as we see her through Iulio's eyes. It is worth pointing out, in fact, that we *only* see her from Iulio's perspective and as the target of his persistent male gaze, a point reinforced by Poliziano's repeated depiction of his awestruck admiration of her beauty (I.38.5-8; I.41.5-8; I.56.5-8). This is, after all, not the 'love story' of Simonetta and Iulio, but the tale of Iulio's development alone, in which Simonetta is significant only as an object of male fascination and desire. She may be a blameless and restrained figure, but she appears in the middle of a hot-blooded hunt in which Iulio is literally tantalised (I.36) as he attempts to 'spear' a doe that is a time-honoured archetype of earthly desire. Iulio's encounter with her is, furthermore, an implicitly seductive and erotic moment as, 'fatto ghiotto del suo dolce aspetto' (I.41.5) and 'di piacer, di disir tutto [...] invescato' (I.42.5), he teeters between base appetites and higher yearnings, becoming prey to both pleasure and torment (I.41; I.56). The sensuality of Simonetta's 'dolce andar celeste/ e 'l ventilar dell'angelica veste' is unmistakable, as is Iulio's awestruck contemplation of them (I.56.7-8). Whatever her associations with Mary and Minerva, the notably unchaperoned Simonetta is, by her own admission, a daughter of Venus

(I.53.8) who is married and therefore sexually mature (I.51.4). She is, to borrow from Poliziano's *serventesse* CXXVI, 'Minerva in atto e Vener [...] in volto' (42), much as the Florentine noblewoman Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni becomes both Venus and Diana in the portrait medal that was created in her honour (Van der Sman 2010: 26; see part three of this chapter). In a society that evidently set so much store by this chaste yet sensual allure, Simonetta is the ultimate *dama* and 'pin-up'.

The fact that she is also depicted as a nymph could only increase her appeal for *Quattrocento* readers. Whilst Ventrone argues that the nymphs of Laurentian poetry became symbolic of the Neoplatonic revival (2007: 29-31), this is far too simple. It was neither possible nor, as we shall see, desirable to divest them entirely of the trappings that they had acquired in the verse of Boccaccio. 'Figura per eccellenza dell'oggetto d'amore' (Calasso 2010: 46), these beautiful virgin huntresses consecrated to Diana bathe naked in the forest (*Ninfale fiesolano*, IX, 27). Even when clothed, they are spied on, mentally undressed (*Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, VIII, 927; XII, 933-935), and even raped by lascivious youths (*Ninfale fiesolano*, IX.34-38). When they run away, their legs become visible, thus inspiring even greater lust in their pursuers (*Ninfale fiesolano*, II.37). Even though they attempt to reject the advances of men, they are amorous figures who dress provocatively, becoming even more attractive for being fugitive and elusive, piquing men's desire and then refusing to satisfy it. The fact that Savonarola later criticised women for dressing their daughters as nymphs in an attempt to marry them off reveals the extent to which such a guise was deemed alluring (Schmitter 1995: 47; 56, n. 72), and gives a sense of the popularity of such pastoral fantasies (Simons 1995: 302). It is worth bearing in mind, moreover, that by at least the early sixteenth century a woman referred to as a nymph and recorded as wearing 'classical attire' was most likely to be a courtesan (Santore 2008: 20-21). It was not, as we have seen, in

Poliziano's poetic and political interests to associate Simonetta with dubious morality. Yet he refers to her as a nymph on seven separate occasions in the course of her relatively brief appearance in the *Stanze* (I.37.8; I.38.6; I.48.2; I.49.2; I.50.1; II.33.7; II.34.6), almost double the number of times that she is described merely as a 'donna' (I.58.5; I.59.6; II.28.1; II.32.7). What, then, was the motivation for Simonetta's transformation into a 'ninfa'?

The answer is to be found, once again, in the combination of purity and sensuality that held such appeal in late-fifteenth century Florence. Simonetta may not run from Iulio in the style of a Boccaccian nymph, but she is equally fugacious and mysterious. Twice she retreats from him, on each occasion doing so in tortuously slow fashion (Musumeci 1981: 90), 'lenta lenta' in I.48.2 and with 'passi lenti' in I.55.3. When she departs the scene, she leaves Iulio in a state of agonised desire such that he is almost driven out of his senses, so torn is he between following 'sua stella' and his fear of doing so (I.56). Unlike the Affrico of Boccaccio's *Ninfale fiesolano*, Iulio can have no hope of relieving this exquisite pain by satiating his nascent sexual desires with Simonetta, paragon of virtue that she is. This makes the erotic spell that she weaves about him all the stronger, a hypnotic power that can only be broken when Iulio, spurred on by Venus, vows to win Simonetta's chaste affections by seeking glory in a joust (II. 41-46). Whether styled as a Petrarchan beauty, *dama* or nymph, then, all of the paradigms that Simonetta represents are dependent on absence, inaccessibility and retreat. Orvieto may deem Poliziano's Simonetta 'schizophrenic' in her embodiment of the charms of Venus and the purity of Pallas-Athena (2009: 248), but it is precisely because she exemplifies the qualities of both goddesses that she is irresistible. Her appeal lies in her ability to combine the pure and the sexual, to speak to high-minded ideals of divine love, poetry, and feminine chastity and modesty, whilst at the same time playing with the reader's more worldly appetites, seducing them with her tantalising blend of sensuality and nymph-like elusiveness. Part Laura, part

courtly ‘lady’, part nymph, she is virtuous and respectable, giving poetic flesh to Florentine aspirations to chivalric respectability, but she is equally full of sex appeal, a screen on to which male fantasies and desires are projected, and behind which the ‘real’ woman has vanished forever, as elusive as any nymph to those who would try to reach her.

Post-Mortem Poetics

Poliziano is the only poet to present Simonetta in this enticing fashion. Yet, as I have argued, its appeal to *Quattrocento* readers was significant. So what led the other ‘Simonetta poets’ to abandon it *en masse*? The answer to this puzzle lies in Simonetta’s death, which kick-started a literary process that saw her transformed from sensual nymph to Florentine star, her earthly identity increasingly stripped away as she became a symbol of the beauty, virtue and cultural supremacy of the city. In poetic terms, her death was a boon for the Medicean poets of *Quattrocento* Florence, as is demonstrated by the fact that she attracted most literary attention posthumously. As we shall see in Chapter Three (102-118), they were quick to exploit the political opportunities afforded by her untimely demise. More than this, though, Simonetta’s death ‘perfected’ her, freeing her from the taint of earthly sin and, in the words of Elisabeth Bronfen, ‘[fixing] her into a stable figure “incorruptible” and [opening] the space for poetic interpretations within which [her poets] could design, shape, and recreate her [...] in infinite variations’ (1992: 369).

It is arguably with the *Stanze* that this transfiguration begins. It is, of course, impossible to be certain at what point in the work’s composition Simonetta died, but there is a definite shift in her portrayal from Book I to Book II, when Poliziano seemingly felt compelled to address the tragedy. Not only, as we have seen, does Simonetta reappear as a symbol of chastity rather than as an earthly woman (II.28), but Poliziano also includes a ‘premonition’ of her death in

Iulio's prophetic dream. As the air darkens, a tremor shakes the earth, the moon and sky turn the colour of blood, and the stars fall, Simonetta is swept away 'in trista nube' just as Iulio has 'disarmed' her (II.33.5-34.4). She then returns 'lieta in forma di Fortuna', and the world becomes beautiful once more as she guarantees eternal fame to both Iulio and herself by inspiring his noble deeds (II.34.4-8). Since the poem breaks off shortly afterwards, our last vision of Poliziano's Simonetta sees her spirited away to this allegorical realm as she begins to shed the trappings of her mortal existence. No wonder that, to quote Orvieto, 'c'è forse il sospetto che dopo la sua precoce scomparsa [...] Simonetta, da avvenente ninfa emissaria di Amore e di Venere, venga per forza di cose mutata [...] in simbolo di virtù e di castità, specimine morale e non più oggetto di desiderio erotico' (2009: 241). What is notable here is that, whilst Simonetta's death may have made the composition of the *Stanze* more complicated, it does not appear to have derailed it entirely. The work is, after all, not the 'story of Iulio and Simonetta' but the *bildungsroman* of the young Medici as he progresses from proto-Hippolytus to mature lover. Florentine vernacular love poetry was, of course, predicated on the absence and unavailability of such *donne angelicate*, unattainable first through virtue and then ultimately through death. Simonetta's demise could therefore only enhance her poetic suitability for Florentine writers.

The funerary verse written to mark the sad occasion bears out this idea. It was one thing to write about a living woman and to transform her simultaneously into a paragon of chastity and desirability, as Poliziano, the consummate poetic genius, had done. Reinventing her after her death, however, was far more easily achieved, especially in a city that venerated Petrarch and Dante. This is particularly evident in Bernardo Pulci's elegy, 'Venite, sacre e gloriose dive', in which Simonetta is transformed from flesh-and-blood woman to a more remote, poetic icon for Laurentian Florence. What we have here is a whole-scale re-imagining of

Simonetta as the new Laura, albeit one whose biographical identity is still politically significant enough to be mentioned in the poem's title and in the body of the text itself (46-48, for example). At first it comes as no surprise that Bernardo, a noted Petrarchist, should laud Simonetta for her 'treccie crespe e bionde', 'dolce riso' and the 'angelica forma' of her beautiful face (139- 42). But the figure who eventually emerges is far from the laughing, sensuous nymph of the *Stanze*, and is instead the sister of the stern Laura of the 'Trionfo della Morte', with whom she shares a notably similar deathbed sequence. Like Petrarch's ideal beloved, Simonetta is awarded preferential treatment by Death (79-81; *Tr. Mort.*, I.67-69), whilst her 'bel fin' (76) is witnessed by a 'mesto collegio' (83) that mirrors the 'bella compagna' who gather around Laura's bedside (*Tr. Mort.*, I.109). Simonetta's stoical attitude towards death and yearning to return to God are particularly close to those of her Petrarchan predecessor. For example, much as Laura accepts her fate as God's will (*Tr. Mort.*, I.70-72) and posthumously asserts that she is joyously alive in heaven (*Tr. Mort.*, II. 23, 38-40), Simonetta looks forward to leaving 'questa valle lacrimosa e bruna' (89) and dismisses earthly life as a 'carcer fosco' (101). She dies 'dopo un dolce sospir' and with her eyes raised to heaven (112-113), seeming merely to fall asleep (120; *Tr. Mort.*, I.168). More than this, in another direct parallel with Laura, Simonetta is 'assai più bella' on her bier than in life (165; *Tr. Mort.*, I.172). When one takes into account the fact that Bernardo's elegy is written in *terza rima*, thereby imitating its *Trecento* predecessor and making him one of the first to adopt the meter for funereal purposes (Williamson 1950: 554), it becomes clear that Simonetta is being portrayed as the first woman since Laura to be worthy of her own 'Triumph of Death'.

But Bernardo does not stop there in his efforts to equate Simonetta with Petrarch's 'leggiadra e gloriosa donna' (*Tr. Mort.*, I.1). His Simonetta not only resembles her in appearance, word and deed. Rather, her affinity with the ideal women of Florentine poetry is

made explicit through Bernardo's assertion that she has joined 'Laura bella e Beatrice' in heaven and, what is more, that *they* have made way for *her* (178-179). In this account, Simonetta has surpassed her precursors in beauty and virtue, and is destined to equal them in literary importance. The inference of all this is that Florence is experiencing a new 'Golden Age' under Lorenzo, one that will see its former poetic glories reborn and even outshone. It has already, after all, produced a Medicean Laura, and poets capable of lauding her in suitably elevated tones. This open celebration of Laurentian literary achievement may well explain why Bernardo's elegy and sonnet were the only 'Simonetta poems' to be published in print during Lorenzo's lifetime. Despite, or rather because, of the tragic circumstances, 'Venite, sacre e gloriose dive' is a veritable 'Triumph' of Florentine poetic endeavour and virtue, with Simonetta as the new female ideal and guiding light of a city 'restored' to its former splendour.

In line with this emblematic function, by the end of the poem the majority of Simonetta's mortal accoutrements have been dispensed with in favour of a progressively remote, starry persona. Poliziano's Simonetta, for instance, is merely goddess-like; the Simonetta of Bernardo's elegy is a 'diva' (43). In the *Stanze* she merely shimmers with light; in 'Venite, sacre e gloriose dive', she has been transfigured into a star (191-193). The Simonetta of the *Stanze* is a married, sensual and sexually mature woman; Bernardo's Simonetta apparently has no husband at all and is ascetically indifferent to death. The contrast with the *Stanze*'s nature-loving nymph is marked. Moreover, whilst Poliziano's Simonetta is imbued with a sense of graceful motion, Bernardo's is largely static. Gone are the billowing dress and heavenly manner, to be replaced by a Simonetta who is described as moving only at the moment of her death, when she happily allows her limbs to succumb to their final slumber (113-114). Whilst her remains are covered by the cold stone of her tomb (190), she has become a shining,

disembodied example to those she has left behind, *Quattrocento* Florence's sole representative in heaven (181; Schmitter 1995: 42) and a symbol of the eternal life that awaits the virtuous. Her death has placed her beyond the reach of age and corruption, allowing her to '[take] on both the celestial brightness of Mary and [...] the virginal purity of Beatrice' (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 18, 21), and transforming her into an 'object reanimated by the poet's speech' (Bronfen 1992: 363) onto which masculine ideals of female virtue are inscribed. As Timideo puts it in his own elegy, 'dalla morte la virtù è difesa' (504).

Lorenzo goes even further in his *Comento*. Unlike the other poets, of course, he was under no pressure to mention Simonetta's name in order to win patronage. By the time he began composing the work in the 1480s, moreover, several turbulent years of murder and war had passed since her death. It would be fair to say that she was unlikely to have been uppermost in the city's collective thoughts. Accordingly, Lorenzo was able to exceed his predecessors in his transfiguration of Simonetta from real woman to Florentine ideal, acting just as opportunistically as they had done in the previous decade. When Simonetta appears in the 'Argumento', for example, no mention is made of her name, birthplace or family, in direct contrast to the *Stanze* and the funereal verse that was written about her. Lorenzo does not even feel the need to mention Giuliano, assassinated by the Pazzi conspirators several years earlier. Simonetta here is simply 'una donna' (591), but one so closely modelled on the Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova* (Zanato 1992: 592) as to be indistinguishable from her. For instance, Beatrice is considered an angel by the people of Florence, who are amazed by the 'dolcezza onesta e soave' that she inspires in them through her beauty, humility and nobility (*Vita Nuova*. XXVI. 1-4). When she dies, the city is left 'quasi vedova dispogliata da ogni dignitate' (*Vita Nuova*. XXX.1). In Lorenzo's depiction of Simonetta, Florence is left equally bereft, mourning the loss of one whose beauty and grace made everyone love her without jealousy, and whose

sweet manners made each person believe that she loved them above all others (591-592).

Lorenzo also equates her with Laura by quoting directly (if slightly erroneously) from the 'Triumph of Death' in his assertion that "Morte bella pareo nel suo bel volto" (593).

Lorenzo, as I argue in greater depth in Chapter Four (142, *et cetera*), is clearly employing Simonetta to present himself as the great poet of a Medicean Golden Age in which the legends of medieval Florence have been brought back to life by a cultural revitalisation. Again, we see how Simonetta's death allowed her to become the new female icon of Florentine poetry, a beacon of beauty, virtue and poetic achievement under Lorenzo. To paraphrase Bronfen, then, 'although [Simonetta] is being reanimated, she is likewise being effaced again when used as an emblem for something else, to which she is (in the end) incidental' (1992: 365-366).

Lorenzo, however, is not content to leave his reinvention of Simonetta there. Rather, he transforms her into his personal Platonic messenger of divine love, his 'stella di Venere', who must sacrifice herself so that he can meet his own beloved (611-612). Simonetta, in other words, must lose *her self* so that Lorenzo can find his, and become a saintly star-like figure in the process. By referring to a salvific Simonetta as intercessor, symbol of divine love and star of Venus, he even comes close to identifying her with the Virgin Mary, associated as she is with the morning star (see Warner 1976: 263-264). The fact that Simonetta appears to be spared bodily decay, superlatively beautiful in death (593) and metamorphosed into a star, only renders her more similar to the Virgin (see Bronfen 1992: 68). It is hard to think of a more apt demonstration of Gilbert and Gubar's assertion that 'whether she becomes an *objet d'art* or a saint [...] it is the surrender of her self [...] that is the beautiful angel-woman's key act, whilst it is precisely this sacrifice which dooms her both to death and to heaven. For to be selfless is not only to be noble, it is to be dead' (2000: 25).

For her poets, then, death ‘freed’ Simonetta up to become the increasingly distant, star-like icon of Lorenzo’s ‘Golden Age’. Relying on a literary tradition that was built on fantasy and idealisation and that thrived on the physical demise of the ‘beloved’, they removed the last vestiges of her corporeality and gave themselves free rein to ‘perfect’ her. The Simonetta who passed her short adult life in Florence is entirely reinvented as the new Laura and/or Beatrice, a secular saint who is emblematic of the city’s cultural revival. By the time that Lorenzo came to compose the *Comento*, she had retreated so far into the realm of poetic fantasy that she could be transmogrified into the star of Venus, her life and death consumed into a narrative of male salvation. Having served this purpose, her star is allowed to burn out and she is forgotten. If, to quote Edgar Allan Poe, ‘the death of a beautiful woman is [...] the most poetical topic in the world’, for the writers of *Quattrocento* Florence this was because she provided the blank slate on which they could design a new icon for the city. Preserved from the ravages of time and vice, Simonetta becomes the quintessential *donna angelicata* of the Laurentian era, the supreme and incorruptible example of virtue, beauty and literary excellence. To quote Bronfen, as a ‘deanimated body’ she becomes an ‘art object [...]’. Not without reason does the word *corpus* refer both to the body of a dead human or animal and to a collection of writings’ (1992: 71). Her tomb lost and her voice silenced, the ‘body’ of texts in which Simonetta appears provides the few remaining traces of her existence, yet even in these she remains beyond our grasp, an unreal and unreachable icon of Florence.

The Iconisation of Women in Late-Fifteenth Century Florence

Simonetta was far from being the only woman to be idolised in Laurentian Florence.

Acknowledging this wider frame of reference is important, since it allows us to appreciate her specific role in Florentine culture and also to draw more comprehensive conclusions as to the

value (or lack of it) placed on women in the city. As we shall see, the ideal women of early Renaissance Florence were ‘poetic mistresses’, wives and (tragically deceased) fiancées, distinguished, at least as far as their contemporaries were concerned, for their physical attractiveness, decorous behaviour, virtue and grace. A case study of Poliziano, creator not only of the first ‘Simonetta’ but of many of the most ravishingly beautiful literary ladies of the day, reveals that such attention to female charms in no way denoted sympathy for women beyond the page. Traditional concepts of feminine achievement, in short, continued to reign supreme in Florence.

Simonetta’s most immediate predecessor as *dama* was Lorenzo’s ‘beloved’, Lucrezia Donati, fiancée and later wife of Niccolò Ardinghelli. Lucrezia was, as Bryce points out, a wise choice of ‘lady’ for a man who had had to learn since his infancy ‘how to occupy and maintain the Medici’s often precarious position of political dominance’ (2012: 14-15). To begin with, her lineage was as aristocratic as that of the Medici was plebeian (2012: 14-15), and even disinterested observers used her beauty as the yardstick by which to find other women wanting (Bryce 2001: 1081, n. 20). More than this, as the descendant of Piccarda Donati (*Paradiso* III) and Corso Donati, her name was freighted with enough symbolic associations in Florentine poetry and history to give ‘enhanced status to his passion, raising it above the realm of the unruly human physical and emotional experience, above the merely sensual’ (Bryce 2012: 14-15).

Since evidence for their ‘affair’ goes back as far as early 1465, that is to the period in which it is presumed that the adolescent Lorenzo made his poetic debut (Zanato 1992: 5), critics have tended to assume that Lucrezia’s presence as muse can be felt in much of his verse (Kent 2013a: 52). Whilst it is worth bearing in mind that, as Kent puts it, ‘had she not

existed he would have had to invent her in order to satisfy the poetic conventions with which he was working' (2013a: 52), Lucrezia is indisputably the subject of a number of his creations. Appearing under the *senhals* of 'Diana' and 'Sole', she treads a dazzling yet elusive path through the forested landscape of his *canzoniere* (Zanato 1992: 5; Dempsey 1992: 101-102), a Laura-like figure of nymphal yet chaste allure who has much in common with Poliziano's Simonetta. Since it was discovered that Lorenzo commissioned Verrocchio to paint Lucrezia's portrait for him, there has been little critical doubt that his sonnet XLIX, 'fatto a piè d'una tavoletta dove era ritratta una donna', refers to this sadly lost work (Dempsey 1992: 82-83). It is likely, too, that Lucrezia is to be identified with Galatea, the 'dura femina' (50) of Lorenzo's *Corinto*, as is suggested by a reference in Poliziano's *Nutricia* (749-750) to a Galatea who no longer looks harshly upon her Corinthus, and by Naldo Naldi's *Daphnis pastor erat nymphae correptus amore* (Zanato 1992: 135-136). The focus of the eponymous shepherd's sensual but comparatively restrained and rusticated fantasies, she cuts a not dissimilarly bucolic figure to the Simonetta of the *Stanze* in her joyous nature and blonde beauty (68-75). The most obvious connection to Simonetta, however, is Lucrezia's role in the *Comento*, in which she becomes the 'sun' to Simonetta's 'star of Venus' (611-612), the ideal beauty whom Lorenzo has been inspired (with a convenient disregard for chronological accuracy) to seek out. In this incarnation, the anonymous Lucrezia takes on the mantle of 'Platonic lover', chastely reciprocating the ardent passion of the narrator (Kennedy 1989: 50). As with Simonetta, Lorenzo's Lucrezia is a dreamlike embodiment of virtue and love.

Lorenzo was joined in these literary endeavours by no fewer than five other poets, namely Poliziano, Luca and Luigi Pulci (in the vernacular), and Naldo Naldi and Ugolino Verino (in Latin). As I explore in greater depth in Chapter Three (102-118), there was much to be gained from composing works in Simonetta's honour, Medici favourite that she was. The same was

manifestly true of Lucrezia. The difference here is that the stakes were arguably even higher, since becoming part of the poetic conversation about Lucrezia meant claiming a place not only in Florence's cultural elite but among Lorenzo's close and trusted 'friends'. We know this because, whilst Simonetta is largely missing from the surviving epistolary record, it provides comparatively rich pickings on Lucrezia, both in the letters of Lorenzo's *brigata* and in those of Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi (1406-1471). These make it clear that, at least prior to the death of his father and the abrupt termination of his 'carefree adolescence', Lorenzo and his comrades devoted a considerable amount of time and effort to celebrating and discussing his 'affair' with Lucrezia. During Lorenzo's absences from Florence, his 'friends' resorted to putting together carefully-worded reports on the actions and mental state of his 'dama', the most famous of these being the partially-encoded missive written by Braccio Martelli on 27 April 1465, in which he describes the marriage celebrations of Lucrezia to Niccolò Ardinghelli, taking in chaste yet illicit meetings with unaccompanied women, cross-dressing at parties and wedding night peeping toms (see Bryce 2012 and Dempsey 1992: 88-95, among others).

It is in the context of this 'pally' yet cautious ingratiating that the 'Lucrezia poems' should be understood, particularly those of the Pulci brothers. Both Luigi's 'Da poi che 'l lauro', sent to Lorenzo in letter-form on 22 March 1466, and Luca's first *Pistola*, 'Lauro, sopra i monti Calvanei' (*circa* 1466-1468), portray an 'abandoned' and disconsolate Lucrezia who becomes the mouthpiece for the poets' submission to, and dependence on, Lorenzo (Bisconti 2000: 125-126). Luigi, for instance, recounts how, without 'l mio Parnaso,/ mio sommo ben, mio Iddio, mio paradiso' (2-3), he has given himself over to a 'solitaria vita' of sylvan wanderings (13-15), living an equally damned existence as that of the 'nymph' Lucrezia (33).

There is a similar dynamic at work in Luca's *Pistola*, in which 'Lucrezia' encourages Lorenzo to grant the financially-troubled poet a place 'all'ombra sua' (100-112).

This is not to say that Simonetta and Lucrezia performed an identical function in Florentine verse. Rather, as Simonetta became the new Laura/Beatrice of 1470s Florence and the means by which funerary verse in the *volgare* was regenerated, Lucrezia was adopted as the female figurehead of the 1460s revival of vernacular pastoral poetry set in motion by Lorenzo and the Pulci brothers (see Carrai 1999). It is she, most often in the form of a nymph, who roams the bucolic imaginings of this 'studio di buccoici' (Luca Pulci, *Driadeo d'amore*, III.84, cited in Carrai 1999: 115), envisaged in Luca's *Pistola* as three shepherds and their 'Lauro'.

Combining the beauty of Deiopeia ('Da poi che 'l lauro', 30; 'Lauro, sopra i monti Calvanei', 7) with the chastity of Diana, Lucrezia as pastoral fantasy embodies the *Quattrocento* notions of sensuality with which we are now familiar. It is evident that, in creating the *Stanze*'s nymph-like Simonetta, Poliziano was paying tribute to the achievements of the previous generation of poets, making them part of his complex literary landscape.¹³ Lucrezia and Simonetta therefore have much in common, celebrating feminine beauty, Florentine verse and Medici achievements in equal measure. They are not, as Dempsey supposes, simply emanations of the same ideal or of an identical cultural context. Nonetheless, both were '[emblems] of the new humanist culture of the city' (1992: 112-113). Florentine women, in other words, were readily embraced as symbols of the cultural revitalisation of late-fifteenth century Florence, but there was no role for them in this new 'Golden Age' beyond that of muse.

¹³ See Chapter Four (147-151) for an assessment of Simonetta's appearance in the *Bucoliche elegantissime composte*, a collection of original pastoral verse published in February 1481 (*st. f.*).

This impression is confirmed by the other young women who rose to prominence in the city in the 1460s, 1470s and 1480s. The first of these is Marietta degli Strozzi, another reputed beauty who was courted as a *dama* at much the same time as Lucrezia, and whose features were recorded by Desiderio da Settignano in a now lost ‘testa’ (Coonin 2009: 43). Unlike Simonetta, Marietta stands out not so much for her literary heritage as for the unusually detailed description of the events that were held in her honour, although she did attract two Latin elegies by Naldi Naldi and a *capitolo ternario* by Filippo Lapaccini. What emerges is a portrait of woman whose physical charms, purportedly matchless elegance and troubled family history meant that she was laden with political and poetic associations that made her particularly well-suited for chivalrous homage. This is made clear by the nature and scale of the courtly exercises that were performed in her honour in 1464. According to a letter sent by Filippo Corsini to Lorenzo, on 20 January Bartolomeo Benci, Lottieri Nerone and Priore Pandolfini took advantage of a blizzard to organise a night-time snowball fight, lit by torches and accompanied by flutes and trumpets, in front of the house ‘di quella nivea fanciulla’, who is praised by Corsini for the grace with which she joined in with the game from her window (cited in Ventrone 2007: 18). On the fourteenth day of the following month, Benci returned for more nocturnal festivities at the head of an ‘enormous liveried party of perhaps 400 including torchbearers, musicians, pages, and the like’, which processed to ‘the Strozzi home, pulling behind them a contraption twenty yards tall showing the triumph of love’ (Trexler 1980: 231).

This is significant in a number of ways. To begin with, Benci’s was only the second triumph of love to be staged in Florence, and the first to have been used specifically to ‘woo’ a lady (Ventrone 2007: 19, n. 22). What is more, the previous outing had taken place to mark Lorenzo’s ‘prima uscita cerimoniale ufficiale’ (2007: 19, n. 22), meaning that Marietta’s

‘trionfo’ could not help but be connected to him, especially since Benci, Pandolfini and Nerone all came from prominent families allied to the Medici. Marietta thus provided an opportunity to bring to life the poetry of Petrarch and the values of Platonic love, creating an inherently Florentine language for courtly customs that handily associated both cultural renewal and chivalric ‘pomp and circumstance’ with Lorenzo. This explains the decision of another Medici client, Filippi Lapaccini, to immortalise the occasion in his lengthy *capitolo ternario*, ‘Notizia d’una festa fatta la notte di carnasciale per una dama la quale fu figliuola di Lorenzo di messer Palla degli Istrozi’. Here, Marietta is praised for her ‘biltà infinita [...] / ch’è di sì gran valore e virtù cinta’ (I.29-30), for ‘la sua diva luce [che] ogn’altra impera’ (I.43), and for her ‘occhi fiammeggianti’ (II.2), in typically Petrarchan and Ficinian style. It is, however, the men who are the main focus of attention, with the list of those present extending for the better part of two books, and most of the rest of the poem being more concerned with the actions of these ‘amanti’ (II.49, 54) than with those of Marietta. Her task, from the safely-enclosed vantage point of her window, was to react with grace to the devotions of her admirers and to incarnate an essentially passive ideal of femininity (Holmes 1997: 18).

Her ‘lovers’, meanwhile, had their minds not only on fulfilling their courtly ‘duties’ but also on more serious matters of state. The Strozzi family was a venerable but politically disadvantaged one, its men having been exiled in 1434 as enemies of the Medici. In 1464, however, with Cosimo ill, Piero sickly and Lorenzo little more than a boy, and with the powerful Pala Strozzi’s hints that he might conspire against the government following the death of the so-called *Pater Patriae*, the family’s fortunes appeared to be on the rise (Trexler 1980: 230). The nubile Marietta ‘would be an enormous asset in the political battle to come if the Strozzi were rehabilitated. [...] Thus the snowball fight [and *armeggeria*] must have been either directly political, an outright attempt by the Medici and its supportive families to flatter

the Strozzi, or indirectly political, the actions of up-and-coming youngsters of powerful families watched by their fathers' (1980: 230). Martelli, indeed, is convinced that the contrast drawn by Naldo Naldi between Marietta and Helen of Troy, bringers of peace and war respectively, refers to a projected match that would have seen her marry Giovanni Tornabuoni, Piero de' Medici's brother-in-law (1980: 247, 253-254). Whether or not Martelli is correct, it is worth bearing in mind that the highly choreographed events of 14 February, in which the devices of the Benci and Strozzi featured prominently (1980: 231), were protected by the regime via a decree that allowed no one else to ride on horseback that night, and even absolved the participants from responsibility for any deaths that ensued (Coonin 2009: 45). The Medici evidently saw it as being in their interests not only to allow the *armeggeria* to take place, but to lend it their support. Marietta, then, demonstrates that political considerations, as much as beauty and youth, were the major reason for the idealisation of women in late-fifteenth century Florence.

The literary treatment of Ginevra de' Benci supports this view. Ginevra, Bartolomeo Benci's niece, is best known for the famous portrait by Leonardo that now hangs in the National Gallery of Art, Washington (figure 1). But she was also the subject of a series of poems extolling her beauty and virtue, which celebrate her as the *dama* of Bernardo Bembo, the Venetian ambassador to Florence. In contrast to Simonetta, with the exception of two sonnets by Lorenzo that may or may not refer to her (Bryce 2009: 146-147) the entire cycle of verse in which Ginevra appears was composed in Latin by, respectively, Alessandro Braccesi, Cristoforo Landino and Naldo Naldi (2009: 137-138). One must assume that, in addressing a renowned humanist who wrote mostly in Latin and who hailed from beyond the city's walls, the Florentine vernacular was not viewed as an apt medium. It is also possible that the decision had something to do with Ficino's (Latin) courting of Bembo, which began

from the moment that the ambassador arrived in Florence, and included invitations, gifts of manuscripts and an epistolary contact that was maintained until the Platonist's death (Bryce 2009: 142). As Bryce points out, Ficino not only gave him a copy of his *De Amore*, but Bembo saw it as a fit place for his single written reference to Ginevra as a virtuous and beautiful woman, writing in the margin four lines from one of Landino's elegies (2009: 142). Certainly, Landino's third 'Ginevra elegy', which is expressly addressed to Bembo, contains a host of Ficinian imagery and assertions. Landino states, for instance, that '[...] since desire is excited by the beautiful, love [...] loves the beautiful and rejoices in images of beauty' ('V. To the Same', 7-8). Ginevra could, in addition, boast of a number of familial connections to the Florentine philosopher and translator, 'making her replete with very tangible Neoplatonic connections' (Bryce 2009: 143). It is also worth remarking upon the fact that both Ficino and Bembo were present at a 1475 banquet held by Lorenzo to discuss the immortality of the soul (Bolzoni 2010: 336). It may well be, then, that Latin was judged to be the best medium in which to weave a web of beauty that would appeal to this renowned humanist, to 'convert' him to Platonism (Bolzoni 2010: 336), and thus to create an advocate of Florentine culture and Ficinianism in the Veneto. Whatever the case, Ginevra's Latinity serves to highlight Simonetta's importance as a vernacular icon.

In other ways, though, the two have much in common. Most obviously and unsurprisingly given her links to Ficino, there is the lauding of Ginevra as at once superlatively lovely and entirely innocent of sin (2009: 138), Bembo being simply her 'chaste delight' (Landino, 'VII. To the Same', 10). Much like the Simonetta of the *Stanze* and the *Comento*, what is more, Landino's Ginevra is radiant with light, 'the whole charm of the Graces [shining] from her brow' ('V. To The Same', 44), and is beloved of and comparable to the gods ('III. To Bernardo Bembo', 29-30; 'V. To The Same', 43-46; 'VIII. To The Same', 61-68). She possesses,

furthermore, the same blend of virtuous restraint and sensual allure, '[speaking] sweetly with sweet laughter and honest modesty, for modesty and laughter combine with equal strength, so that her shining blushes red and a blush shines upon her face' ('VIII. To The Same', 69-70).

Beyond this similarity in imagery, Ginevra is as much as Simonetta 'a cultural construct of the feminine rather than a historical subject- put to use in the management of complex and sometimes conflictual relationships between individuals, or groups of individuals, in the Florence of the 1470s' (Bryce 2009: 132-133). Whether they were working on behalf of Ficino, to bolster Medici efforts of the early-mid 1470s to win a Venetian bride for Giuliano, or for the greater good of a city that had just entered into a new League with Venice (Bryce 2009: 138-139), the real focus of the poets' attention was not Ginevra but Bembo. Nearly all of the poems that refer to Ginevra are directed primarily to Bembo, and even those that are nominally addressed to his 'paramour' may well have been intended principally for his eyes (Bryce 2009: 137-138). As with Simonetta, moreover, we learn nothing of Ginevra's thoughts or feelings (Bryce 2009: 147), and would be pushed to distinguish her from a 'line-up' of other literary beauties of the day. If Lorenzo's 'Sonetto fatto al duca di Calavria in nome di una donna' (LVIII) and 'Sonetto fatto per il duca di Calavria quando la S. andò al bagno' (LX) do indeed refer to Simonetta (Carrai 2007: 85), this would not even have been the first time that Medici circles had elevated a visiting dignitary's romantic preferences to the realms of poetry and philosophy.¹⁴ In this light, being awarded a *dama* could be seen as a gesture of respect, and as the ritualised 'offering' of Florence's women to eminent guests (see Bryce 2002: 1084-1085 on Florentine women dancing for 'foreign' visitors).

¹⁴ See Chapters Three and Four (109-111; 161-162) for further discussion of Simonetta's connection to Alfonso, the Duke of Calabria.

One of the most telling clues as to Ginevra's relative lack of importance in all of this is that none of the elegies refers to her as a poet in her own right, when we have epistolary evidence that she wrote at least one *sestina*, the strikingly titled 'Chieggio merzede e son alpestro tygre' (Bryce 2009: 154-155). Bembo is the cultural (and political) agent to whom Naldi, Braccesi and Landino are reaching out, in other words, whilst Ginevra is significant only for the traditionally feminine virtues of beauty and chastity. It is possible, on the other hand, that the laurel-and-palm device on the reverse of Leonardo's portrait, generally believed to be that of Bembo (Fletcher 1989: 811), first belonged to Ginevra and was only later adopted by the Venetian (Garrard 2006: 41). The 'Honor' referred to in the work's original motto, 'Virtus et Honor', would then refer to Ginevra's poetic honour (2006: 29). Yet whether or not this was so, the fact that this maxim was replaced shortly after the work was completed, becoming 'Virtutem Forma Decorat' ('Beauty Adorns Virtue') (Garrard 2006: 44-45), suggests that gender norms were swiftly re-established. The painting is, moreover, notoriously difficult to interpret, yielding more questions than answers, chief among these being the extent to which Ginevra was allowed room for 'self-expression' in the choice of pose and apparel (Bryce 2009: 148-149). The vast majority of the evidence points to Ginevra's value to her poets as lying in her capacity to be transformed into a cipher on to which the customary female virtues of beauty and chastity could be inscribed. As Bryce puts it, 'the "Ginevra" texts are primarily a poetry of politics and of patronage, with Bembo, rather than Ginevra, as the true object of seduction' (2009: 139). There is little here to alter our perceptions of the role that women played in late-fifteenth century Florentine verse.

The same can be said of the works of art and poetry that depict Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni. But whereas Simonetta, Lucrezia, Marietta and Ginevra were chiefly extolled as *dame* and nymphs, Giovanna played the more prosaic role of ideal bride, mother and wife.

This is not to say that she was never praised as a ‘poetic mistress’. There is a possibility, for instance, that the legend borne by one of the two portrait medals in her honour (figure 2), namely ‘CASTITAS-PULCHRITUDO-AMOR’, was designed to be read in combination with a medal owned by Pico della Mirandola with the motto ‘PULCHRITUDO-AMOR-VOLUPTAS’. According to this theory, ‘her medal answers his by reversing the emblem’, so that ‘in place of the platonic male definition of love: “Love is Passion aroused by Beauty”, we have a female response: “Beauty is Love combined with Chastity”’ (Lawless 2003: 14). What is more certain is that the imagery on both of Giovanna’s medals is identical to that associated with the other women discussed in this chapter. Not only, for example, does the first of these assert the significance of beauty and chastity to a woman’s power to inspire love, but this declaration is twinned with an image of the Three Graces, the very embodiments of divine elegance and virtue linked to Simonetta, Ginevra (Landino, V. 44), and others. The iconography of the second medal (figure 3) is equally telling. Its quotation, ‘VIRGINIS OS HABITUMQUE GERENS, ET VIRGINIS ARMA’ (‘a maiden’s face and mien, and a maiden’s arms’) is lifted directly from *Aeneid*. I.35, in which Venus appears to Aeneas in the guise of a huntress. The figure that appears beneath it represents Venus in just such a pose, embodying both the beauty of the goddess of love and the virtue of Diana (Van der Sman 2010: 26). Giovanna, no less than her poetic sisters, is therefore presented as being loveliness and chastity personified.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that these medals were almost certainly created *circa* 1486 (Luciano 2001a: 131; Randolph 2002: 212), and were thus intended to celebrate first and foremost Giovanna’s marriage of the same year to Lorenzo Tornabuoni, rather than her purported ‘relationship’ with Pico. With her bound hair and rich jewels, Giovanna is every inch the perfect bride (Luciano 2001a: 131), a vision that finds its literary equivalent in Naldo

Naldi's *Nuptiale Carmen ad Laurentium Tornabonium Iohannis filium iuvenem primarium* ('Wedding song to the distinguished youth, Lorenzo Tornabuoni di Giovanni'). In this epithalamium, which describes the nuptials in elevated tones, we see the same preoccupation with divinely-bestowed beauty and chastity that characterises many of the texts described in this chapter (Van der Sman 2010: 60). Giovanna, for example, wears a dazzlingly white gown, and is awarded by Venus a magic girdle that is deemed "a chaste present" (2010: 37; 60). Descriptions of dancing and jousting are also included (2010: 41-42), in a manner not entirely dissimilar to depictions of the courtly events with which Simonetta, Lucrezia and Marietta were associated. Giovanna, however, takes the place of honour not as 'poetic mistress' but as newly-wed (2010: 41-42) and, whilst sex is very much off the agenda for the *dame*, Naldi had no compunction in referring, albeit in idealised terms, to the "heavenly embrace" that consummated the marriage (2010: 42).

If Patricia Simons is correct, an image of Giovanna as wife and (expectant) mother also survives, this time in painted form in Domenico Ghirlandaio's fresco of the *Birth of the Baptist* in the Cappella Tornabuoni (church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence, *circa* 1486-1490). Whilst there is no scholarly doubt as to Giovanna's appearance in *The Visitation*, which I discuss in a moment, there has been little consensus as to the identity of the pink-clad lady in the *Birth* (figures 4-5). For Simons, though, it is clear that her features can all be traced to Giovanna's portrait medals (2011-2012: 127). She is convinced, moreover, that 'no other young woman was likely to have been chosen for such prominent portrayal in the chapel', especially since Giovanna's son, like the Baptist, bore the name of Giovanni. Assuming that Simons is correct in her assumptions, this commemoration of Giovanna's fertility is unlike anything that we have so far seen, the *dama*-nymph being far too ethereal to have anything to do with the messy realities of childbirth.

The Giovanna who appears in the *Visitation* (figures 6-7) was tragically free from such cares, having died in pregnancy or childbirth at the age of twenty. In this posthumous celebration of her life and character, she is the personification of the perfect Florentine wife. With her long neck, blonde hair and white skin, she fulfils all the criteria of Petrarchan beauty that are familiar to us from Simonetta, Lucrezia *et al* (Tinagli 1997: 67). She is, moreover, ‘looking decorously in front of her, in the measured manner appropriate to her gender and status’ (1997: 67), and in a style that recalls the modesty and elegance of the unhurried movements of Poliziano’s Simonetta. Yet, a largely static figure, she has none of the dynamism of the Simonetta of the *Stanze*, withdrawing her gaze from that of the onlooker. What we are seeing here is a Giovanna presented as the ideal ‘aristocratic’ spouse, seemly in dress and behaviour, and with none of the ambiguities of identity and status that colour the visual images associated with Simonetta (see Chapter Five, 201-213). She is, what is more, the walking embodiment of familial honour, her *giornea*, or overgown, covered with the heraldic devices of the Tornabuoni (Tinagli 1997: 67).

The other poems and works of art created to mourn her death and commemorate her life portray her in a similar light. Poliziano, for example, wrote a Latin epigram in which he describes Giovanna as being ‘fortunate’ ‘by birth, beauty, child, wealth and husband [...] and also by talent, character and mind’ (1-2; transcribed in Van der Sman 2010: 102), a veritable roll-call of the qualities desirable in a *Quattrocento* Florentine wife. Unusually, we also have an epigram by the grieving Lorenzo Tornabuoni, much of the language of which is familiar to us from depictions of Simonetta, Ginevra and Lucrezia. Lorenzo, for instance, states that ‘The Graces gave [Giovanna] her wits and Venus beauty,/ The goddess Diana [...] a chaste heart’ (1-2; transcribed in Van der Sman 2010: 102), in the standard eulogy of feminine virtue and beauty. The following four lines, however, take a different approach, describing Giovanna

as the ‘honour of the fatherland, descendant of the Albizzi,/ But married, while a young maid, to a Tornabuoni,/ Much loved by the people during her life,/ Now cherished by the highest God’ (3-6). Giovanna, in other words, is framed squarely within a discourse of civic honour, bringing pride even in death to her natal and conjugal families, and to the city at large.

Ghirlandaio’s famous posthumous portrait of Giovanna in Madrid’s Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (figure 8, *circa* 1488) expresses all of these things and largely corresponds to her portrayal in the *Visitation* (although critical opinion is divided as to which image inspired the other; see Brown 2001a: 190 and Weppelmann 2011: 68). Here, Giovanna wears the same emblem-strewn *giornea* as in the fresco, with her rings, pendant and brooch alluding to her marriage and bridal finery (Weppelmann 2011: 67). The book and beads positioned on the niche behind her, perhaps a rosary and prayer book (Brown 2001a: 193), signal piety, devotion and learning (Tinagli 1997: 77). Her profile pose, redolent of chastity (Simons 1995: 43-44), adds to this vision of beauty and virtue. The inscription, ‘Ars utinam mors animunque effingere posses/ pulchrior in terris nulla tabella foret’, *id est* ‘Art, if only you were able to portray character and soul, no painting on earth would be more beautiful’ (DePrano 2008: 618-619), further clarifies Giovanna’s exemplary status as the most chaste and lovely of women. The portrait, in other words, ‘compliments her attainment of the prescribed virtues for a patrician woman in Florentine society’ and ‘claims her for her conjugal family’ (2008: 623). Indeed, since the painting could still be found ten years after Giovanna’s death in the ‘*chamera del palco d’oro*’ of the Tornabuoni palace (DePrano 2008: 634), it was evidently designed as a lasting memorial to her excellence that would continue to bring credit to her husband and his relations. Like Simonetta and the other women mentioned in this chapter, Giovanna represented an ideal of feminine beauty and virtue, albeit as the model wife rather than as nymph or *dama*. This is not to say that she was not mourned sincerely and

commemorated as a flesh-and-blood woman, along with Simonetta and others like her, but there is nothing here to challenge Renaissance gender norms.

Giovanna was positively long-lived compared to her elder sister, Albiera, who died in 1473 at the age of fifteen, days short of her marriage to Sigismondo della Stufa. All of the verse and prose that describes Albiera was composed to mark this sad event, making her in some respects Simonetta's closest equivalent. Yet in another sense they are poles apart, since whilst Simonetta represented a major reinvestment in vernacular funerary verse, only one of the more than forty poems written about Albiera is in the *volgare*, the implications of which I discuss at greater length in Chapter Three (98). Moreover, whilst the vast majority of the Latin and vernacular verse on Simonetta is directed to one of her 'lovers', it is Albiera's fiancé who is the focus of attention here, with Albiera classed as his 'wife' and Sigismondo as her 'husband' twelve times in the course of Poliziano's 'In Albieram Albitiam, Puellam Formosissimam, Morientem. Ad Sismundum Stuphum Eius Sponsum' ('On the death of Albiera degli Albizzi, a beautiful girl, to her fiancé Sigismondo della Stufa'; 4, 24, 25, 166, 177, 198, 219, 221, 224, 253, 248, 271). Albiera may be, as we shall see, the perfect Florentine maiden, but she is not a *dama* and, unlike Simonetta, her marital status is all-important.

The imagery used to describe them is, furthermore, far from identical, notwithstanding Ventrone's assertions to the contrary (2007: 34-35). Albiera may amaze old and young with her blend of sensuous beauty and unassailable virtue (85-86), eliciting comparisons with Simonetta's miraculous powers, but she casts a somewhat different spell. To be sure, the same poetic and Platonic resonances illumine them with an aura of divinity (150; Ventrone 2007: 34-35). Yet what defines Albiera's triumph and tragedy is her perpetual virginity, a state that

could not be claimed for Simonetta, whatever her Marian connotations in the *Stanze*.

Poliziano refers to Albiera as a 'puella' or a virgin on nine separate occasions (131, 153, 153, 156, 159, 162, 169, 187, 194-198, 251), whilst Simonetta is most definitely a 'donna' (for example, *Stanze*, I.53.4; I.58.5; I.59.6; II.28.I; II.32.7). Most arresting is the comfort that Albiera takes in her 'uncontaminated' virginity and in the fact that she will never be a wife in anything but name (194-198). It is therefore Albiera's privileged status as eternal 'virgo intacta' that is her defining feature.

To conclude, whilst Simonetta stands out from her literary peers as an icon of Laurentian vernacular (funerary) verse and, in contrast to the Albizzi sisters, as one of the *dame* who haunted the literary and social imagination of those years, all of the young women who were idolised in Florence up until the 1490s were lauded purely for traditional feminine virtues and achievements. 'Simonetta', 'Lucrezia', 'Marietta', 'Ginevra', 'Giovanna' and 'Albiera' are *all* the most beautiful and chaste of ladies, exemplary in their manners and impeccable in their behaviour, 'not real characters but simply rewritten textual constructs culled from canonical sources' (McLaughlin 2000: 137) and contemporary morals. Why, then, were these merchants' wives and daughters transformed into inspirers of chaste and poetic love, and from there into emblems of civic pride? The answer lies partly in the long tradition, common to Florence and to many of Italy's city states, of celebrating the loveliness of local women and of creating a correlation between their beauty and virtue and that of the state (Syson 2008: 249). Florence, moreover, had particular form in producing works in praise of women, from Dante's *serventese* commemorating the sixty most beautiful ladies of the city (as reported in *Vita Nuova*. VI) to Boccaccio's famous *De Mulieribus Claris* ('On Famous Women'). What gave the beautiful-woman-as-Florentine-icon such resonance in the late *Quattrocento*, however, was Florence's much-vaunted status as the 'new Rome', home of Ficinianism and the *tre*

corone. Donne angelicate were central to the poetry of Dante and Petrarch and essential to Platonism as conduits to the contemplation of the divine, and were thus the perfect representatives for Florence and its cultural flourishing. The idea, however, that women should take an active part in this literary and artistic ferment was largely alien to Florentine society at this time (see Cox 2008: 8-14 for more information on the contrast between Florence and the Italian courts).

Poliziano: A Case Study

Poliziano, 'Simonetta's' creator, exemplifies this conservative attitude towards women. His Latin and vernacular verse abounds with beautiful, young, loveable and beloved women, some of whom he professes to adore. Yet whilst Poliziano was ever-inventive as a poet, his stance towards what in his works is very much the '*other sex*' is not so original. His female poetic creations do nothing, as we have seen, to trouble Renaissance gender stereotypes. Furthermore, even when they are at their most sympathetic and tragic, there is a great deal more at stake in literary and political terms than their commemoration and celebration. Not only did they allow Poliziano to play his part in reinventing the Laura and Beatrices who were so central to Florentine cultural pride, but they granted him admission to the élite circles in which such fashionable verse was exchanged, in a city that set increasing store by the poetic and public lauding of its beauties. The less poetically gifted of his fellow citizens, indeed, frequently bothered him with requests for all kinds of poems, emblems and mottos, as he complains in a letter of 22 April 1490 (see Orvieto 2009: 216-217). Poliziano may lament these time-wasters but one must assume that he was repaid in social prestige and any number of favours, if not in cold, hard cash. His choice of literary ladies, moreover, was never disinterested. Rather, as we shall see in Chapter Three (113), the hyperbolic praising of

women had far more to do with courting the favour of their menfolk than with paying tribute to their particular charms.

It is Poliziano himself, in fact, who implies that his songs of ‘amori fittizi’ (*Elegy to Bartolomeo Fonzio*, 139) should not be taken seriously as ‘messages from the heart’. There is nothing in his poetic *oeuvre* to contradict him. In the words of Orvieto, Poliziano’s ideal women are ‘puri e semplici pretesti per *exploits* poetici’ without any recognisably biographical traits (2009: 171; 193-194). The girl of his famous ode, ‘In puellam suam’ (‘To his girl’), clearly owes her existence to the same strain of rustic comedy that inspired Lorenzo’s *Nencia da Barberino*, being a sprightly, humorously-drawn flirt who cedes to her lover’s sexual demands and then sadistically retreats from him (Orvieto 2009: 177-181). His ‘In Violas’ (‘On violets’) is a ‘jeu littéraire, exercice d’entraînement’ (Maier 1966: 160), composed in response to a series of poems on the same theme by Lorenzo, Girolamo Benivieni, Bernardo Pulci and Buonaccorso da Montemagno (Orvieto 2009: 187). The Lalage of his ‘In Lalagen’ (‘To Lalage’), whose name Poliziano borrowed from the odes of Horace, owes her existence largely to the works of the great elegiac poets of ancient Rome (2009: 193-194). We know next to nothing of the Ippolita Leoncini da Prato of whom Poliziano writes in a number of his vernacular poems (*Rime*, VII, XII, XIII, XIV, CIII, CVI, CVII), and we learn precious little more about her from them. Orvieto may well be right to argue that Poliziano probably had no direct relationship with her, that her name was chosen to entertain his ‘allievi pratesi’, and that she functioned as a ‘fanciulla-pretesto’ who gave him the opportunity to flex his poetic muscles ‘in tutti gli stili e linguaggi possibili’ (2009: 289). This is to take nothing away from the beauty and brilliance of Poliziano’s verse. ‘[...] anzi, proprio l’assenza della passione si riteneva rendesse più pregevole l’opera del poeta, se di grande artificio, onde perfettamente simulare quella passione, il poeta doveva essere in

possesso' (Martelli 1985-1986: 307). Poliziano was virtuosic in his engagement with the key themes of Laurentian poetry, notably youth, beauty, love and the passing of time, but his intellectual curiosity did not extend to the women who sing, dance and laugh their way through his verse.

What is more, the virgin/whore dichotomy that characterises so much of the poetry of the day is plainly visible in the works of Poliziano. This is most obvious in the *ballata*, 'Una vecchia mi vagheggia', and in the ode, 'In anum' ('To an old woman'). They may be inspired by the *vituperatio vetulae* (Bettella 2005: 76, 79), a tradition that had its roots in a shared Latin and vernacular heritage that must have appealed to a poet as eclectic as Poliziano; they may be an 'esercitazione di scuola', as much a pretext for displaying his prodigious literary gifts as the 'fanciulle' and 'puellae' of his more complimentary verse (Orvieto 2009: 167). This does not mean, however, that they are not highly disturbing. In 'Una vecchia mi vagheggia', for instance, Poliziano is revolted by her slimy palate (10), her smell 'o di can morto/ o di nidio d'avoltoio' (14-15), and by her 'poppe vizzo e vote' (39), to name but a few of her more revolting features. As Bettella argues, 'Poliziano's comic treatment of the old prostitute reflects his anxiety about a female figure who transgresses the codes of proper behaviour and decency and who obliterates the fascination with/veneration of female youth at play in some of his most famous poetry' (2005: 76).

This vein of 'mal celata misogonia', to quote Orvieto (2009: 244), is easily traceable in a number of Poliziano's works. His one take on the 'advice to women' genre, 'Io vi vo', donne, insegnare' (*Rime*, CXVIII), is hardly a proto-feminist manual (see Kent 2013a: 64 and Bausi 1997: 290-296). Rather, he instructs his audience to avoid wearing too much makeup (7-10), never to leave 'ampolle e bossoletti' around their beds (11-14), and to laugh frequently 'pur

ch'abbiate netti e denti' (30). True, women should learn to play cards, dice, chess and backgammon (35-36), to recite 'canzonette, versi e favole' (38), to sing and dance with skill (39-42), and to write well (99-100), but this is only so that they will appear pleasing to men and be able to send letters to their lovers (35-42; 101-102).

The *Detti Piacevoli*, if they indeed were compiled by Poliziano, are full of anti-marriage and anti-woman sentiments. A 'Messer Bartolomeo medico Pistolese', for example, is quoted as stating that he would rather marry a woman who brought him a large dowry than one renowned for her wisdom, since 'dalla più pazza alla più savia donna del mondo non era un granello di panico, e che non voleva questo granello comprarlo 300 ducati' (Poliziano 1985: 51, n. 141); 'un Maestro Agnolo Barbini' tells a breast-feeding woman that 'voi donne havete da Dio più bella gratia che voi non meritate [...] Perchè se vi havesse fatte le poppe tra gambe come a l'altre bestie, per certo voi eravate una schifa cosa a vedervi lattare' (1985: 95, n. 363). Most head-turning are the quotes attributed to Ficino who, like Poliziano, remained a bachelor for the entirety of his life.¹⁵ For 'Messer Marsilio', 'e' si vuole usare le donne come gl'orinali che, come l'huomo vi ha pisciato dentro, si nascondono, e ripongono' (Poliziano 1985: 58, n. 182). Not only this, but 'Dice Messer Marsilio che e preti son più cattivi che i secolari, i frati de' preti, de' preti e monaci, de' monaci e romiti, de' romiti le donne' (Poliziano 1985: 59, n. 189). In this version of events, even the man who could reasonably claim to be Laurentian Florence's greatest exalter of feminine beauty has little interest in or sympathy for his subjects. Women might be praiseworthy for their external loveliness and as unwitting conduits of divine radiance, but this is as far as it goes. Poliziano certainly appears to have had little respect for Lorenzo's wife, Clarice, taking it upon himself to replace in her absence the priest

¹⁵ Branca, one of the strongest advocates for Poliziano's total 'conversion' to Aristotelianism in the 1480s, interprets these 'quotations' as being a parody of Platonic love (1986: 472). It is hard to sustain this argument, however, in the light of the continued Ficinian resonances in Poliziano's work.

whom she had charged with her children's education (Tomas 2003: 24). Whatever the pedagogical arguments, this was surely an immensely arrogant step, undermining Clarice's authority in her own home and demonstrating his lack of regard for her opinion.

This is not to say that Poliziano did not make exceptions to this rule, most obviously in the case of Lucrezia Tornabuoni. His letters to her demonstrate the esteem in which he held her, and the apparent companionship that they shared. For example, writing on 18 December 1478 from Cafaggiolo where he and his young Medici charges had been sent to escape from the plague and from the dangers of wartime Florence, Poliziano complains to Lucrezia of his loneliness and fear. 'Non truovo qui la mia Madonna Lucrezia in camera', he laments, 'colla quale io posso sfogarmi; e muoio di tedio' (1976a: 68, Letter XXI). This does not mean, of course, that they were 'friends' in the modern sense, given the formal tone that Poliziano adopts with Lucrezia and the fact that his missives function to a large extent as 'patronage letters' (see McLean 2007: xii for a definition).

It was only in the 1490s that Poliziano, along with the rest of the city, truly began to take an interest in the 'learned ladies' who had long been a feature of the Italian courts. Yet we should be wary of taking his praise either of the Venetian scholar Cassandra Fedele or of the Florentine Alessandra Scala at face value. Poliziano does seem to have been genuinely impressed by Fedele when he met her in Venice, writing to Lorenzo on 20 June 1491 that 'È cosa [...] mirabile, nè meno in vulgare che in latino; discretissima, *et meis oculis etiam* bella. Partimi stupito' (1976a: 81-92, Letter XXX). He went on to strike up a Latin correspondence with her, the most well-known part of which is the famous encomium in which he addresses her as the 'glory of Italy', and lauds her for 'subtle, elegant, articulate Latin missives' and 'erudite, eloquent, sonorous, brilliant' oration (Poliziano 2000: 90). The letter is, nonetheless,

full of what Schibanoff terms ‘thinly disguised dispraise’ (1994: 195-196). For instance, the fact that Cassandra ‘would rather comb a book than wool, paint with a quill rather than rouge, stitch with a pen rather than a needle, and [...] cover papyrus with ink than her skin with white powder’ is ‘no more odd or less strange than if violets were to grow in ice, roses in snow, or lilies in the midst of frost’ (Poliziano 2000: 90). As Cox argues, moreover, what is really at stake here is not so much Fedele’s honour and talent as ‘the all-important and eminently negotiable question of the relationship between classical and modern humanistic learning, with the *virtus* of women metonymically representing the state of development of an entire culture’ (2008: 28-29). Fedele demonstrates that ‘Earlier times no longer have the right to boast about their Muses, Sibyls, Pythian prophetesses, Pythagorean women philosophers, Socrates’ Diotima, or Aspasia’ (Poliziano 2000: 90). ‘[...] if the *women* of classical antiquity or modern humanistic culture were so intellectually empowered, then what more could be said of its men?’ (Cox 2008: 29). When it came down to it, Poliziano may not even have been particularly interested in Fedele, since he failed to reply to one of her letters and only sent a response after receiving a second missive (Jardine 1985: 806-807). ‘One must suspect that the *actual* exchange of letters and views and the *real* girl ranked rather low on his list of intellectual priorities’ (Jardine 1985: 806-807).

Poliziano’s relations with Alessandra Scala were similarly ambiguous, as we can tell from the series of Greek epigrams that he wrote about her. In the first of these, ‘Alla poetessa Alessandra’ (XXVII), he expresses his amazement at her portrayal of Sophocles’ Electra. His praise, though, is somewhat double-edged. Beyond her faultless mastery of the Attic tongue, what he is most interested in is her virginal demeanour and decorous behaviour (Jardine 1985: 810). Fedele, too, is invoked as a ‘maiden’, deemed worthy for the ‘virginal simplicity’ of her writings and for the way in which she ‘cast [her] virginal eyes down on the ground’ when

reading her oration (Poliziano 2000: 90-91). There is nothing very different here, then, from the standard admiration of women for their beauty and chastity. What is more, the rest of Poliziano's epigrams '[transform] the exchange from one between Greek virtuosi into a series of formalised lover's addresses to an absent beloved', meaning that 'Scala is [...] effectively excluded from the exchange altogether, in spite of Politian's continuing protestations of admiration' (Jardine 1985: 816-817). These love poems make few references to her learning and quickly descend into rebukes and insults (see XXX- L of Poliziano's *Epigrammi Greci*). There is a good chance, too, that this 'mock suit' was connected to Poliziano's polemic with Alessandra's father, Bartolomeo, rather than being inspired by genuine emotion (Godman 1998: 129). Poliziano, then, not unlike many of his fellow humanists, had minimal interest in engaging with either of these women as scholars in their own right.

Conclusion

Poliziano's opinion of women mirrored those of Florence at large: conventional, brutally dismissive of those who did not live up to social and poetic ideals, and slow to take on board the more progressive attitudes that were gaining ground in the Italian courts. Poliziano was crucial to Simonetta's poetic afterlife, creating the 'Pygmalion's statue' that subsequent poets remodelled according to their own tastes and circumstances. But Simonetta, as with all other women, was not important to his own story, being merely one more string to his literary bow. In this sense, she stands for the entire panoply of voiceless *dame*, nymphs, virgins and brides with which late-fifteenth century Florentine poetry and art abounds, all equally smothered by a bewitching yet suffocating veil of idealism. Behind this enchanting mask lay ugly truths.

CHAPTER THREE

POLITICS, PATRONAGE, COMPETITION, COLLABORATION:

SIMONETTA'S ELECTION AS POETIC MUSE

Introduction

Why did so many poets choose to write about Simonetta, and what was the nature of the relationship between them? Were they really flocking to commemorate a famous and adored beauty, as has often been assumed? My hypothesis is twofold. First, since Simonetta became the subject of an unprecedented number of funerary poems in the *volgare*, I work with the premise that she became a vehicle for the development and promotion of Tuscan vernacular literature that was taking place in 1470s Florence. Second, whilst not denying that such high-minded objectives were a motivating factor in Simonetta's posthumous poetic popularity, I argue that, as a Medici favourite, she was valuable homosocial currency in an increasingly courtly society that set a premium on intellectual achievement. I then go on to debate the ties that bound the poets together, questioning whether their works on Simonetta were the fruits of a close-knit group united by shared ambitions and beliefs, or if we are dealing with a more complex set of associations, rivalries and anxieties. In doing so, I provide a nuanced account of the production of culture in Laurentian Florence, challenging the myths that have often coloured our understanding of early Renaissance Tuscany. One of the legends that will come under particular scrutiny is that of Marsilio Ficino's 'Platonic Academy', since Simonetta has frequently been connected with Ficinian theory, to the point of being identified as a 'Neoplatonic icon' by Giovanna Lazzi and Paola Ventrone (2007: 36). Whilst Simonetta is, as I explained in the previous chapter, described to a certain extent in Platonic terms in Poliziano's *Stanze* and Lorenzo's *Comento*, such a reading does not hold true for the entire

corpus. Rather, the true focus of attention is the development and promotion of the Tuscan vernacular.

I shall focus here on texts written *circa* 1476 in the aftermath of Simonetta's death. This will allow me to analyse how the poets responded to each other's works in a relatively precise historical moment, and in the context of the wide-ranging cultural and societal changes that were taking place at the time. My corpus, therefore, will include two sonnets by Girolamo Benivieni, four by Lorenzo de' Medici, one by Baccio Ugolini, another by Luigi Pulci, Bernardo Pulci's elegy and sonnet, and Francesco Nursio Timideo's 'Motor del cielo et Re degli emisperi'. Poliziano's *Stanze*, although begun in 1475, will also be taken into consideration, both as the immediate predecessor of these funerary compositions and for Poliziano's response to the tragedy in Book II. 33-37. The coda to this chapter concerns Tommaso Sardi's *De Anima Peregrina*, examining why the poet-monk, in stark contrast to his more courtly counterparts, failed to win Medici patronage.

Depictions of Simonetta and Cultural Trends in 1470s Florence

For many scholars, Simonetta is a byword for Neoplatonic wisdom and love. Giovanna Lazzi and Paola Ventrone, in particular, are convinced that Lorenzo, Poliziano and Botticelli were responsible for transforming Simonetta into the ultimate 'Neoplatonic nymph', 'modello eccellente di bellezza neoplatonica' (2007: 31). This insistence on connecting Simonetta with Ficinian thought reflects the wider belief that early Renaissance Florence was dominated by a Medici-sponsored 'Platonic Academy', whose members, comprising much of the city's cultural élite, honoured Ficino as a 'new Plato'. This vision of late-fifteenth century Tuscany, popularised by Arnaldo della Torre's 1902 *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze*, was until recently the accepted version of events, largely supported by academics as important as

Paul Oskar Kristeller and Frances Yates. But if, as James Hankins has demonstrated, such an Academy never in fact existed as a formalised institution (2004: 223-249), have Simonetta's links with Platonism been exaggerated?

It should be stated immediately that there is little to suggest that the poets collectively elected her simply as a 'Neoplatonic icon', far less that they were writing as members of an 'Academy'. This is not to dispute Ficino's undoubtedly great influence on Florentine culture, nor to reject entirely the notion that a limited number of the 'Simonetta poems' reveal an interest in Ficinian thought. As we have already seen, Lorenzo's *Comento* and Poliziano's *Stanze* are in part the product of such a philosophical context, although the latter is nowhere near as schematically Platonic as Martelli and his disciples would like us to believe. It is, however, hard to identify instances of Neoplatonic doctrine in the majority of the remainder of the texts in which Simonetta appears. Girolamo Benivieni's (original) sonnets, with their laments for the loss of the sun (VII, 1-2), and for the 'corporeo velo' that prevents Giuliano from contemplating his beloved (VI, 10-11; VII, 10-11), could certainly be said to indicate the interest in Platonic ideas that would later flourish in his *Canzona d'amor* and in his friendship with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Yet whilst one could tenuously trace Ficino's support for the synthesis of classical and vernacular texts (Storey 2003: 606) in Bernardo Pulci's elegy and Baccio Ugolini's sonnet, it is hard to identify any specifically 'Ficinian' imagery in either. Even Lorenzo's 'Simonetta sonnets', considered as works in their own right prior to their inclusion in the *Comento*, are not overtly Platonic. Taken as a whole, the 'Simonetta poems' provide little proof that her name had become shorthand for Platonic beauty and love, or that writing about her signalled compliance to Ficinian principles, far less membership of a 'Platonic Academy'. The mere fact that Luigi Pulci composed a sonnet for Simonetta, presumably in 1476 and therefore at the height of his quarrel with Ficino (see Orvieto 1978:

237-240), further belies the theory that she was regarded as the personification of Florence's Platonic revival.

I propose that what these 'Simonetta poems' truly reveal about late-fifteenth century Florentine culture is its efforts to revive and promote the Tuscan *volgare*. Latin had been the language of literature and learning in Italy for the best part of a century by this time, with the *volgare* linked primarily to popular forms of verse and prose. It was only in the 1460s that scholars and writers in Florence began to re-engage with the city's vernacular heritage, and to champion the supremacy of the dialect that had given birth to the *tre corone* of Italian medieval poetry.¹⁶ By the 1470s it was increasingly clear that a more serious vernacular idiom needed to be fashioned, one which would weave together the best of the Florentine vernacular tradition with the classical and Platonic learning in which Florence excelled (Greene 1982: 156), in a 'cultural project' that connected the *volgare* to the political and intellectual standing of the state (Gilson 2009: 134). It was this new poetic language that Lorenzo and the poets associated with him set about developing, leading to a boom in vernacular verse that was experimental in its forms, themes and style, both reworking Tuscan traditions and claiming space for the *volgare* in genres that had once been the sole domain of Latin (see Gilson 2009: 134-147). It is true that Ficino had a stake in the development of the vernacular, as Storey observes (2003: 606), but it would be limiting in the extreme to attribute it to his influence alone. Lorenzo, for one, had a compelling motive for expending his creative energies in this way, since the *volgare* had long been the preserve of the families who had formed the city's *Trecento* élite, who defended it as 'la Gloria più luminosa dell'antico Comune' and as a rallying-point for anti-Medici sentiment (Martelli 1992: 40). It was therefore essential to

¹⁶ Whilst Leon Battista Alberti had attempted such a revival with his 1441 vernacular poetry contest, the *Certame coronario*, he had met with little success (see Gorni 1972).

establish 'una lingua letteraria fiorentina che, depurata delle sue scorie municipali e nobilitata grazie agli apporti della più illustre tradizione classica e volgare, cessasse di essere [...] strumento culturale proprio dell'oligarchia cittadina, e contemporaneamente potesse quindi presentarsi come una lingua sovra-regionale' (Bausi 1997: xvi-xvii).

Simonetta became a flag-bearer for this brave new vernacular world, and a touchstone for the developments that were taking place. To realise just how far this is so, one need only compare her to Albiera degli Albizzi, whose fiancé, Sigismondo della Stufa, put together an anthology of forty components written in her honour in the wake of her death in 1473 (see Patetta 1917-1918). Of these forty, thirty-eight were composed in Latin and two in Greek. Bernardo Pulci's sonnet, 'Furato hai, Morte dispietata e rea', is not recorded amongst their number, and if other texts in the *volgare* once existed, no trace of them remains. By the time of Simonetta's death in 1476, a sea change had taken place. Of the twenty-four poems that mourn her, the *Stanze* included, there is now an even split between Latin and vernacular verse. What Simonetta represents, then, is the (re)discovery of a Tuscan vernacular voice for funerary verse, a genre that had previously been dominated by the ancient languages. She died at just the right moment to become the vehicle for this vernacular incursion into Latin territory, in part explaining her poetic appeal.

This connection between the 'Simonetta poems' and the increasing status of the vernacular is given material form by the first section of MS Arezzo 181 (BCA), 'un ricco zibaldone quattrocentesco' (Carrai 1985: 85), which Curti suggests was transcribed in Rome no later than 1478 (1998: 187). The work is notable for the antiquarian tastes of its compilers, who used it to note down Latin inscriptions, abbreviations and numerals. What quickly becomes apparent is its 'netta predilezione per il genere funerario' (1998: 188). Whereas one might

have expected the manuscript to focus exclusively on texts in Latin, particularly given the commissioner/transcriber's evident fascination with the ancient world, this is not in fact the case. Even if classical, Neo-Latin and vernacular poems alike are accorded Latin titles, with texts in the ancient language far outnumbering those in the *volgare*, Luigi Pulci's 'Simonetta sonnet' (21r), the poem that Baccio Ugolini would later adapt for the same purpose (41r), Poliziano's 'Dum pulchra effertur nigro Symonetta pheretro' (28r), and Naldo Naldi's 'Mortua candidior cum sis quam viva fuisses' (28r), another 'Simonetta epigram', can all be found amongst its pages, documented without any apparent discrimination. This demonstrates that, even beyond Florence, the vernacular 'Simonetta poems' were at the forefront of the increasing acceptance of the *volgare* as a language of literature that could rival its ancient cousins, and which was capable of achieving the solemnity necessary for funerary verse.

Another interesting feature of MS Arezzo 181 is its inclusion of Petrarch's 'Lassato ha morte senza sol il mondo', under the title 'In mortem Laurae' and with nothing to distinguish it from the later occasional vernacular poetry exemplified by the 'Simonetta poems' (15v). This gives us a sense of the extent to which the Aretine poet's works lamenting the death of Laura were seen as the ideal model for Renaissance funereal texts in the *volgare*, and as their direct precedent. Despite the tendency to read Simonetta as the embodiment of Ficinian thought, the poems are linked far more by shared Petrarchan themes and language than by Platonic imagery (Barricalla 2007: 9). Of the twelve vernacular works written around the time of her death, nine of these are sonnets, drawing on the verse form most associated with Petrarch's love poetry. Even the poems that eschew this familiar genre abound with Petrarchan imagery, from Bernardo Pulci's lauding of Simonetta's 'treccie crespe e bionde' (139), via Timideo's laments for 'il lume del suo viso' (262), to Poliziano's description of her 'fronte umilmente superba' (I.43.4). Dante's influence can also be

perceived, most notably in the decision of Bernardo Pulci and Timideo to use *terza rima*, and in the parallels that can be drawn between Simonetta and Beatrice. Combined with the mythological imagery employed by Poliziano, Bernardo, Lorenzo and Baccio Ugolini, what we have here is a Simonetta used not as the figurehead of a ‘Platonic Academy’ but as the means by which a ‘new’ Florentine vernacular could be brought to life. More than this, as Chapter Two has demonstrated, the fact that the beautiful and ‘adored’ Simonetta died at such a young age made her the perfect ‘Laura’-figure for 1470s Florence, a city whose most famous poets spent much of their creative lives mourning their lost beloveds. She therefore allowed poets such as Poliziano and Bernardo Pulci to create a suitably composite ideal of poetic womanhood that chimed perfectly with the cultural preoccupations of late-fifteenth century Florence.

The idea that Simonetta should be read as evidence for a concerted effort on the part of Lorenzo and his fellow poets to breathe new life into the Tuscan vernacular is further validated by the awareness that Poliziano wrote the majority of his poetry in the *volgare* during the same decade (Bausi 1997: v). It is also worth bearing in mind that, beyond Lorenzo’s well-known predilection for vernacular verse and his shunning of Latin, Benivieni, the Pulci brothers and Baccio Ugolini all specialised in the *volgare*, and were influential in their day. As I shall explore in greater depth in Chapter Four (147-151), moreover, whilst there is no one manuscript or printed book that contains all of the ‘Simonetta poems’, the poets were no strangers to collaborative projects, with Lorenzo, Benivieni, Bernardo Pulci and possibly Poliziano coming together in 1481-1482 to devise and publish the collection of pastoral verse known as the *Bucoliche elegantissime composte*. In the words of Adrian Armstrong, ‘a body of related works [here] produces a developing enrichment of

poetic language, as poets collectively explore key metaphors and test the limits of established forms' (2012: 72-73).

In addition, this reading of Simonetta is upheld by two recent reassessments of Luigi Pulci's life. Critics such as Orvieto have long argued that the 1470s saw Pulci increasingly estranged from Lorenzo and marginalised from Florence's newly Platonic cultural 'scene', a process that came to a head with his quarrel with Ficino in 1476, 'l'anno della definitiva defenestrazione del Pulci', leading him to abandon the city for good (1978: 240). Alessandro Polcri's 2010 *Luigi Pulci e la Chimera* does much to call this interpretation of the poet's life into doubt. Polcri points out that there is no evidence for a decisive break with Lorenzo, that Luigi's poetry remained extremely popular, and that his absences from Florence date back to the 1460s, necessitated by his economic woes and by Medici diplomatic missions. Even his entry into the service of Roberto Sanseverino is explained by Lorenzo's courting of the *condottiere*, Pulci's need for a stable income, and his usefulness as a 'double agent', esteemed and trusted by both parties. This is not to say that Pulci's relationship with Lorenzo did not grow less close and that he did not spend more time away from Florence and by the side of Sanseverino, but the major motivating factor was financial security rather than cultural isolation (2010: 10-50). As Polcri concludes, 'non solo [...] non fu cacciato da Firenze, né ebbe con Lorenzo problemi più seri di quanto per esempio ebbe lo stesso Ficino, ma [...] fu l'autore di uno dei *bestsellers* del secolo ed ebbe un suo importante incarico diplomatico che continuò a tenere per molti anni fino alla morte' (2010: 50-51). Decaria, too, paints a picture of a poet who, far from divorcing himself from the poetic concerns of the day, was the author of a substantial body of occasional verse, and whose 'Simonetta sonnet' in particular demonstrates that he was 'molto ben integrato nel contesto della poesia fiorentina del Quattrocento' (2009: 149-151). Taking these reinterpretations of Pulci's poetry and biography

into account, and bearing in mind Simonetta's status as an instrument for the revival of the Florentine *volgare*, claimed as such by the most innovative and important vernacular poets of a city with far wider cultural interests than Ficinian Platonism, Luigi's place amongst their number seems entirely fitting. Rather than having been pushed out of Florence in 1476, his 'Simonetta poem' of the same year therefore reveals him to have been an integral part of Lorenzo's 'vernacular project'.

Simonetta, then, far from proving the existence of a 'Platonic Academy', demonstrates that fifteenth-century Florence was a culturally diverse city, in which Ficinian philosophy was only one point of pride and discussion. She provides evidence of a cultural élite who invested in reworking and reviving the vernacular for its own merits, rather than simply utilising it as a means to put Platonic theory into practice. All this makes her far more redolent of the *Accademia letteraria* or *Accademia Medicorum* referred to by early sixteenth-century sources describing Lorenzo's cultural patronage, an informal grouping of poets, philosophers, scholars, mathematicians and artists who gravitated around the *de facto* ruler (Hankins 2004: 370- 373).

Cultural Capital and the Search for a Patron

It would be wrong, however, to assume that the poetic elevation of Simonetta was simply a high-minded collective effort to expand the boundaries of knowledge and glorify Florence. In a city that viewed itself as a new Athens or Rome, set great store by its cultural achievements, and was unofficially controlled by a man who had deeply invested in them, the ability to contribute to the city's intellectual life was a key part of what it took to become an active, prosperous citizen. Brian Maxson has recently shown how the acquisition of cultural capital in Laurentian Florence allowed low-born humanists to take on prominent diplomatic roles,

thanks in part to the Medicis' manipulation of Florentine offices (2014: 113-114). Those capable of writing (vernacular) verse were equally aware that they were 'competitors in a field where to operate efficiently as a poet, to possess what Bourdieu calls the *habitus* of a poet, is a passport to material gains and favour' (Taylor 2007: 7-8). Although, for the sake of brevity, I have referred throughout this thesis to the 'Simonetta poets', they were first and foremost scholars, diplomats, secretaries and officials of various stripes, whose poetic talents were instrumental in creating and shaping their careers. Simonetta therefore became a medium through which they could display and market their 'wares'. More than this, she was a Medici favourite, giving the poets a pretext to address the brothers directly and thereby making her particularly valuable currency for winning their backing; of vital importance given that Lorenzo regulated access to positions of power, wealth and authority. Furthermore, since Lorenzo had chosen to write about her, and to pursue his aim of modernising and promoting the Florentine *volgare* in doing so, vernacular poets had a powerful motive to do the same.¹⁷ It may also be worth bearing in mind that, according to Poliziano's *Pactianae Coniurationis Commentarium* ('Commentary on the Pazzi Conspiracy'), Giuliano not only enjoyed reading love poetry but wrote Tuscan verse himself (1958: 64). From this perspective, Simonetta becomes a poetic pawn, the 'cult object' of a homosocial exchange that had everything to do with masculine self-representation, and very little to do with the 'real' Simonetta (see Bryce 2009: 138-139, 147 on Ginevra de' Benci).

The poets were certainly in need of 'material gains and favour' in the period in which their works on Simonetta were written. The financial troubles of Luigi and Bernardo Pulci, pursued by the creditors of their brother Luca, and then obliged to support his widow and children

¹⁷ We cannot be certain as to the order in which the funerary verse about Simonetta was written yet, as we shall see, intertextual references strongly suggest that some of the poets at least were paying homage to Lorenzo's 'Simonetta sonnets'.

when he died in 1470, are well-known. This is thanks in large part to Luigi's despairing letters to Lorenzo, which beg him to intervene on his behalf, and 'non sofferire, nel colmo delle tue felicità, che i tuoi miserabili amici et servidori sieno come cani ributtati o stratiati' (1886: 37-38, Letter IV, *s.d.*). Bernardo's predilection for writing funerary verse for the Medici and their associates, from Giovanni and Cosimo de' Medici, to Albiera degli Albizzi and Simonetta, is also suggestive of the Pulcis' reliance on patronage.

The precarious situation in which the other poets found themselves in the 1470s has been less noted. With the benefit of hindsight, for example, it is easy to forget that Poliziano arrived in Florence in 1469 as a poverty-stricken 'orphan' of fifteen, his father having been murdered four years earlier. His earliest recorded verse laments the "livida cenciosa povertà" in which he found himself, and which prevented him from focusing on his studies (Del Lungo 1897: 94-95). Girolamo Benivieni was even more vulnerable. Sickly throughout his life, he became seriously ill in 1472 and his health had barely improved by the end of the decade, leaving him entirely dependent on his father, who complained of the "gran spesa" required to keep him alive (Re 1906: 64). It is no wonder that he should have chosen to add his voice to the chorus of lamentations for Simonetta's death, or that he was later to choose a place of prominence for his 'Simonetta sonnets' in his Laurentian *canzoniere*, *Canzoni e sonetti di Girolamo Benivieni fiorentino* (Leporatti 2008: 218-219).

The 1470s also saw Baccio Ugolini and Francesco Nursio Timideo in dire financial straits. The former, not unlike the Pulci brothers, belonged to a noble but penurious family. As he complained to Lorenzo in a letter dated 18 November 1473, 'lo stato mio et di tutta la casa mia [...] è miserabile'" (ASFi, MAP, XXIX, no. 1024). Patronage letters from as early as 1473 request favours for himself and various family members. In appealing to Lorenzo, of

chief concern is the granting of the Badia of Coltibuono to his brother, Donato (Curti 1995: 17-18), on which he declares that his livelihood and that of his family depends (ASFi, MAP, XXIX, no. 1024). What little we know of Timideo's early life is marked by similar economic woes. In a letter to Felice Feliciano, recorded among the latter's *Letters and Sonnets* in the British Library's MS Harley 5271, he laments the 'bataglie' that he faces in Verona, 'tormentato e da iniqui homini infiamato, da povertà depressa e da infirmità corporale afflicto et atterrato, da odio occulto insidiato e da molte adversità straciato' (17r-v). These complaints must date to the period before 1472, because by January of that year we find him in Ravenna, in exile from his native city, recovering from a serious illness, mourning his father, and further weighed down by poverty (Giuliani 1881: viii). He was, in other words, desperately in need of a patron.

The fact that most of the poets were, sooner or later, employed either directly by the Medici or by the Florentine state suggests the extent to which cultural capital was used in the city as a means of securing one's livelihood. Poliziano, for example, was lifted from poverty after he won Lorenzo's attention with his translation of the second book of Homer's *Iliad*, the dedication to which contains an appeal for help to the young Medici, reminding him that "“Sta a Voi, che potete, aiutare il poeta: vorrei aver Voi, e non curarmi d'altre muse e d'altri dei; Voi potete farmi tale da non vergognarmi degli antichi”" (Del Lungo 1897: 119). His petition worked, and saw him invited to live in Palazzo Medici in 1473, becoming Lorenzo's personal secretary in 1474 and tutor to his son, Piero, by the end of 1475. It is no wonder, nor mere hyperbole, that Poliziano should describe Lorenzo in the *Stanze* as 'o causa, o fin di tutte le mie voglie' (I.4.7). The composition of the *Stanze* and the creation of the poetic Simonetta, moreover, coincided with his being granted an independent source of income, ordained and appointed as prior of the church of San Paolo on Lorenzo's orders (see Poliziano's letter to

Lorenzo of 19 October 1477, 1976a: 55). Until this point he never truly considered himself as having escaped his economic woes (Orvieto 1973: 308). Simonetta was thus, in all likelihood, partly responsible for his financial security.

The fortunes of Bernardo Pulci were also on the rise in the 1470s, with Flamini going so far as to define 1476 as the watershed after which, ‘dato un modesto ma stabile assetto a’ suoi bene, egli può tenere d’ora innanzi più quieto e riposato vivere’ (1888: 233). His appointment in 1484 as the Provveditore degli Ufficiali of the Florentine and Pisan *Studios* may reflect the renown that he surely won from the print publication of his elegy and sonnet on Simonetta in the *Bucoliche elegantissime composte*. Timideo also benefited from his elegy on Simonetta, since it was accepted into the Medici library, a significant achievement for any author (Piccolomini 1875: 90; Jardine 1997: 212-213). Much later, his skills as a poet were presumably one of the reasons that Caterina Cornaro employed him as her secretary (Giuliani 1881: 212-213). This demonstrates once again how, in allowing poets to build up their cultural prestige, Simonetta led at least indirectly to their finding paid work.

Baccio Ugolini was another success story. The Badia of Coltibuono was indeed granted to Donato, whilst in the year following Simonetta’s death Baccio himself was awarded a substantial ecclesiastical benefice, namely the parish of S. Vincenzo di Valdambra and then, latterly, the priorate of S. Lorenzo a Campi. Finally, in 1489 he was made a canon of S. Maria del Fiore. His extensive diplomatic career is another indication of his skill at exploiting his highly-regarded musical and poetic abilities, making himself at once a trusted servant and pleasurable companion of the Medici, the Gonzaga, the Sforza, the Riario and the Aragonesi (Curti 1995: 10-15). We know, for example, that Baccio was valued in Mantua as early as 1459 for his copying of manuscripts and for his gift with the lyre (1995: 67-68, 148). Baccio’s

literary skills, along with his decision to ally himself more closely with the Medici in the wake of the Pazzi Conspiracy, could not help but stand him in good stead in Lorenzo's Florence, and led swiftly to his appointment as Florentine ambassador to Basel and then to the king of France (1995: 28). Composing a sonnet on Simonetta was part and parcel of this sustained cultural and political campaign.

More than this, Simonetta demonstrates how, in the hands of a quadruple/quintuple agent such as Baccio, one sonnet could be made to earn cultural capital twice over. The poem, recorded anonymously as 'Simonetta moriente flebile carmen in mortem' in BRF MS Riccardiano 2823 (185v), is not, it turns out, an original composition. Rather, it is a minimal reworking of a poem written to mark the death in 1474 of the teenage Alessandro Cinuzzi, a Sienese page in the service of Girolamo Riario, lord of Imola and nephew of Pope Sixtus IV. It was even published as such in *Alexandri Pueri Senensis multorum nostri temporis Poetarum Epigrammata foeliciter incipiunt*, a printed anthology of the verse written about Cinuzzi released circa 1474-77 (see Patetta 1899: 152-156 and Curti 1998: 177-178). Despite the fact that the earlier version of the text was composed for an adolescent boy and the second ostensibly for a married woman, there is very little to distinguish them, beyond a few necessary modifications in gender, as is clear when the poems are placed alongside each other:

- i) Quanto poté natura, studio et arte
di gratia, di belleze et di costumi
concedere ad un sol(o), Morte or consumi
e invola al mondo la miglior sua parte?

Quante lachryme meste ad terra sparte
vedren, chiusi i celesti e chiari lumi;
quanti poi de Elicone derivar fiumi,
quante per me stracharsi inchiostri e carte?

O Superi invidiosi, o crudel Parca,

chi t'ha permessa potestà sì in terra
che ardischa anchor nelli Angeli seuire?

O non nascer costui che Styge or varcha,
o per gratia del cielo, poi che nato era,
dovea per certo non poter morire.

(transcribed by Curti 1998: 198)

- ii) Quanto studio poté natura et arte
di gratia, di bellezza et di costumi
in uno subiecto porre, Morte or consumi
e involi al mondo la miglor [*sic*] sua parte?

Quante lagrime, lasso, a terra sparte
vedren, chiusi i celesti et chiari lumi;
quanti poi d'Elicone derivar fiumi,
quante penne stracharsi inchiostri et carte?

O Superi invidiosi, o crudel Parcha,
chi t'ha promessa potestà sì intera
ch'ardiscar anchor nelli Angeli seuire?

O non nascer costei che Stige hor varcha,
o per gratia del cielo, poi che ta[l] nata era,
dovea per certo non poter morire.

(BRF MS Riccardiano 2823, 185v)

Celebrating a specific individual is clearly not a priority here; what matters is praising the dead in a suitably elevated manner, and to be seen to do so by patron and peers. Regardless of the contents, this suggests, such verse had a material value for author and recipients. It is intriguing, furthermore, that a poem written for a teenage boy will, with minor alterations, do just as well for a 'mature' woman, with both Alessandro and Simonetta praised for their grace, beauty and manners (2), and described as having bright and heavenly eyes (6). In a culture that considered men under thirty and all women as 'imperfect "idiots"' (Trexler 1980: 11), neither were likely to be commended for much more than their physical attractiveness and the

adoration that they inspired. Simonetta is of little significance as an individual here, but as currency in the economy of cultural capital she is vital.

This impression is reinforced by Francesco Nursio Timideo's elegy. Two manuscript copies of the work survive, namely BnF MS Ital. 1543 (199r- 207r) and BNCF MS II II 75 (192v- 202r). Since the latter is a near-identical copy of the former (Richardson 2009: 135-136), it makes sense that the same title is conferred on each: 'Francisci Nursii Timidei Veronensis Regii Secretarii Carmen austerum in funere Symonette Vespucciae Florentinae: Ad illuxtrissimum Alphonsum Calabrie Ducem'. In other words, the work is addressed to Alfonso d'Aragona, Duke of Calabria and heir to the Neapolitan throne, whose 'connection' with Simonetta is alluded to by Luigi Pulci, Tommaso Sardi, and possibly in two sonnets by Lorenzo (Bryce 2002: 13-14). Given that BnF MS Ital. 1543 is a miscellany of mainly Milanese verse compiled *circa* 1495-6 with the aim of glorifying Ludovico Sforza and the poetry produced by his court (Castagnola 1988: 102), it makes sense that a poem dedicated to Alfonso should be included. Although widowed in 1484, he had after all been the husband of Ludovico's sister, Ippolita, who is afforded several mentions in the course of the manuscript (1988: 118-134).

Yet Alfonso was not the elegy's only recipient, since beyond BnF MS Ital. 1543 and BNCF MS II II 75 we have another record of its existence, in the 1495 inventory of the Medici library (Piccolomini 1875: 90). Listed as 'Deploratio mortis Simonette, facta da fra Timideo da Verona, in menbranis- Vulgare', it is reasonable to assume that we are dealing with a high-quality vellum presentation copy of the poem, commissioned especially for the Medici (Bryce 2002: 19). Made to order, often lavishly decorated and designed to convey a 'special appreciation' for the recipient, such manuscripts could be powerful tools in securing the

favour of a patron (Richardson 2009: 2). Misjudge the gift and the occasion, and the author could be left with nothing but a hefty bill, as we shall see in the case of Tommaso Sardi. It does not seem credible that Timideo would have taken such a risk as to present the Medici with a work dedicated to Alfonso d'Aragona. It is far more probable that a second version of the poem, addressed to Giuliano, existed. There is nothing in the body of the elegy that refers directly to the Neapolitan prince, so adapting it for another patron must have been a simple operation. For Timideo, then, Simonetta was a useful means of boosting his 'cultural credit' with both the Medici and the Aragonesi. Commemorating a woman he may never even have met was a secondary concern.

'Com'hai tu, crudel Morte, un sì bel viso', Luigi Pulci's 'Simonetta sonnet', demonstrates how it was possible for poets simultaneously to increase both their own cultural stock and that of their city. As we have already seen, the poem was written during the period that has traditionally been interpreted as one of increasing estrangement between Lorenzo and Luigi. If this were the case, the fact that it was addressed to Alfonso d'Aragona could be construed as an attempt to win the favour of a new patron, or even as a snub to the Medici. On the other hand, if we accept Pulci's theory that Pulci remained loyal to Medici interests throughout the latter part of his life (2010: 27-28) this casts the poem in a different light. It is important to bear in mind that Luigi knew Alfonso personally, having accompanied him on a visit to Pisa and the Tuscan *contado* during the latter's stay in the region, 'in veste di vero e proprio diplomatico' (Carrai 1985: 56). As Pulci jokingly relates to Lorenzo in a letter dated 30 May 1468, 'venerdì a Cascina lo illustrissimo Duca di Calabria e 'l Magnifico Luigi de' Pulci tutto di di te ragionorno, et dissesi del male pure assai' (1886: 67, Letter XIII). The next day Luigi reports that 'Domenica sera alberghiamo insieme, il Duca e io', and advises Lorenzo to let him know if he wishes him to ask anything of Alfonso on his behalf (1886: 70, Letter XIV).

Several months later, on 12 August, he laments that ‘dopo la partita del Duca qui non si trae più fiorini’ (1886: 71, Letter XV), suggesting that he had been in contact with him over a prolonged period of time. February-April 1471, moreover, found him in Naples, again on Lorenzo’s business. ‘Lo illustrissimo Duca assai affectionatamente m’ à domandato di [Guglielmo nostro], et habbiamo di lui et di te assai parlato et cose tutte magnifiche’, he relates (1886: 90, Letter XX, 8 March 1471). He could even narrate on 27 March of how ‘lo illustrissimo Duca assai questa mattina, in camera sua soli, mi ragionò di te; pure con l’affectione usata et con gran segni d’amarti et stimarti assai’ (1886: 98-99, Letter XXII). Not only this, but Luigi was in contact with Alfonso’s wife, Ippolita, whom he very likely met as early as December 1467 (1886: 64, Letter XII, 14 December 1467), and to whom he dedicated his *Novella del picchio senese*, probably written during his stay in Naples (Carrai 1985: 56).

Taking all of this into account, one could legitimately read his dedication of ‘Com’hai tu, crudel Morte, un sì bel viso’ to Alfonso as of a piece with the *Raccolta Aragonesa*, the anthology of mainly Tuscan verse that Lorenzo sent to Alfonso’s younger brother, Federico, in 1476-1477. If, as I shall argue in Chapter Four (142-146), the *Raccolta* was intended to vaunt Florentine cultural achievements at a time when relations with the southern kingdom were in decline, with Lorenzo’s ‘Simonetta sonnets’ playing a starring role, receiving a work from one of Florence’s most renowned poets may have been calculated to achieve the same effect. At the very least, it could have been interpreted as a gesture of goodwill and solidarity from a Medici diplomat, and thus indirectly from Lorenzo himself. As we have seen, Lorenzo’s ‘Sonetto fatto al duca di Calavria in nome di una donna’ (LVIII) and his ‘Sonetto fatto per il duca di Calavria quando la S. andò al bagno’ (LX) may be evidence that he was aware of Alfonso’s ‘attachment’ to Simonetta, and even encouraged it. If Simonetta was used by Lorenzo in life and in art to manage relations with Naples, as Bryce (2002) has also argued,

there is a clear case for interpreting Luigi's sonnet as having been written to please and be useful to his Medici patron, and perhaps to facilitate the poet's own relations with the Aragonesi at the same time. Although Luigi was a Vespucci family friend and appears to have known Simonetta, whose words he reports to Lorenzo in a letter of 8 December 1472 (1886: 122, Letter XXIX), there is little here to suggest that he aimed purely at honouring her memory.

It made sense to pay tribute to Simonetta's loveliness and goodness, whilst extolling the virtues of her Medici 'benefactors'. Whether or not Simonetta was Giuliano's lover in deed as well as in word, the Medici had gone out of their way to associate themselves with her, making her a useful pretext for addressing them directly in verse, expressing sympathy at one and the same time for their loss and for their cultural preoccupations. It is not surprising that several of the 'Simonetta poems' openly praise the Medici, most famously in the case of the *Stanze*, which addresses Lorenzo in the style of an ancient poet invoking the gods, depicting him as the 'ben nato Laur' on which all of Poliziano's hopes depend (I.4). Elsewhere, Poliziano professes his desire to sing of 'l'amor di Iulio e le armi' (I.7.8), transforming the younger son of a merchant and banker into the new Aeneas, and has Cupid and Venus discuss 'l'antica gloria e 'l celebrato onore/ [...] della Medica famiglia' (II.3.1-2). Bernardo Pulci's elegy continues this classicising celebration of the Medici, depicting Giuliano as the Apollo to Simonetta's Daphne (49-51). Benivieni takes a slightly different tack, portraying Giuliano as man of virtue who will meet his beloved in the next life ('Se morta vive ancor colei che in vita', 9-11), and who prays fervently for this heavenly reunion ('Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è 'l chiaro sole', 12-14). Rather than painting a picture of a city in thrall to beauty, the 'Simonetta poems' give us a glimpse into the intensely competitive nature of (cultural) patronage in Florence, with poets flocking to lavish the most extravagant praise on the powerful. This was

not just brazen hyperbole. In a society that offered limited opportunities for advancement, to address the patron who could make or break one's fortunes as semi-divine was not only formally required but reflected the power that he or she held over such petitioners (Martines 2001: 9).

A great deal of praise is also bestowed on Simonetta. As Lauro Martines argues, the mistresses of rulers might 'attract love poems from client-courtiers around the prince, this being a roundabout way of wooing the prince himself', with Ludovico's Sforza's Cecilia Gallerani being a prime example (2001: 103). The 'Simonetta poems' should be considered in the light of this 'triangulation' of desire, whether or not her 'relationship' with Giuliano was ever consummated. This is demonstrated by Francesco Nursio Timideo's elegy, in which the poet goes so far as to profess his love for Simonetta, railing against Amor, who continues to burn him even though the object of his affections is in heaven (241-243), and lamenting the many oaks destroyed by his sighs, the grass torn up by his cries, and the fountains dried up by his sobs (88-90). This is despite the fact that Timideo may very well never have met her, since we have no clear evidence for his whereabouts between January 1472, when he wrote a letter to a friend from Ravenna, and 1489, when Caterina Cornaro employed him as her secretary (Giuliani 1881: viii-ix). Certainly, there is nothing in his description of Simonetta that would have required him to have had any contact with her, so formulaic are his descriptions of 'lo candido suo collo che non have/ paro', her 'angelici costumi', and her 'sguardi honesti' (274-287).

It is worth bearing in mind, moreover, that almost all of the (non-Medici authored) 'Simonetta poems' written in the 1470s are either addressed directly to Giuliano or Alfonso d'Aragona, or are concerned with applauding Medici achievements. Even though the poets

may dwell on Simonetta's 'bellezze tenere' (*Stanze*, I.53.7), from 'l'angelica forma del bel viso' ('Venite, sacre e gloriose dive', 140) to 'gli occhi stellati et l'amorose ciglia' ('Motor del cielo et Re degli emisperi', 256), none of their works are in any sense portraits of her, nor are they disinterested commemorations of her life. Indeed, one would be hard pushed to form an image of Simonetta in one's head, so generic and fragmented are the descriptions of her. The majority of the attributes accorded to her are in essence no different from those used to depict hundreds of other women in medieval and Renaissance love poetry, who remain 'curiously elusive, vaporising upon close inspection into "scattered" fragments [...] whose serial citation and stereotypical character work to deny corporeal integrity to the human figure described' (Cox 2005: 583-584). Applauding Simonetta for her virtue and beauty, in accordance with the standard formulae for conveying feminine worth, the poems are designed to reflect well on those who 'loved' her, and to win their favour by extolling her charms.

More than this, in the context of a wider Italian culture in which women were 'conceived of as *defining* the court and structurally necessary to it', and in which 'gallant deference to women served as an attractively mitigated expression of courtiers' real position of subservience to their princes' (Cox 2008: 44), the communal election of Simonetta as muse strongly suggests that Simonetta, along with women such as Lucrezia Donati, was being used to aid Lorenzo's proto-courtly ambitions. Lorenzo and his fellow poets were, in effect, emulating the cultural trappings of the courts as far as it was possible to do so in an environment that permitted the poetic lauding of women but saw other signs of female power as dangerously autocratic. Much as he was stealthily 'drawing on and feeding citizens' expectations as to how an oligarchic leader should behave' (Kent 2013b: 237), Lorenzo and the other 'Simonetta poets' were appropriating Florentine literary traditions and funerary customs to further Medicean agendas.

Some of the poets went even further in their efforts to pay homage to Lorenzo and his family. Whilst the poets are evidently drawing on the accepted Petrarchan lexicon for describing beautiful (and dead) young women, the insistence in a number of the poems that Simonetta is either a star shining down from heaven or the sun that has set is the fruit not merely of poetic invention but of flattering imitation. Whilst some of the similarities may be coincidental, the fact that Bernardo Pulci's elegy concludes with the image of Simonetta as a 'benigna stella hor su nel ciel gradita' (191) is surely not unrelated to Lorenzo's first 'Simonetta sonnet', which invokes her as a 'chiara stella' so bright as to be able to compete with Apollo (1-4). When one takes into account Naldo Naldi's epigram 'Ad Laurentium Medicen carmen de laudibus Simonettae morientis scribentem' ('To Lorenzo de' Medici, writing a song of praise on the dying Simonetta'), which quotes directly from Lorenzo's sonnet and thus proves that doing so was an accepted method of paying tribute to his literary skills, it seems possible that Luigi Pulci's decision to refer to Simonetta as a star (12) was prompted by the same motive. Likewise, Benivieni's description of her as 'l chiaro sole' ('Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è'l chiaro sole', 1), corresponding to Lorenzo's second 'Simonetta sonnet', in which she becomes the sun to the 'Clyzia' of those she has left behind, may have been calculated to produce a comparable effect.

As well as displaying due deference to Lorenzo's literary skills, there is some epistolary evidence to suggest that some of the poets sought to create a sense of cultural brotherhood with Lorenzo. Whilst the majority of their surviving correspondence with the Medici takes the form of semi-official reports on matters of business and state (with nary a reference to the verse on Simonetta), the letters of Luigi and Baccio provide a somewhat different perspective. A number of Luigi's, for instance, mention plans to write poetry or his inability to do so (Pulci 1886, Letters I, II, III, IV, VIII, XX, XXIII, XXXVII), whilst VIII, XI, XXVIII, XXXIV and

XXXV make it clear that they, or other no longer extant letters, contained verse. VI and XXIV have even come down to us in their original form, poetry intact. References in Pulci's letters to wishing to 'fare non so che sonetti' with Lorenzo (VIII, 53) are mirrored by Baccio Ugolini's reminders of 'e' comuni nostri studii' (ASFi, MAP, XXIX, no. 974, 5 November 1473) and the 'Muse' (ASFi, MAP, XXIX, no. 1024, 18 November 1473) that bind them together. Whilst on 'holiday' in Coltibuono, Baccio even asks Lorenzo to send him a 'viola [...] acciò che passi con meno durezza il tempo che ho a stare senza voi' (ASFi, MAP, XXXIII, no. 534, 14 July 1476). The fact that the last of these examples was committed to paper in the very year that Simonetta died suggests the importance to Baccio at this time of stressing his claims to intellectual companionship with Lorenzo. Viewed from this perspective, the 'Simonetta poets' become 'a body whose members, whatever the inequalities and tensions between them, evince a "deep, horizontal comradeship" that transcends social, political, or aesthetic differences' (Armstrong 2012: 170).

Such manifestations of devotion, however genuine, should not blind us to the fact that, as Lorenzo's power increased, 'assertions of affection became more common; service and claims of servanthood surged; expressions of obligation [...] multiplied; expressions of faith, trust, loyalty, and trustworthiness began to abound' (McLean 2007: 106-107). Even the letters of Luigi Pulci, a companion of Lorenzo's youth, should be read in this light. Although his missives are the most informal of any of the poets discussed here, frequently adopting a familiar, joking manner, they are also 'an education in courtliness of the sort for dealing with powerful men and patrons', his language close to that of the love poetry of the era (Martines 2001: 13). In 1466, for example, we find him exhorting Lorenzo to love him 'arditamente, che ancora ne sarai contento, et confesserai ch'io sia fedele' (1886: 34, Letter III, *s.d.*). The next year he insists that 'io ti scrivo, perché tu non mi dimentichi, Lauro mio, però ch'io desidero

questo sopra tutte le cose, et così ti priego tu facci; et quando mi dimenticherai, io mi dimenticherò ancora io stesso' (1886: 65, Letter XII, 14 December 1467). Combined with his pleas for assistance and preferment, from his appeal to be included 'nel numero de' tuoi eletti per Roma' (1886: 29, Letter II, 1 February 1466 *s.c.*), to his entreaties that Lorenzo intervene with Luca's creditors 'per la nostra lunga e perfecta amicitia' (1886: 38, Letter IV, *s.d.*) these are the words of a man who is entirely dependent on his patron. It is telling, too, that when truly afraid of losing his favour in February 1474, Luigi resorts to the traditional language of patronage, begging Lorenzo not to rush to judge him but to consider instead the 'lunga servitù et fede' of 'uno tuo servitor'. He is, moreover, clearly desperate, writing 'colla mano che trema per la febre', and almost 'fuori del senno; perché non dormo, non mangio et sono fuori di me' (1886: 140-142, Letter XXXVII, 15 February 1474 *s.c.*). The relationship of the 'Simonetta poets' to Lorenzo, it is apparent, was primarily that of client to patron, albeit one whose favour could be won by displays of literary skill and a sense of 'poetic brotherhood'.

The one painted image that contains a portrait of both Lorenzo and a 'Simonetta poet', Domenico Ghirlandaio's *The Confirmation of the Rule* (figure 9, circa 1483-1485), visually reinforces the gulf that separated them. One of the frescoes commissioned by the general manager of the Medici bank, Francesco Sassetti, for his chapel in the church of Santa Trinità in Florence, the foreground of the work is dominated by full-length representations of Lorenzo, Antonio Pucci (another loyal Medicean), Sassetti and his sons. Below them, one can just make out the top step of a staircase, up which process Poliziano, visible from the waist up, Lorenzo's three sons, and two other unidentified male figures (Borsook and Offerhaus 1981: 36-38). Even though Poliziano was chair of Latin and Greek literature at the Florentine *Studio* and a renowned scholar in his own right by the time that the frescoes were completed in 1485, there is no question here as to the relative importance in the social hierarchy of this

son of a murdered small-time merchant 'di mediocre stato' (Del Lungo 1897: 9). His significance in the scene, moreover, derives entirely from his role as tutor to Lorenzo's sons, rather than from his scholarly and literary achievements. In addition, his posture and position mirror that of the lowly monks kneeling before Pope Honorius III, with Lorenzo's gesture, perhaps of welcome, providing a secular equivalent to the blessing that the pontificate extends to his fellow clergymen. Gazing up at Lorenzo adoringly, cap literally in hand, this depiction of Poliziano echoes the devotion expressed by the 'Simonetta poets' in verse and letter, and the sense that they were defined chiefly by their relationship with the *de facto* ruler. Warburg's identification of the lowest figure on the stairs as Luigi Pulci (1999: 198) has been called into doubt (Carrai 1985: 189-199), but if he is correct *The Confirmation of the Rule* contains the likeness of not one, but two 'Simonetta poets', dominated by a Lorenzo who towers over them, both literally and metaphorically.

Read against the background of poet-patron relations, the 'Simonetta poems' do not provide evidence of a cult of beauty that had Simonetta at its heart, less still objective proof of her loveliness, virtue or 'unique status' in Florence. 'An essentially fictional construct enmeshed in the processes of masculine self-exploration and/or self-(re)presentation' (Bryce 2009: 147), Simonetta was a tool for impoverished poets intent on shaping successful careers in a city that set great store by intellectual accomplishment, and which was controlled by a man who had every reason to reinforce this trend. She demonstrates how employment and prestige was to be won in late-*Quattrocento* Florence, as its citizens struggled to attract Lorenzo's attention and favour, trading literary skill for professional advancement. The poetry of Lorenzo and the other 'Simonetta poets' was not, therefore, simply 'un mondo di irrealità, un'evasione, un rifugio fantastico' (Martines 1972: 169), but proof of the cultural effort expended by those who wanted to get ahead in Laurentian Florence.

The Relationship Between the ‘Simonetta poets’

The image that has emerged so far of the ‘Simonetta poets’ is of an informal grouping, united in part by a shared passion for vernacular poetry, but even more so by their mutual quest to transform cultural capital into financial gain. What is harder to judge is how the relationship between the poets affected the way in which Simonetta was portrayed. Were they motivated by rivalry, for example, competing for the limited resources on offer? Or did they feel a sense of loyalty, even poetic allegiance towards one other? It is difficult to be conclusive, given the scarcity of the evidence and the fact that their works were never united in a collection.

Nevertheless, the fragments that have survived are suggestive of a set of poets who, in their attempts to outdo each other but also to stand up for each other’s interests, prefigured the academics of the sixteenth century, tied together as much by competition as by shared poetic agendas.

We do know that most of the poets were in contact in some form or another, unsurprising in a ‘social community whose members were linked by bonds of commonly held assumptions’, and in which ‘fundamentally, the approach to knowledge making was collaborative’ (Celenza 2010b: 15). The link between Luigi and Bernardo, who lived together for part of the 1470s (Flamini 1888: 224), is self-evident. What is less well-known is that Luigi seems to have been in contact with Baccio, Benivieni and Poliziano, poets who are generally viewed as being ‘culturally opposed’ to him. In a letter to Lorenzo of 27 October 1473, for example, Baccio recommends himself ‘ad Vostra Magnificentia et al mio Luigi Pulci’ (ASFi, MAP, XXIX, no. 930). In return, on 20 September 1476 Luigi instructs Lorenzo, ‘Ricordati di me quando se’ col Baccio, che altrimenti non credo te ne ricordi’ (1886: 152, Letter XLII). Luigi expresses admiration for Poliziano in his *Giostra* (160. 1-8), looking

forward to the verse that the young scholar is about to write in honour of Giuliano's joust. Benivieni's sonnet L, 'Risposta ad uno sonetto per le rime, mandatogli da uno amico suo essendo in Mugello', addresses a 'Luigi' (9), perhaps Pulci (Leporatti 2008: 196). This is hardly the combative, controversial figure that scholarship has accustomed us to expect.

An examination of the connections between the other 'Simonetta poets' reveals a similar level of cooperation and exchange. Benivieni and Poliziano, along with Lorenzo and Pandolfo Collenuccio, were two of the protagonists in the famous *tenzone* on love and *Fortuna* (Percopo 1897), with Benivieni translating Poliziano's Latin rendition of Moschus's 'Amor fugitivus' into the *volgare* (Leporatti 2008: 203-206). Furthermore, a poem by Francesco Villani, which refers to 'il Polizian di virtù caldo,/ E 'l Benivieni, e 'l loro amico fido' (see Re 1906: 73), suggests that they were associated enough to be mentioned in the same breath. Lorenzo, Poliziano, Benivieni and Bernardo Pulci all contributed to the series of poems composed on the theme of violets, which were almost certainly written in dialogue (De Robertis 1988: 85-86). The connection between Poliziano and Baccio, his first 'Orfeo', is well-documented. Along with Benivieni and Lorenzo, moreover, they shared an interest in music, improvisation and singing (Curti 1995: 168; Pirrotta 1982: 23-24). Antonio Benivieni the Younger, in his *Vita di Girolamo Benivieni*, even goes so far as to describe Lorenzo and Benivieni as sometimes passing 'la sera' together 'a 'provisare' (ASFi, Codici Gianni 43, 10v-11r), although the veracity of this assertion is open to debate (see Roush 2006, particularly 6). It seems clear, then, that the 'Simonetta poets' read and/or heard, circulated and responded to each other's verse, and were influenced by what they saw.

The 'Simonetta poems' reinforce this impression. Beyond the fact that the poets elected her *en masse* as worthy of poetic attention, which in itself suggests a certain level of discussion

and collaboration, their works are characterised by a number of intertextual resemblances. Poliziano's *Simonetta*, for example, lights up 'd'un sì dolce e vago riso,/che i monti avre' fatto ir, restare il sole:/ ché ben parve s'apriSSI un paradiso' (I.50.2-4). Bernardo Pulci, similarly, remembers 'gli ochi donde uscia sì dolce riso/ che a meza nocte nel più freddo gelo/ potea far luce e in terra un paradiso' (142-144). Furthermore, whilst Bernardo states that 'del nostro pianto il cel si ride' (170), Luigi's sonnet includes the phrase, 'benché il nostro pianto in c[i]el fia riso' (5). This may be due in part to convention, but it is hard to imagine that they had not read each other's poems, and were not influenced by what they saw.

Such intertextual connections help to shed some light on Timideo's elegy. Whilst the poem itself and the record of its existence in the Medici library appear to be the only indication of a link between Timideo and Florence, it in fact contains a substantial quantity of stylistic and thematic parallels with Bernardo's 'Venite, sacre e gloriose dive'; so many, in fact, as to suggest that they were the result of emulation as much as literary custom. It is not insignificant that both works are funereal elegies in *terza rima*, a form that only began to appear in the last quarter of the fifteenth century and was therefore still a novelty in 1476 (Williamson 1950: 554). The correspondence between the elegies, however, does not stop there. For Bernardo's 'eterni chiostrì' (179), there is Timideo's 'stellato chiostrò' (230); Bernardo's 'carcer fosco' (101) is Timideo's 'carcer tetra' (460); Bernardo bemoans the loss of *Simonetta's* 'leggiadre accoglienze' (21), Timideo her 'celeste accoglienze' (287). Bernardo's declaration that the 'temple' of the gods has fallen is mirrored by Timideo's assertion that 'ognun sa ch'ella fue alle Muse un tempio,/ in tanto honore et gloria e tanto preggio/ che chi lo fe' rovinar fu artifice empio' (379-381). Timideo's 'essendo sola a tuo [*sic*] giorni perfecta' (450) is very close to Bernardo's 'essendo unica stata a' tempi nostri' (181), and his description of heaven laughing at *Simonetta's* death whilst the Earth weeps (508-509)

is identical in sentiment to the words of Luigi and Bernardo. Even more revealing is Timideo's decision to include a 'deathbed scene', in which Simonetta, aware that 'l suo toscho in manna/ cangiava', tells her fellow mortals that 'siete voi d'ombra', and that she does not regret leaving her 'vivere aspro'. Those who see her body agree 'che sì in bellezza era cresciuta,/ che viva fu deforme e sempre mesta' (466-495). This is very similar to Bernardo's Simonetta, 'mosse come chi d'aspra e dura legge/ dopo alcun tempo per sententia è sciolto', and happy to leave the 'dispietato exitio' of life since 'vivere a me sempre dispiacque' (86-106). Bernardo too makes much of her posthumous beauty, stating that 'in sul pheretro posta' she was 'assai più bella' (164-165). For both, furthermore, Simonetta was a nymph, beloved by the Graces (2, 190 [Pulci]; 382-383, 422 [Timideo]). Given this wealth of intertextual resonances, it seems reasonable to speculate that Timideo, as the younger, less-established (and less talented) poet, saw a copy of Bernardo's elegy and attempted to emulate it, in the hope of achieving the same blend of the Petrarchan and the classical, and winning the favour of either the Medici or Alfonso d'Aragona by adopting the latest literary fashions. How he got hold of the poem is impossible to know, but we cannot rule out the chance that he either met or was in contact with Bernardo. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that he had formed some kind of relationship with Poliziano, since Timideo's avowal that Simonetta's beauty was such 'da poner freno alle procelle e venti' (279) echoes Poliziano's assertion that her glance could calm storms (I.43.8). There is also a noticeable resemblance between Timideo's insistence that her death was marked by tremors and a great 'romor di onde' from the Arno (463), and the cataclysm that accompanies Poliziano's 'prediction' of the tragedy (II. 34). In Timideo's case, therefore, the manner in which Simonetta was to be depicted was largely determined by his reading of other poets' works on her, if not by direct communication with them.

The idea that the ‘Simonetta poets’ were in regular, mutually beneficent contact is given further weight by epistolary proof that they sometimes united to advance each other’s interests. This is given particular weight if one assumes that Paolo Orvieto (1973) is correct and Poliziano is the ‘compare’, or comrade, mentioned with affection and concern on many occasions in the letters and verse of Lorenzo and his associates. For example, Luigi, Baccio and Bernardo all participated in ensuring that the ‘fratello del compare’ (Pulci 1886: 127, Letter XXXII, 12 August 1473), identified by Orvieto as Mariotto Ambrogini, was awarded the benefice of the church of Cintoia. We know this partly due to the ‘progress reports’ that Luigi and Baccio sent to Lorenzo on 12 August 1473 and 21 May 1474, respectively. Baccio, for example, states that ‘la causa di Cintoia se agita adesso con più caldo che fino a hora non s’è facto’, reassuring Lorenzo that ‘Philippo Martelli et Bernardo Pulci non ne lassano a fare cosa alchuna’ (ASFi, MAP, XXX, no. 407), demonstrating the younger Pulci brother’s involvement. Luigi, meanwhile, keeps Lorenzo informed as to a rival for the post (1886: XXXII, 127-128). These assertions are matter-of-fact in tone, with Baccio and Luigi seemingly intent merely on forwarding the latest developments to their employer. But both were also willing to plead with Lorenzo on Poliziano’s behalf, suggesting that a strong emotional bond existed between them. Baccio, for instance, possibly referring to Lucrezia Tornabuoni’s displeasure at Lorenzo’s favouring of Mariotto over her preferred candidate (Orvieto 1973: 306), comments on ‘il litigio del compare, il quale mi sarà tanto a cuore quanto fussi mio proprio sì perché molto amo esso compare sì et perché del vostro honore sono avidissimo’ (ASFi, MAP, XXIX, no. 1024, 18 November 1473). Luigi, for his part, is equally concerned in impressing upon Lorenzo that he should support Mariotto’s claim ‘per la fede del compare e le muse e le virtù del bistolfo [prete] nostro’ (Pulci 1886: 127-128, Letter XXXII, 12 August 1473). In return, Poliziano recommends Taddeo Ugolini, Baccio’s brother,

in the warmest terms for employment at the *Monte Comune*, one of Florence's most important financial institutions (Curti 1995: 18; Poliziano 1976a: 52-53, 17 October 1477). On the basis of this evidence it would appear that we are dealing with a tight-knit group of poets who fought each other's battles and held a genuine concern for each other's well-being.

It is, however, important to acknowledge the role that rivalry may have played in how Simonetta was depicted, with comradeship and competition existing side by side, as the poets banded together in a dangerous world but also struggled as individuals for the limited resources on offer. The resemblances in style and lexicon examined above, for example, make even more sense if one interprets imitation as at once the result of mutual approbation and of attempts to mirror and surpass the fruits of each other's labour, in an 'incessante competizione cittadina' that was contemporaneously 'un'appassionata e polifonica compartecipazione collettiva' (Orvieto 2009: 186).

One approach is to consider the 'Simonetta poems' in the light of the *tenzone*, at once 'un'opera a più voci' and an opportunity to display one's talent, in a battle of poetic skill between two or more poets on a given theme (Giunta 2002: 24-25). Although the 'Simonetta poems' do not belong to this tradition in the strictest sense, since they are not all in the same form, do not share the same rhyme scheme and belong to the genre of the *lirica in mortem*, they were born of the same culture, and of poets who, as we have seen, did take part in such collaborative efforts. The form necessitated an exchange of verse in manuscript, 'a fundamental quality [of which] was that it created and fostered a sense of close communication and solidarity among those with similar interests and tastes' (Richardson 2009: 1-2). From this perspective, Simonetta becomes a point of contact between often physically disparate poets, a means of keeping alive a sense of kinship and identity in spite of

the practical difficulties that this posed. In this way, to quote Bronfen, Simonetta comes to represent ‘the masculine artist and the community of the survivors’ (1992: xi). On the other hand, the building and maintaining of such ties did not preclude a competitive edge to proceedings. Indeed, the term *tenzone* implies contest, with poets striving to compose the best work on a given topic, and to impress both their fellow poets and potential patrons.

Bernardo Pulci is a case in point. First, there is the fact that of all the ‘Simonetta poets’, Bernardo’s merging of classical and vernacular tropes is closest to that of Poliziano’s *Stanze*, suggesting that Bernardo read the younger poet’s work and was highly influenced by what he saw. Second, his elegy on Simonetta contains a number of similarities to Poliziano’s epicedium for Albiera degli Albizzi of three years earlier, not least his depiction of a dying noblewoman who addresses those surrounding her deathbed with her last breath before succumbing to her ailments. It is entirely plausible that Bernardo, whilst collaborating with and admiring his colleague, was simultaneously attempting to exceed Poliziano’s dying beauty, whilst staking a claim to being as inventive a vernacular poet as his contemporary, introducing the Florentine *volgare* to lengthy, high-register funereal verse much as Poliziano had opened it up to the mini-epic. It would not be surprising, moreover, if they sometimes did not see eye-to-eye, Poliziano being notoriously quarrelsome. He certainly had a falling out with Michele Marullo, the author of a Latin distich on Simonetta, if the latter’s ‘Tu respondi, Angiolino, in pulcianese’ is anything to go by (Del Lungo 1897: 68-69). Competition was clearly as great a motivation as solidarity, but they were far from being mutually exclusive. As Armstrong puts it, ‘poetry [...] is a collaborative social activity, involving co-operation and/or competition’, with poets simultaneously ‘recognising the importance of predecessors or contemporaries’ and ‘[mounting] self-assertive challenges to them’ (2012: xiv-xv).

Another useful paradigm for understanding the joint role of rivalry and comradeship among the ‘Simonetta poets’ is that of the academies that proliferated in Italy in the sixteenth century. Like the members of these formal institutions, the ‘Simonetta poets’ can be viewed as banding together for security in a perilous world, at once working together to garner fame, success and cultural capital as a group, and attempting to stand out amongst their peers and thus attract the favour of a patron. There was no guild to advance their interests nor, as we have seen, could they rely on family connections and wealth for their advancement. They needed an alternative network to survive, and were one of the informal groupings of friends and colleagues whose exchanges of verse were one of the principal ways through which Florentine cultural life operated until at least as late as the mid-sixteenth century (Werner 2009: 65-66, 76). Simonetta not only provided a locus for the development of this ‘community’ of vernacular writers, but allowed her poets to gain access to ‘the idiom of noble love’, ‘the amatory voice of Italy’s urban elites’, and was therefore ‘a vehicle for socially ambitious writers’ (Martines 2001: 96-98). Depicting Simonetta in such terms allowed them to carve out a space for themselves in upper-class echelons to which they would otherwise not have belonged, as a ‘collective’ and as individuals. It is in this sense, rather than as members of a ‘Platonic Academy’, that the ‘Simonetta poets’ prefigured the later academies. Both of these models, then, suggest that the ‘Simonetta poems’ should be read as the product of a shared sense of identity and endeavour, but also of antagonism and intense competition.

Conclusion

The ‘Simonetta poems’ give us a glimpse into the complex, collaborative and rivalrous world that powered the literary and artistic breakthroughs of the Italian Renaissance. Simonetta’s poets were in part motivated by high-minded ideals and by a common sense of identity,

extending the range of the Florentine vernacular in terms of genre and style. It would, however, be anachronistic in the extreme to suggest that all they were concerned with was the simple celebration of beauty, still less the specific merits of Simonetta. The 'real' woman is entirely obliterated in the rush to create as much cultural capital as possible from the situation, and to appeal to the Medici in doing so. In part the product of artistic principle but far more of a competitive society that had little time for those who failed in such attempts, she is the perfect illustration of how culture was produced in Renaissance Florence.

Coda: Tommaso Sardi and the Pleasures and Pitfalls of Patronage

One such failure was Tommaso Sardi, whose attempts to make good on the years he spent composing his *De Anima Peregrina* are a case study in choosing the wrong work for the wrong patron at the wrong time, and of what happened to those who did not manage to master the 'intellectual and social *habitus* which [marked] belonging in a court or similar environment' (Taylor 2007: 22). His portrayal of Simonetta, representative of this wider malaise, is testament to the fact that she could be the breaking, as much as the making, of a poet. This is all the more striking when one considers Sardi's success in other fields. He had earned a degree (Boncompagni 1854: 196-197) and given two readings in theology at the Florentine *Studio*, or university, by the age of thirty, and had become a noted preacher in the Duomo and in his home church of Santa Maria Novella, a role from which he retired prior to the writing of his epic (Nardello 2002: 119-120). During his lifetime, moreover, he was three times elected prior of the adjacent convent, and was both its occasional treasurer and long-term librarian (2002: 119-120). When he died of a fever on 17 October 1517, 'alle sue esequie intervennero per rendergli onore tutti i dottori dell'Università fiorentina' (2002: 119-120). Yet Sardi never succeeded in being granted the money that would have allowed him to publish *De*

Anima Peregrina in print, despite the efforts that he dedicated to winning such funds. So what went wrong, and what light can Simonetta shed on it?

It should be stated that *De Anima Peregrina* was not a complete disaster. As we shall see, it was accepted in manuscript by several important patrons and survives in five handwritten copies. Beyond this, it was praised in the year of Sardi's death by Leandro Alberti in his *De viris illustribus ordinis praedicatorum libri sex in unum congesti*, was cited in Michele Poccianti's 1589 *Catalogus scriptorum florentinorum*, and is remembered by a number of seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors (Cerracchini 1738: 197-198; Fineschi 1782: 3, n. 1; Boncompagni 1854: 197-208). It is only in more recent centuries that Sardi's renown has diminished to such an extent, although it is evident that Sardi was not as gifted a poet as he was a preacher. *De Anima Peregrina* is overlong, abstruse and almost unreadable without the assistance of the self-commentary, as Sardi himself appears to have realised. Indeed, the closing words of the commentary give thanks to God “che io ho visto il fine di questo breve Comento acciocchè più non sia accusato di essere troppo oscuro in questo lungo testo” (cited in Fineschi 1782: 6-7). Sardi also had an unfortunate taste for inventing new words, Dante-style, a task for which he had little aptitude (Nardello 2002: 139). When all of this is taken into account, it is impressive that the epic gained even limited fame. That it did so is testament to Sardi's determination to see his work acknowledged and appreciated, even when fate appeared to be playing tricks on him.

Medicean that he was, he had originally planned to dedicate his epic to Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, but was foiled in this plan by the family's exile from the city a year after he began writing it. Nevertheless, in around 1509 with *De Anima Peregrina* complete, he had a presentation copy of the work (BNCF MS BR 46) made, replete with Strozzi and Medici

emblems, for Filippo Strozzi, presumably on the occasion of his marriage to Clarice di Piero de' Medici (Nardello 2002: 153-154). Sardi may not have received the dues that he felt he deserved, but the manuscript remained in the Strozzi family library until it became part of the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze's Fondo Magliabechiano, suggesting that the gift was not unappreciated.

Sardi's next manoeuvre, indicative of a man belatedly resolved to move with the times, was to dedicate a fresh copy of *De Anima Peregrina* (BNCF MS BR 17) in 1511 to the *Signoria Fiorentina* in the person of Piero Soderini, *gonfaloniere a vita* of Florence's republican regime. Sardi did everything that he could to increase the appeal of this Medicean work for its new audience. First, he had it presented 'in pubblico Consiglio' by Pietro Paolo d'Ascoli, *primo dottore* of the Florentine *Rota*, on no less a day than 25 March, the Florentine New Year (Nardello 2002: 121). Sardi is, he implies, making a fresh start. It is obvious, moreover, that the manuscript was designed to appeal to Florentine pride and piety and to flatter Soderini. Gone are the Medici insignia, to be replaced on the binding by metal renderings of the coats of arms of the Church and the Soderini family. The front and back covers are adorned, respectively, with 'portraits' of Petrarch and Dante, whilst the first of three full-page illuminations contains miniatures of St. John the Baptist, the Florentine lily and several other symbols of the city (figure 10). It would appear that Soderini accepted the manuscript, even if it is hard to imagine quite what he made of its pro-Medici overtones. But luck, yet again, was not with Sardi; Soderini was exiled on 2 September 1512, and the manuscript was left, forgotten, amongst the papers in his room (Bianconi 1910: xvi- xvii; Marchese 1855: 395, n. 2). Sardi's ambitions were foiled once more.

Sardi's next bid at winning patronage, with the return of the Medici and in the hope of fulfilling his ambition of seeing *De Anima Peregrina* in print, was to plan a new copy for Giovanni de' Medici (Bibl. Cors. MS 55 K 1; see figures 13-15). His hopes were high, as we can tell from his sonnet 'Che fai Fiorenza? Aspecto e mia [*sic*] figliuoli', in which he celebrates the return of the Medici and prays that now that the night has passed and "[...] el giorno viene/ ch'el ciel mi manda el sol col santo bando/ che mi ristorj di sì lunghe pene'" (cited in Marino 2002: 10-11). By the time that Giovanni became Pope Leo X on 11 March 1513 Sardi was in Rome, courting his favour. He clearly could not have been more delighted at Leo's elevation to the papacy since, as he points out in the dedicatory letter that he was soon to write to the new Pope, he had predicted the happy event in his epic poem (Marino 2002: 9-10; Paoluzzi 2002: 266). In a series of sonnets written for Leo at the time, furthermore, 'esprimeva chiaramente che si aspettava di ricevere da Leone X i mezzi necessari per pubblicare i suoi versi', so that "non più in oblio/ Lethe porrebbe gli splendori di Dio" (cited in Marino 2002: 10). As he puts it, "Aperte son le vene/ di tucte e bene et al tuo mar fam corso./ A me ne basterebbe un brieve sorso" (cited in Marino 2002: 10). The stage was set for Sardi to be hailed as the poet-prophet-theologian of a fresh Medicean dawn, a Dominican Dante devoted to the family's first pope. Given that *De Anima Peregrina* had been designed from the first as 'un'apologia della Chiesa e allo stesso tempo un'esaltazione della casa medicea e del suo esponente più legato all'ambiente ecclesiastico' (Nardello 2002: 12), it is easy to understand why Sardi thought it would find favour with Leo.

The manuscript itself is a fascinating artefact. Forced to rush the work by Giovanni's elevation to the papacy, he decided to use the same illustrations as appear in BNCF MS BR 17, albeit ensuring that they were of a higher quality by commissioning Attavante degli Attavanti to do much of the work, rather than settling for his *bottega* as he had done for

Soderini (Paoluzzi 2002: 266-269; compare figures 10-12 to 13-15). Nevertheless, in many ways his timing could not have been better, nor his efforts at customising the manuscript more apt. First, Sardi's inclusion of a commentary on Book I. 1, and of a sonnet that he had written in honour of Giovanni and his family (Bianconi 1910: xviii), allowed him to make his praise of the Medici more explicit. For example, the 'sì bel lauro' of I.1.5 unsurprisingly turns out to be a reference to 'uno alto spirito chiamato Laurentio', whose memory 'mosse el pressente auctore ad cotale opera componere'. The shadow cast by the laurel, moreover, should be understood as 'li figliuoli, et sì come li rami fanno ombra et danno refrigerio, così li grandi, magni et magnifici figliuoli di quello bronchone verde, di quello alto spirito con la loro grande et innata magnificentia et gratia sono come ombra refrigerante, qualunche lasso sobto tale ombra et protectione si riposerà' (Bibl. Cors. MS 55 K 1, 24v). The manuscript's first illumination, much like its earlier counterpart, includes a depiction of the laurel tree described in poem and commentary (13r). So far, so good, but Sardi went further than this.

The symbols of Florence that characterised BNCF MS BR 17 have almost entirely vanished, to be replaced by two *putti* supporting a miniature of Leo, and representations of two Medici emblems, the *broncone fiorito* and a ring with three feathers. 13r, which must have been completed before Giovanni's elevation to the papacy, displays Giovanni's coat of arms as cardinal: 'due bronconi fiammeggianti incrociati in forma ovale, terminati con rami fogliacei', with a diamond ring, feathers, the motto *semper*, and the Medici *palle* crowned by a cardinal's hat thrown in for good measure (Paoluzzi 2002: 267; figure 13). The second illumination (96r; figure 14) includes 'l'impresa medicea delle api attorno all'alveare', along with the *broncone fiammeggiante* (2002: 267).

The third (154r; figure 15), whilst very similar to its counterpart in BNCF MS BR 17, differs from it in a few striking ways. Like 13r and 154r, it features Medici devices, in this instance ‘due anelli a punta di diamante, simbolo della perfezione e della solidità del governo dei Medici’, and a *broncone fiorito* (2002: 267). The central image is also of the papal court, but whereas in BNCF MS BR 17 the pontificate remained unnamed and Sardi merely knelt next to the dignitary who proffered his work, here the throne is emblazoned with the words ‘Leo X’, and it is Sardi himself who offers his manuscript. Sardi is clearly trying to reassert his devotion and dedication to the Medici, something that can also be deduced from the binding. Although substantially ‘restored’ in the eighteenth century, it appears that the original metallic decorations were reattached (2002: 264). These include two medallions bearing portraits of Lorenzo and Cosimo ‘il Vecchio’, on the front and back ‘cover’ respectively. Even before it was rebound, the manuscript, measuring 370 x 265mm, must have been an impressive work of art. Sardi even managed to secure a private audience with Leo to present it to him (Fineschi 1782: 68; Bianconi 1910: xviii). ‘[...] infine espresso tutto il suo impegno di letterato e di poeta nel lodare ed esaltare, nel poema, la famiglia medicea e il suo esponente di maggior prestigio: Giovanni’ (Nardello 2002: 120). The fact that the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana’s copy of *De Anima Peregrina* (MS Plut.41.24) is similarly decorated with Leo X’s device implies that either he or Clement VII had it transcribed (Fineschi 1782: 2), so Sardi’s gift cannot have gone down too badly. According to Fineschi, moreover, Leo received Sardi graciously, thanking him and endowing him with many spiritual blessings (1782: 68). Yet no publication or financial recompense was ever forthcoming. So what went wrong and why, just over two years later, could Sardi lament the twenty-two years he had laboured over *De Anima Peregrina*, the 300 large gold florins he had spent in trying to see it published, and

the fact that he had received nothing, not even a pair of shoes, in return? (cited in Nardello 2002: 121).

Sardi's representation of Simonetta, as an adulteress deserving of death, possessed of outer beauty but inner corruption, is indicative of why he did not achieve this long-desired goal. However beautifully packaged, the contents of this austere, moralising epic, offered by a mendicant friar whose work rejected many of the classicising trends that had characterised Laurentian Florence (Nardello 2002: 135), were unlikely to strike a chord with Leo. The new pontificate was, it should be remembered, a former pupil of Ficino, who at this time was busy with the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-7), which upheld Ficino's core belief as to the immortality of the soul (Hankins 2004: 435-436). He would go on to encourage the study of the ancient world, founding a Greek college and a printing press to promote the study of the language, amassing a collection of classical sculpture which he then opened to the public, and showing an interest in protecting the ruins of Rome. One of his first actions as pope, furthermore, had been to appoint Pietro Bembo as his secretary, thereby lending his backing to one of the greatest humanists and vernacular love poets of the day, Ficinian philosophy and Petrarchan love poetry now being firmly back in vogue (Hankins 2004: 116, 410).

Sardi appears to have realised some of this and to have made an attempt to adapt his work accordingly. This adjustment takes the form of the commentary on I.1, unique to Bibl. Cors. MS 55 K 1 and apparently not by the poet-monk himself (Nardello 2002: 136-137). In contrast to the self-commentary that Sardi was later to add to ASMN MS IB 59, this piece is 'una lunga e dettagliata spiegazione del primo capitolo, densa di esempi, aneddoti, conoscenze erudite (di carattere mitologico, etimologico, poetico e retorico)', including references to Greek authors (Nardello 135-136). There was a certain superficiality to this classicising

framework, as is indicated by the very different nature of Sardi's self-commentary, which favours references to Scripture and vernacular poets over those to mythology and Greek writers (Nardello 2002: 134-135). It certainly did not make up for Sardi's singling out for criticism of the very woman whom Leo's uncle had been 'Platonically courting', and whose death had inspired an outpouring of verse in the 'noble love' tradition by poets who included Leo's father. If anything, moreover, Leo was even more dedicated to luxury than his father had been, adorning the Vatican and the city at large with works of art and ordering lavish spectacles. A devotee of hunting, (sometimes crude) entertainment and undemanding beauty, abstruse poetry condemning the indulgence of pleasure was hardly likely to appeal to him (Kidwell 2004: 176-178). Added to this, Sardi's denouncement of the sin of simony via Simonetta was not going to endear him to a pontificate who later 'sold every service he could conceive of, including indulgences in Germany', to fund his extravagant lifestyle (Kidwell 2004: 178).

When Sardi died four years later his poetic feats were by no means forgotten; if his ambition had simply been to render even more august his reputation as a scholar and theologian his aims would have been amply realised. Yet he ended his days as a disappointed, much poorer man, whose attempts to see his epic published were constantly thwarted by a mixture of bad luck, changing times and obscure verse. With the election of Leo X Sardi evidently thought that his time had come, but in censuring Simonetta and all that she stood for, crudely condemning as adultery what other poets had interpreted as chaste and courtly love, and using her to unmask sins that his patron had every intention of committing, Sardi was painfully at odds with prevailing fashions, the relic of a bygone Savonarolan era. This final disillusionment was even, the compiler of the *Necrologio* of Santa Maria Novella insinuates, to hasten his death, since 'ex Urbe tandem reversus, et febre percussus clausit dies

suos' ('finally, returning from the City he was struck by a fever and ended his days'; Marino 2002: 9). For Sardi, these treacherous games of poetry, patronage and politics had proved fatal.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM LAURENTIAN STAR TO SAVONAROLAN SERPENT:

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CHANGE ON

REPRESENTATIONS OF SIMONETTA¹⁸

Introduction

In this chapter I shift my focus from the poetic context of the Simonetta poems to the political, cultural and religious concerns that shaped their creation and re-working from the last quarter of the fifteenth century through to the early sixteenth century and beyond. My main concern is to investigate whether and, if so, why, the way in which Simonetta is portrayed in poetry changes over time, and why depictions of her appear, are re-used and are neglected at particular points in Florentine cultural and political history. Can we trace any connections between the manner in which she is represented and the forms in which her poems are adapted and published, and the political and cultural events of the day? My central hypothesis is that the ‘Simonetta poems’ have the potential to provide a unique point of access to Florence’s altering political and cultural preoccupations and the effect that they had upon the literature of the day, since they continued to be formed and ‘re-formed’ from 1475 until the 1530s, by poets who were at the heart of cultural, religious and political developments in Renaissance Florence. The aim of this chapter is therefore to investigate the relationship between the poems and their afterlives, and the historical context in which they were written and re-worked. In doing so, I aim to shed light on the impact of political and cultural change on the composition and publication of Florentine poetry in the *Quattrocento* and *Cinquecento*.

¹⁸ Part of this chapter was adapted for my article, Lorenzo’s Star and Savonarola’s Serpent. Changing Representations of Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci (2014). *Italian Studies*, 69(1), 4-23.

I also intend to offer new insights into the shifting use of women in the verse of the day, from a means of expressing social ideals to representations of moral corruption. In order to do this I shall take a largely chronological approach, following the fortunes of the poems from their original composition through their various metamorphoses, and relating them to developments in Florentine society.

I shall focus in particular on Girolamo Benivieni, whose long life saw him transform from Laurentian love poet to committed Savonarolan convert, and who re-worked his Simonetta sonnets several times. He therefore represents a particularly fruitful line of enquiry for the purposes of this chapter, and an in-depth case study of his ‘Simonetta poems’ concludes my arguments, alongside analysis of the political messages contained within Poliziano’s *Stanze*; an examination of Lorenzo’s re-use of his Simonetta sonnets from the *Raccolta Aragonesa* to the *Comento*; analysis of the 1481 (*st. f.*) Miscomini edition of the *Bucoliche elegantissime composte*, a collection of original pastoral verse in the *volgare* by Francesco Arsocchi, Girolamo Benivieni and Jacopo Fiorino de’ Boninsegni, which also contains Bernardo Pulci’s vernacular translation of Virgil’s *Bucolics* and his elegy and sonnet in memory of Simonetta; and the first detailed investigation into Tommaso Sardi’s portrayal of Simonetta in his *De Anima Peregrina*. All of these poets and publications have the potential to contribute to our understanding of Laurentian cultural politics and ‘propaganda’, of the impact of the Pazzi Conspiracy and War and their aftermath on Florentine literature, and of Savonarola’s influence over the Arts in 1490s Florence.

1475-1477: The Emergence of Simonetta

The mid-1470s were a time of relative peace and stability for Lorenzo and for Florence as a whole. November 1474 had seen the signing of a league between Florence, Milan and Venice,

and Lorenzo, having survived the early threats to his 'rule', was now able to consolidate his hold over the city's cultural life. The years 1472-1475, indeed, were the backdrop for the beginnings of his extensive and influential involvement in the Florentine *Studio*, for the growth of his reputation as a connoisseur of ancient and contemporary art, and for the purchase of his garden at Piazza San Marco, a possible location for the legendary sculpture garden in which Michelangelo learnt his trade (Kent 2004: 74-75). He was finally at leisure, moreover, to revive his interest in composing vernacular verse (Kent 2004: 67), and to turn his attention to transforming and exalting Florentine poetry, to his own acclaim and that of the city (Martelli 1995: 41). As Najemy argues, these years were also a breeding ground for tensions between Lorenzo and his *ottimati* enemies, and between Florence and Rome, conflicts which were shortly to explode in the Pazzi Conspiracy of 1478 (2006: 347-356). A superficial calm was nevertheless maintained between 1475 and 1477, which Lorenzo, with his highly developed awareness of 'image management', was quick to exploit, celebrating Medici wealth and supremacy, and his role in the creation of the 1474 league, in the joust of 29 January 1475.

Poliziano's *Stanze* were composed at the apex of this precarious but much-vaunted peace. Since Poliziano had been living in the Medici household for more than a year by the time of the joust, as what might be termed a pseudo-courtly scholar-secretary and poet (Jardine 1997: 245), and as one of Lorenzo's closest collaborators in his cultural reforms, one might expect his explicitly encomiastic poem to reflect his master's promotion of himself as the creator of a stable and artistically thriving city. It is clear from the outset that this is indeed the case. Lorenzo becomes the 'ben nato Laur, sotto il cui velo/ Fiorenza lieta in pace si riposa,/ né teme i venti o'l minacciar del celo [*sic*]' (I.4.1-3), the sheltering tree to the flower of Florence. The poem's idealised Tuscan landscape abounds with a sense of springtime renewal and

promise: Iulio himself is depicted as being ‘Nel vago tempo di sua verde etate/ spargendo ancor pel volto il primo fiore’ (I.8.1-2), and the forests are full of flowers and birdsong (I.25). It is in the form of Simonetta, however, that Poliziano’s celebration of this Laurentian cultural and political spring reaches its apex, in a wholesale Medicean appropriation of the longstanding tradition that envisioned Florence as a beautiful woman, flourishing like a flower.

The association between Florence and flowering dates back to medieval discussions of the origins of the city’s name, which interpreted it as deriving from the fact that the city was built on the site of a flower-filled meadow (Bergstein 1991: 679-680). The topos of the flourishing of ‘Lady Florence’ was current as early as the thirteenth century, as Brunetto Latini’s depiction of the time when ‘Fiorenza/ fioria, e fece frutto,/ sì ch’ell’era del tutto/ la donna di Toscana’ makes clear (1991: 687-689). As civic pride in the beauty and prosperity of the city increased, the myth of floral Florence became ever more important. In 1296 Florence’s new cathedral was officially named ‘Santa Maria del Fiore’, ‘an invented, [...] specifically Florentine appellation for the Virgin Mary’ intended to honour the State (1991: 679). If Adrian Randolph’s theory is correct, Donatello’s *Dovizia* (circa 1428-1430) with its cornucopia-bearing female figure, had provided an early fifteenth-century embodiment of Latini’s flourishing and fruitful Fiorenza (2002: 27). It is also worth noting that the idea of flowering Florence had been taken up in 1464 by Luca Pulci in the prologue to his *Driadeo d’amore*, which imagines Lorenzo’s magnificence as a ‘florida fronda a far fiorir Fiorenza’ (Acidini 2010: 104). By the time that Poliziano began writing the *Stanze*, therefore, it was common practice to depict the city as a beautiful woman bearing flowers or fruit (Bergstein 1991: 688-689). With the *Stanze*, however, he was instrumental in updating the notion of ‘Donna Fiorenza’, and in connecting it specifically to the Medici and to Laurentian peace and

prosperity. It has long been argued that Botticelli's *Primavera* depicts the ideal spring of a Medici Golden Age, and that smiling Flora (figure 16), sheltered by a laurel, alludes to the city of Florence and its flourishing under Lorenzo (Cox-Rearick 1984: 79; Acidini 2010: 103). The same should be said of Poliziano's Simonetta, who strikingly resembles Botticelli's Flora in pose, appearance and apparel. Like her painted counterpart, her domain is 'un fiorito e verde prato', at the heart of Poliziano's Tuscan spring (I.37.6), and she wears a white dress decorated with images of flowers (I.43.1-2). Her skin is pale, her hair flowing and golden (I.43.1-4), and her lips and teeth resemble red violas and pearls (I.50.5). Moreover, mirroring Flora's famous smile, Simonetta's sweet and joyful nature is such that the 'dolce sereno' of her eyes calms the air around her (I.44.1-4), and the laughter with which she responds to Iulio's awestruck entreaties seems to unlock paradise (I.50.1-4). She even rises to her feet 'con di fior pieno un grembo' (I.47.8), directly paralleling the flowers that Flora cradles in her lap. She is the very image of joyful, thriving Florence, protected by its Lauro.

Other aspects of Simonetta's depiction by Poliziano also demonstrate that she is being used as a projection and celebration of Florentine cultural achievement and ideal citizenship. It is no coincidence that of all the Muses Poliziano should compare her to Thalia (I.45.1), whose name is etymologically connected to 'that moist freshness of youth that is akin to the moist, swelling buds or young shoots of plants' (MacLachlan 1993: 38-40). Beyond this, Thalia is the name of one of the Three Graces, who appear in person several times in the course of the poem as the attendants of Venus (I.68.5; 92.6; II.22-24), and are frequent companions of beautiful women in the visual art of the era. From Botticelli's *Primavera* and Villa Lemmi frescoes, via Niccolò Fiorentino's portrait medal of Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni, to Francesco del Cossa's *April*, they dance wherever the goddess of love holds sway, embodying the dynamism that to Renaissance eyes lent beauty its appeal, moving its beholder and

provoking a response or exchange (Mac Carthy 2012: 65-66). It is just this dynamic beauty that Simonetta herself encapsulates, suggesting that Poliziano's decision to liken her to Thalia was not incidental. Her eyes do not merely shine, but flash with the fire of Cupid's torches (I.44.1-2); she lights up with 'un sì dolce e vago riso' that it could move mountains or stop the sun in its tracks (I.50.2); and everywhere the weightless sensuality of her movements is stressed, from her 'passi lenti' (I.55.3) to 'l ventilar dell'angelica veste' (I.56.8). Radiant with beauty, joy and love, it is her 'amorosa grazia' (I.55.4) that inspires Iulio's *colpo di fulmine*, and transforms Poliziano's 'Etruria' (I.51.3) into the home of ideal virtue and loveliness.

But the Graces had a further meaning, a fact not lost upon fifteenth-century scholars (Moss 2003: 21). Both Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and Seneca in *De Beneficiis* had made much of their social importance, connecting them and their circular dance with the giving and receiving of benefits, and thus with the bond of reciprocity that they identified as the cornerstone of a stable and civilised society (Mac Carthy 2012: 65-66). Poliziano, famous for his erudition, was surely aware of this interpretation. Indeed, grace is the principle that governs the springtime world of the *Stanze* and Simonetta's role within it, with nymph and nature bound by their mutual bestowing and receiving of favours. At the sound of her 'parlar divino', for example, breezes hush and birds sing (I.44.7), and the whole forest laughs around her and lightens her cares (I.43.5-6). This is, moreover, a landscape ruled over by its 'Lauro', and in which one of Lorenzo's devices, the 'ingegnosa pecchia' (Cox-Rearick 1984: 81-82), darts from blossom to blossom (I.25.7), with all its connotations of productive, hard-working and harmonious society (Woolfson 2009: 290). Poliziano, then, has transformed Simonetta from merchant's wife to the embodiment of ideally-ordered, Medici-controlled Florence.

It is also clear that Poliziano intended his portrayal of Simonetta, and the *Stanze* more generally, to call to the mind of his reader Florentine achievements in the world of the visual arts, and the rediscovery of ancient art that was taking place at the time the poem was written. Whilst Book One of the *Stanze* famously concludes with the ekphrastic depiction of the bas-reliefs decorating the palace of Venus (I.97-119), Simonetta herself is, in the words of Poliziano, ‘painted’. Her dress, for instance, is not simply decorated with a pattern of roses, flowers and grass but is ‘di rose e fior dipinta’ (I.43.2; I.47.4), and her face is ‘dipinto di ligustri e rose’ (I.44.6). As Warburg observed when analysing Botticelli’s *Flora*, the near-identical pose of Simonetta and her painted peer clearly recalls a classical type exemplified by a first-century AD statue of Pomona/Flora to be found in the Uffizi (figure 53), whose presence in the Medici collections was documented by Vasari as early as the second-half of the sixteenth century (1999: 126-127). Poliziano’s Simonetta therefore appears to be designed to celebrate the revival in classical art and learning that characterised the Florentine cultural scene, bringing to life both ancient art and poetry. His Simonetta, then, makes poetic flesh of an abstract concept of peace, order and cultural achievement in 1470s Laurentian Florence.

The power and importance of this idea is made clear by its influence not only on Botticelli, whose *Primavera* was painted some four years after the composition of the *Stanze* was definitively interrupted, and whose *Birth of Venus* arguably contains another personification of Florence (Acidini 2010: 82), but also by the work of a number of other poets and artists of the day. Notable among these is Bernardo Bellincioni, whose sonnet 197, written in 1492 in the persona of Apollo, begins with a strikingly similar depiction of ‘Fiorenza’:

Co’ fiori in grembo un’altra donna bella
 Veggio, che nova Atene el mondo canta,
 Lieta posarsi a l’umbra della pianta [del Lauro],

Che tanto amai in viva forma quella.

This description is mirrored by Niccolò Fiorentino's portrait medal of Lorenzo (*circa* 1490), the reverse of which features a lady, identified as 'Florentia', seated beneath a laurel, holding a lily in her hand and cradling a number of other flowers in her lap, framed by the motto 'Tutela patri[a]e' (Hoffmann 2011a: 181-182). It can be no coincidence that Fiorentino's portrait medal of Poliziano features a strikingly similar design (Hoffmann 2011b: 187- 188). Poliziano's Simonetta, then, born of the need to vaunt Lorenzo's political and cultural achievements in the fragile calm of 1470s Florence, inspired a new generation of artists and poets to depict Florence as a flower-bearing lady, whose flourishing was to be understood as the result of Lorenzo's beneficence.

Poliziano must have been in the midst of composing the *Stanze* when he was called upon to write in Lorenzo's name the *epistola* for the *Raccolta Aragonesa*, the anthology of Tuscan vernacular verse sent by Lorenzo to Federico d'Aragona, younger son of the king of Naples, in 1476-1477. Like Poliziano's portrayal of Simonetta in the *Stanze*, the collection is very much the product of its time, reflecting both the need to vaunt the cultural achievements of Florence and its Medici 'overlord', and the growing political unease that characterised the decade. Lorenzo's inclusion of his four recently-composed sonnets on Simonetta is central to the way in which he presents both himself and the literary fortunes of his city, and is particularly revealing of the tensions that typified the years leading up to the Pazzi Conspiracy.

The mere fact that Lorenzo included his own work in a collection designed to demonstrate the supremacy of the Tuscan poetic tradition is significant. Indeed, whilst the *epistola* dignifies his position as Florence's leading citizen, recalling his 1476 meeting with Federico

in Pisa, expressing his devotion to him, and using the rhetoric of gift-giving to establish himself, in the words of Zemon Davis, as part of Federico's 'noble world of honour' (2000: 63), the insertion of his own compositions establishes him as the latest in a long line of Tuscan literary greats. Despite Lorenzo's assertion in the *epistola* that he has incorporated his verse 'per fare alli altri [scritti] paragone e per fare quelli per la loro comparazione più ornati parere' (Poliziano 1976b: 133), his actions in fact betoken anything but modesty. As Tiziano Zanato points out, Lorenzo's contribution amounts to sixteen separate pieces, a not inconsiderable amount in the context of the *Raccolta*, and one exceeded by only three poets, if one does not take into account the 'place of honour' naturally accorded to Dante and the *Stilnovisti* (1992: 318). Even more notably, no other *Quattrocento* poet is allowed to surpass this limit, leaving us to conclude that Lorenzo intended to present himself as the only poet of the century worthy of the name (1992: 318). Certainly, the positioning of his work at the very end of the chronologically-ordered manuscript appears less a modest 'afterthought', more a declaration that it should be interpreted as the culmination of Tuscan poetic endeavours thus far.

In the context of this none-too-subtle piece of personal and provincial promotion, the inclusion of Lorenzo's Simonetta sonnets is especially intriguing. Not only do they take up a quarter of his total input but, divided into two sections, they both open and close the section, in the reverse order from the *Comento*. It is tempting to think that Federico, and more particularly his elder brother, Alfonso, were aware that the poems referred to the latter's erstwhile 'beloved'. As Bryce argues, there are certainly grounds for regarding their appearance as part of the intricate and rapidly deteriorating web of relations between Florence and Naples, no longer allies and soon to be outright enemies in the war of the Pazzi Conspiracy (2002: 20). Simonetta was, as we have already seen, connected to Naples via her

brother-in-law, Jacopo III Appiani d' Aragona, lord of Piombino, son of an illegitimate daughter of the Neapolitan king. He had also been the prime mover behind her marriage into the Vespucci family, who could themselves boast a distinguished history of diplomatic service in, and trade with, the southern city. The creation of the *Raccolta Aragonese* was, Bryce notes, also roughly contemporary to the marriage of Jacopo IV Appiani, Simonetta's nephew, to Vittoria Piccolomini, granddaughter of King Ferrante. It coincided, moreover, with a projected match between Giuliano de' Medici and Simonetta's niece, Semiramide Appiani, and with Jacopo's awarding to the Medici of a five-year contract giving them access to his iron ore mines on Elba. All of these events could explain her presence in the collection (2002: 21-22). In the light of these observations, Simonetta becomes one more instrument in the complex, failing network of diplomatic dealings between the cities, in an anthology whose primary objective, in the words of Bryce, lay in 'its function as cultural propaganda directed by the weakest of the five major states on the Peninsula to one of the most powerful, with the former laying alternative claims to supremacy in other fields, linguistic as well as literary' (2002: 23).

Lorenzo must, at any rate, have been proud of his Simonetta poems to give them such a prominent place in his segment of the *Raccolta*, and clearly felt that they provided suitably elevated material for such a purpose, in a selection of his verse evidently intended to demonstrate his ability to express both tragedy and comedy (Zanato 1992: 318). It is worth mentioning that the entire anthology ends with the sonnet, 'O chiara stella, che coi raggi tuoi', which depicts Simonetta as a new and brilliant star, and thus leaves the reader with a parting image of radiance, renewal, and triumph over death. This echoes the *epistola*, which first laments the near loss of 'molti venerabili poeti, li quali primi il deserto campo della toscana lingua cominciorono a coltivare' (1976b: 131), and then praises Federico for having saved

them by requesting that ‘tutti questi scrittori le fussino insieme in un medesimo volume raccolti’ (1976b: 131). Not only this, but the Tuscan vernacular is described as being ‘in questi nostri secoli tutta di fioretti e d’erba [...] rivestita’ (Poliziano 1976b: 131). What we have in both missive and sonnet is a sense of cultural resurrection, of the conquering of (poetic) oblivion, and of the emergence of hope and light from the darkness. The poem and the anthology as a whole are thus presented as the product of a Florence that is flourishing under its Medici poet-‘ruler’, in which the great Tuscan poets are respected, and their achievements embellished by the authors of a new ‘Golden Age’. Simonetta has, in effect, become the ‘star’ and muse of Florentine poetry, which burns ever brighter in Laurentian Tuscany.

The Simonetta of the *Stanze* and of the *Raccolta Aragonese* is therefore intimately connected to the historical context of the mid-1470s, to its poetic and artistic achievements and superficial calm, but also to the worsening political situation that would eventually shatter this brittle semblance of peace. Both Lorenzo and Poliziano are intent on conveying the rebirth of Florentine culture under its *de facto* Medici ruler, on stressing his political importance to the city, and on demonstrating what Bullard terms ‘Lorenzo’s genius [...] in being able to weld his personal reputation and that of Florence together [...] [drawing] upon the very pride and glory of Florence, using the one to buttress the other’ (1994: 48-49). Simonetta, whether floral ‘Donna Fiorenza’ or shining star, is the embodiment of this sense of Medicean and Tuscan pride in the city’s beauty and cultural supremacy. Yet, even as it was being collated, the *Raccolta Aragonese* was the product of growing uncertainty in Florence’s external affairs, and the *Stanze* would famously never be completed following the disastrous events of the Pazzi Conspiracy and ensuing war. These cultural high-points of the 1470s were thus inextricably bound up with the tragedy and turbulence with which the decade would draw to a close.

The (Poetic) Aftermath of the Pazzi Conspiracy

The Pazzi Conspiracy of 26 April 1478, which saw Giuliano assassinated and Lorenzo wounded during Easter mass in Florence's Cathedral, had a profound and lasting impact on the city. Not only were around fifty suspected conspirators hunted down and killed that very day, but Sixtus IV and King Ferrante of Naples, who had been involved in hatching the plot, immediately declared war (Najemy 2006: 356-357). The conflict lasted for a year and a half, and became increasingly disastrous for Florence, abandoned by her allies, and for Lorenzo, whose position in Florence was ever more precarious, particularly given Sixtus's decision to excommunicate him and to place the city under an interdict in June of that year. His letter of the following month to the Florentine priors and people stressed his love for them and his determination to rid them of their Medici 'tyrant' (2006: 358-359).

Lorenzo responded with a spectacular *coup-de-theâtre*: on 5 December 1479 he had a *pratica* of forty leading citizens convened, and informed them that he had resolved to leave the following morning for Naples, to end the war either by handing himself over to his enemies, if their quarrel proved truly to be with him rather than Florence as a whole, or to negotiate a peace settlement by other means. It was a calculated risk, not so much for the danger that he might face in the southern city, p, but for his enforced absence from Florence. Despite ominous mutterings from home and Ferrante's delaying tactics Lorenzo managed to bring the negotiations to a satisfactory conclusion, and was hailed as a hero when he returned to Tuscany in March 1480 (2006: 359-361).

As Francesco Guicciardini wryly notes, Lorenzo not only emerged relatively unscathed from these perilous years, but actually succeeded in bolstering his authority in Florence: he was no longer forced to share his wealth and power with a younger brother, his chief enemies

had been removed, ‘ed in effetto si insignorì in modo dello stato, che *in futurum* rimase liberamente ed interamente arbitro e quasi signore della città’ (1931: IV, 37-38). Although the tensions that would eventually lead to the exile of the Medici in 1494 continued to bubble away under the surface, for more than a decade Florence was to enjoy peace, prosperity and a period of outstanding cultural creativity.

It would be logical to assume that interest in preserving Simonetta’s memory and in circulating the verse written about her suffered its own terminal decline with the death of Giuliano. It is well-known that Poliziano’s grief and shock at his brutal murder, recounted in his *Pactianae coniurationis commentarium*, led him to abandon the *Stanze* for good. What is so intriguing about this period, however, is that this rejection of a ‘Simonetta poem’ is the exception rather than the rule. The years following the conclusion of the war would, in fact, see Simonetta’s first appearance in print, and were to provide the backdrop for Lorenzo’s re-use of his sonnets on the noblewoman in his *Comento*. What explanation can there be for this new surge of interest in Simonetta, who by the time her ‘lover’ was killed had already been dead for two years, and whose relevance for Florence might well have ended with this fresh tragedy?

The answer, the evidence suggests, is to be found in the context of a city and family in the process of rebuilding diplomatic ties with Rome and Naples, and keen to celebrate their mutual resurgence. One of the ways in which they did so was to guarantee as wide an audience as possible for accessible, pro-Medici poetry in the *volgare*, at a time when the family needed to stress the political and cultural benefits that its ‘protection’ continued to offer Florence. The *Bucoliche elegantissime composte*, published in February 1481 (*st. f.*), is an example of this pro-Medici literature. At first sight, Bernardo Pulci’s funereal poems on

Simonetta and his elegy on Cosimo de' Medici, 'Piangi tu, che pur dianzi era felice', are a curious addition to this collection of eclogues. Yet Pulci's poetry *in mortem* is a key component of an edition that is intended to celebrate Lorenzo and his family and, in 'un messaggio sottile, sfumato, chiaro solo a chi ne possedesse la chiave', to bring to an end the debate as to who was responsible for the disasters of 1478-1480 (Battera 1990: 160-161).

To begin with, the decision to publish the book in print privileged speed and quantity of diffusion, giving it an immediate political impact (Battera 1990: 156-157). Second, the absence of Lorenzo's pastoral-themed works, *Corinto* and *Apollo e Pan*, allowed him to appear in the collection as dedicatee rather than poet. He duly plays this role for Bernardo's translation and Boninsegni's fifth eclogue, which respectively open the anthology and bring it to a close (1990: 151). This is significant because these dedications, along with Benivieni's third and fourth eclogues, provide a kind of narrative of Lorenzo's political career, from 'l'esordio sulle orme degli avi', to 'la salita drammatica al potere', and finally 'l'apoteosi del magnanimo mecenate' (1990: 151-152). At the same time, the choice of works, authors and dedicatees is designed to send a subtle but powerful message of solidarity with Rome and Naples (1990: 160-161). For example, the book contains verse by two Siennese authors, Arsocchi and Boninsegni, whose city had taken the side of Sixtus IV and Ferrante during the war of 1478-1480, thus uniting them on the page them with their Florentine peers (1990: 151-152). Moreover, whilst Boninsegni's last eclogue is addressed to Lorenzo, his first four are dedicated to Alfonso d'Aragona, creating a poetic bond between these one-time enemies. In a similar vein, the dedicatee of Benivieni's entire contribution is Giulio Cesare da Varano, a vassal of the pope (1990: 151-152). Benivieni's fourth eclogue, moreover, offers what Battera terms a 'moral reinterpretation' of the Pazzi Conspiracy by suggesting that Florence in some way deserved the revenge of Jove, here identified with Christ and therefore with Sixtus, his

earthly representative. With peace re-established and cordial relations resumed, it was clearly time to leave behind accusations of culpability, offering a moral rather than political perspective on events (1990: 159-160).

On the basis of this reading of the *Bucoliche*, the presence of Bernardo's elegies and sonnet becomes easier to explain. First, all three celebrate the Medici in some form. Bernardo, for example, praises Cosimo for having been 'pudico, sever [...] giusto e santo,/ [...] ch'a Cesare o Caton nissun diè vanto' (127-129), and encourages his fellow citizens to honour his heir, Piero, 'ver successor della virtù paterna' (179). In 'Venite, sacre e gloriose dive', Iulio takes on the guise of Apollo (49-51), and in the sonnet is comforted and adored from afar by a Simonetta who is now a goddess in heaven. It is, moreover, possible to read the elegies as twin celebrations of Medici political and cultural achievements, Cosimo having actively made Florence flower (15) by bringing back to life the 'prisca eccellenza, che già tanto/ fé Roma addorna d'alti templi e chiostri' (125-126), and Simonetta, as we saw on pages 43-45, both a classical goddess and the new Laura (178-179), and thus the passive, female representative of this flourishing.

These laudatory poems, furthermore, take their place among a whole raft of vernacular works eulogising the Medici that were published in print in Florence, often for the first time, from 1479 to 1482. For instance, Luca Pulci's *Driadeo d'Amore*, originally composed as far back as 1465, received its debut as a printed book in 1479 at the hands of the Florentine publisher Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna, who the previous year had been responsible for the first edition of Poliziano's *Pactianae coniurationis commentarium*. It was then swiftly republished by both the Ripoli printing press and by Miscomini in 1481 (*st. f.*). Miscomini was responsible too for the earliest print copy of Luca's *Pistole in rima al Lorenzo de' Medici*,

which was released on the same day as his edition of the *Driadeo*. Luigi Pulci's encomiastic *Giostra di Lorenzo de' Medici* was also given its first print outing by Miscomini on 18 March 1481 (*st. f.*), whilst his *Morgante*, written at the behest of Lorenzo's mother Lucrezia, appeared almost simultaneously in a partial Ripoli edition, and was published in full by another Florentine publisher, Francesco di Dino, the following year.¹⁹ This evidence suggests that the *Bucoliche* and the Simonetta poems that it contained should be read in the light of this wider vernacular celebration of the Medici.

The fact that Bernardo's poems on Simonetta were chosen to recall her Medici 'paramour', rather than the more antagonistic vernacular poems on his assassination known as the 'Tradimento per la morte di Giuliano de' Medici' and the 'Morale mandato a Madonna Lucretia da Luigi Pulci per la morte di Giuliano', is of a piece with the collection's commemorative but non-combative stance. Here one does not find the 'naming and shaming' approach of the 'Tradimento', nor the accusations against Rome that characterise the 'Morale' (31-42), but rather an overriding emphasis on the beneficence of death, which has freed Simonetta from the 'carcer fosco' of earthly life (101). Giuliano's death should, by process of extension, be welcomed rather than lamented.

Equally notable is that renewed attention is being given to a woman who, as we know, had a number of familial ties to Naples, whose father-in-law had been implicated in the Conspiracy and thrown into prison for two years, and whose nephew, Jacopo IV Appiani d' Aragona, had fought against Florence in the subsequent war. The publication of the *Bucoliche*, furthermore, took place six months after the signing of the contract that would finally see Simonetta's niece, Semiramide, enter the Medici family by virtue of her marriage

¹⁹ I am indebted to the British Library's Incunabula Short Title Catalogue, available at <<http://istc.bl.uk>>, for providing the data for these observations.

to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, cousin of his more famous namesake (Bryce 2002: 26-27). Simonetta's appearance in the anthology is, therefore, indicative of a city and family keen to let bygones be bygones, and to rebuild its fractured relations with Naples and Rome by means both cultural and diplomatic.

At the same time that the *Bucoliche* was published, another politically significant re-appropriation of Simonetta was taking place in the form of Lorenzo's *Comento*, which Zanato argues convincingly was begun *circa* 1480-1481 (1992: 556). Simonetta's Neapolitan connections, as Bryce has argued convincingly, may well have played a role in Lorenzo's decision to grant such a prominent position to the sonnets composed in her honour, which provide the material for the opening 'Argumento' (2002: 26-27). What now merits further attention is the way in which Lorenzo uses the commentary on his 'Simonetta sonnets' to refashion his self-image in the light of the disastrous events of 1478-1480, of his 'triumph' in Naples, and of a city whose cultural, political and diplomatic fortunes were once more in the ascendant, along with those of her *de facto* ruler.

Much as he had presented himself prior to his journey to the southern city as a private yet devoted citizen of Florence, in describing the impact of Simonetta's death he portrays himself not as the powerful elder brother of her 'lover', Giuliano, who is never mentioned, nor even as the patron of the 'fiorentini ingegni' who rushed to express their grief in verse and prose (593). Rather, he becomes one citizen among the many who were moved by the death at such a tender age of one so beautiful, virtuous and beloved (591-592). He does not, moreover, depict himself as the leading poet of the day, a position of pre-eminence that he had claimed some four years earlier in the *Raccolta Aragonese*, but states that in writing his 'Simonetta sonnets' his modest wish was merely to 'accompany' the writings of those who had already

exercised their literary talents in praising her (593). Nowhere, of course, is it pointed out that many these compositions were expressly addressed to Giuliano, and must have been motivated as much by the need to pay court to Florence's most influential family as by genuine emotion.

The description of Simonetta's funeral is particularly interesting for the way in which Lorenzo uses it to stress Florentine unity, and to appeal to a sense of *fiorentinità*. Simonetta, Lorenzo states, was 'da casa al luogo della sepoltura [...] portata scoperta', which caused crowds of people to flock towards her bier in the hope of catching a glimpse of her (592). It is an account that continues to capture the popular imagination, and to be taken as proof of the adoration that Simonetta received in both life and death. The fact that Lorenzo was actually in Pisa at the time of the funeral should alert us to the fact that we are not dealing with an 'objective' eyewitness retelling of her story. Knowledge of Florentine funerary customs gives us further insights into Lorenzo's intentions. Despite the stress that modern commentators lay on the exceptional nature of the funeral itself, it was common practice in fifteenth-century Florence to dress the bodies of the deceased in their best clothes and place them on full view when transporting them, in the course of a highly public procession, to their place of burial. So why does Lorenzo describe the event in this manner?

What he is emphasising, it turns out, is not the fact that Simonetta's body was carried uncovered to her tomb in the church of Ognissanti, but the impact that this spectacle had upon her fellow citizens. Simonetta's body moved to tears 'tutti che concorsono per vederla', Lorenzo states. Those who knew her, he continues, were struck by her even greater beauty in death, whilst 'In quelli che prima non la conoscevano nasceva uno dolore e quasi rimordimento di non avere conosciuto sì bella cosa prima che ne fussino al tutto

privati' (592). Simonetta's obsequies have become the focal point for what Lorenzo terms a 'dolore molto universale e comune' that afflicted and thus brought together 'tutto il popolo fiorentino', united in their suffering at this 'pubblico danno e iattura comune' (591, 606). This account has the advantage of portraying Laurentian Florence as a community unified by emotion rather than riven by political discord, even in the 1470s. More than this, it allows Lorenzo to present himself as the selfless 'spokesperson' for the city's grief, motivated to write his 'Simonetta sonnets' not by a 'privata e grande passione' but by the wish to commemorate 'uno dolore e compassione che molti e molti altri mosse nella città nostra' (606). Simonetta has become Lorenzo's means of creating a vision of civic harmony, and of claiming for himself a 'modest' yet meaningful contribution towards it.

At the same time, he uses the 'Argumento' to prove himself a champion of Florentine verse and culture. Only a few pages earlier, in the 'Proemio' to the *Comento*, he mounts a passionate defence of the Tuscan language and its literature, concluding that 'di quelle laude che sono proprie della lingua, la nostra ne è assai bene copiosa', and underlining his belief in its miraculous properties by asserting that 'potrebbe facilmente [...] venire ancora in maggiore perfezzione, e tanto più aggiugnendosi qualche prospero successo e augumento al fiorentino imperio' (584). Now, as I demonstrated on pages 68-69 of Chapter Two, he displays his commitment to furthering the cause of Florentine poetry by depicting Simonetta in his commentary as the reincarnation of Florence's original 'eccellentissima donna' (595), Beatrice, and as the Laura to his Petrarch, who compels him to retrace the famous poet's steps by wandering through the fields 'solo e pensoso [...] tutto occupato nel pensiero e memoria di colei' (595).

Lorenzo has, then, succeeded in presenting himself as at once a humble citizen faithfully recording the devastating impact of Simonetta's death 'nella città nostra' (591), and as Florence's hero, loyally furthering its poetical and linguistic interests. The overall message is that his concerns and p. This is a Lorenzo who, with the memory of the Pazzi Conspiracy fresh in his mind, is keen to remind his readers that he is not a tyrant, but simply a man who has his city's best interests at heart, and one who has recently proved himself prepared to make the 'ultimate sacrifice' to ensure its salvation. Indeed, Randolph goes so far as to suggest that in taking on the mantle of the passive Petrarchan lover, completely under the control of his lady, Lorenzo is reminding the reader of this act of selfless devotion to the beautiful 'Donna Fiorenza' (2002: 134-135).

But Lorenzo does not stop there in his efforts to portray himself simultaneously as a devoted servant of Florence, and as its natural and worthy ruler. To begin with, 'his casting of himself as the [. . .] poet of love contributed to that sense of his exceptionality he and his friends encouraged, reinforcing his image as a princely republican if not quite yet a republican prince' (Kent 2013a: 62). For those who had the knowledge to see it, his depiction of Simonetta was central to another underlying assertion of his text: that he could legitimately claim to be a wise man in Plato's conception of the term, 'capable of apprehending that which is eternal and unchanging' (Plato, *Republic*, VI. 484b) and a lover of 'truth' (VI. 485c), and thus deservedly the city's political leader, almost its 'philosopher-king'. This first becomes apparent in the Ficinian discussions of love that characterise the 'Proemio' and the 'Argumento', in which it is understood as an 'appetito di bellezza' that finds its source in all of Creation's inherent desire to return to the 'suprema bellezza, cioè Dio', and which leads the true and noble lover to carry out 'opere virtuose, per farsi più degno che può di quella cosa che lui stima sopra all'altre degnissima' (570-572). To demonstrate that he is such a man, and

capable of understanding these divine truths, Lorenzo is prepared to rewrite history, relating his 'love story' as if his experience of Simonetta's life and death predated his meeting with Lucrezia Donati, in all likelihood the subject of the 'Nuovo Argumento', whom he had in fact been courting for several years by the time the Genoese noblewoman arrived in Florence. It was Simonetta, he recounts, who was his 'notizia universale di amore [...]; per la quale universale cognizione divenni poi alla cognizione particolare della mia dolcissima e amorosa pena' (606). In writing his sonnets on her, he continues, he was obliged to imagine what it must be like to lose 'una carissima cosa', and began to search for a lady worthy of his own love and devotion, which, after some time, he duly did, judging her to be even more exceptional than Simonetta (607). As the star of Venus must vanish before the sun can rise, then, so Simonetta allowed him to accustom his 'eyes' to the 'splendore celeste' of divine love in preparation for his discovery of Lucrezia, his 'novello sole' (611-612). Lorenzo has left behind his 'cammino [...] cieco' in favour of a New Life of wisdom, contemplation, and self-knowledge, as the text's constant references to Apollo suggest (Roush 2002: 88), and is by implication a fitting figurehead for a city at the heart of the Renaissance revival of Platonism.

More than this, his depiction of Simonetta's story is almost an idealised re-enactment of recent Florentine history: a beloved citizen dies, one who is connected to the Pazzi Conspiracy, the only contemporary historical event that is alluded to in the entire work, via the memory of her 'love affair' with Giuliano (Bryce 2002: 26-27); the whole of Florence mourns, and Lorenzo is himself left devastated by the tragedy; yet this moment of darkness is pierced by the light of a star that augurs the arrival of a new sun and of fresh hope. Just as Lorenzo used the Simonetta sonnets in the *Raccolta Aragonese* to convey a sense of cultural resurrection, so here they become part of an even broader narrative of renewal, suggesting the resurgence of the city and its most powerful family following two perilous years of murder

and war. Since Simonetta is implicitly compared to Dante's Giovanna, the *Vita Nuova's* 'Primavera', whose appearance marks the arrival of the 'verace luce' of Beatrice (XXIV. 3-5), she can even be understood in the *Comento* as embodying the Florentine and Medicean 'spring' of the 1480s, which saw Florence and its quasi-'ruling dynasty' draw back from the brink of catastrophe to enjoy a long period of peace and prosperity.

We can therefore conclude that the 1480s saw a shift in the way that depictions of Simonetta were used. They remain representative of a city keen to display its cultural prowess, of its *de facto* ruler's policy of making his achievements and that of Florence appear synonymous, and of the need to maintain good relations with other states. Yet the events of recent years have made their mark. Portrayals of Simonetta are no longer confined to manuscript but have made the transition into print, a politically-motivated decision that granted their celebration of the Medici, and that of other such encomiastic works, a rapid and widespread diffusion at a time when the family had just survived one of its greatest crises. This is, moreover, no longer the moment for overt attempts to gain the cultural upper-hand over rival states, as the *Raccolta Aragonese* was intended to do, but for reconciliation and the rebuilding of ties between Florence and its former enemies. Lorenzo, furthermore, no longer uses Simonetta to present himself explicitly as Florence's 'ruler' and foremost poet, but as a humble citizen devoted to his *patria* and its people: the Pazzi Conspiracy has had its effect. At the same time, both the *Bucoliche* and the *Comento* commemorate Florence's cultural successes and the city's rebirth following murder and war, allowing Lorenzo to assert his right to maintain his position of power as its champion and worthy leader. These are products of a city and quasi-ruler quietly but confidently in the ascendancy and on the threshold of the most prosperous period that Florence would know for many years to come.

1494-1515: Savonarola, the Reinvented Republic, and the Return of the Medici

This era of peace and affluence was, however, not to last. Lorenzo died in 1492 to be succeeded by his twenty-year-old son, Piero, who soon proved to be as inept at managing the conflicting nature of his position in Florence as his father had been expert at it. Whilst Lorenzo had managed to keep opposition to the Medici relatively in check, Piero made short work of alienating the city's élite, and tensions were exacerbated by growing fears that Charles VIII of France was about to invade Italy to pursue his claim to Naples as the Angevin heir. Piero at first pledged his allegiance to the Neapolitan regime but, with Charles' forces already marching towards Tuscany in October 1494 and threatening to 'liberate' Florence, Piero caved in and secretly went to meet the French king. With no mandate beyond his own wavering authority, he handed Charles control not only of the fortresses of Livorno, Pietrasanta, Pisa, and Sarzana, but of the entire western half of the city's dominion. By 9 November, Piero and his entire family had been expelled from Florence, barely escaping with their lives (Najemy 2006: 375-378).

With the Medici exiled from the city for the first time in sixty years, a new political order needed to be established, but this was no easy task. There was no consensus as to the Republic's future, and mistrust between the ruling classes, who were in favour of a political system modelled on that left behind by the Medici, and the *popolo*, who were hungry for radical change, was dangerously close to spiralling out of control. Into this power vacuum stepped Girolamo Savonarola, the apocalyptic preacher from Ferrara, flush from persuading Charles VIII to leave Florence without extorting too high a price. Over the coming days he outlined his vision of a city controlled by the many that would institute sweeping moral and social reforms in a new holy republic. Under his influence the Great Council was formed,

opening up real legislative power to the 3000 or so citizens who were eligible to attend. For four years Savonarola held immense sway over Florence, preaching that the city had been divinely appointed the new Jerusalem and would institute the renewal of Christian society if it were purified by moral, political and social change. He was also a hugely divisive figure, splitting the city across class lines into his followers, the *frateschi* or *piagnoni*, as their detractors called them, and his opponents, the *arrabbiati* (Najemy 2006: 381-394).

By 1497 his enemies were gaining the upper hand. First, he was excommunicated by Pope Alexander VI, whom he had condemned time and again as the embodiment of the Church's corruption. His position was then further eroded by his perceived hypocrisy in failing to support the right to appeal of five of Florence's leading citizens, sentenced to death for their alleged involvement in a conspiracy to reinstate Piero de' Medici, thereby disregarding legislation that he had once fervently supported. Tensions boiled over in March 1498, which saw Savonarola banned from preaching by the Signoria following renewed threats from Alexander, and challenged to a trial by fire, which was instead accepted by his colleague *fra* Domenico da Pescia. When the ordeal was cancelled due to a storm, a mob attacked San Marco, the friar was arrested, along with da Pescia and his other closest associate, Silvestro Maruffi, and all three were condemned as heretics. They were hanged and burned in the Piazza della Signoria on 23 May 1498, and their ashes cast into the Arno. Many Florentines, nevertheless, continued to support his ideas and venerate his memory.

If we wish to gauge the reaction of the Savonarolists to what they perceived as the moral failings of Medici-era Florence, and in particular to the lauding of beautiful and adored women in courtly verse and art, we need look no further than *fra* Tommaso Sardi's portrayal of Simonetta in Chapter XIII of the first book of his *De Anima Peregrina*. What Sardi has to

say about Simonetta, transformed from a star-like emblem of Florence and the Medici to a representative of all that is corrupt in Italian society, makes her an even more complex, interesting figure, and further belies the notion that her significance lies only in embodying an unchanging feminine ideal. This section of the text was written in late 1494 to judge by Sardi's assertion in his self-commentary that 'l'auctore scriveva questi stessi versi quando passò re Carlo per acquistare el regno di Napoli' (ASMN MS IB 59, 29r). Sardi, in other words, created his depiction of Simonetta only a few months after the release of the second edition of the Miscomini *Bucoliche* on 19 April and of the first print version of the *Stanze*, published in Bologna on 9 August of that year. This suggests that his decision to include Simonetta in this re-imagining of the afterlife- which is peopled, Dante-style, by many other contemporary figures- may have been triggered by the need to react against these very Laurentian portrayals of her.

The first clue that Sardi's is not the depiction of Simonetta to which we have become accustomed is the location in which the scene takes place, the 'fuocho d'avaritia' (XIII.iii-iv), as the poet and his guide, Moses, travel through the elements of water, air and fire and condemn the sins that they find represented therein. Entering the flames, Sardi becomes aware of burning figures (31-33). One of these, he realizes, is 'a ghuisa di sposa, nello aspecto/ bella gentile affabile et benigna/ qual fussi in molte accesemi el sospetto' (34-36). This, in itself, is a striking assertion: a beautiful, richly dressed, seemingly virtuous woman is no longer worthy of adoration but suspicion.

This ties in with Savonarola's mistrust of the wealth, ostentation and worldly glamour that he perceived as symptomatic of the moral corruption of Florence, particularly as far as women were concerned. Indeed, his hatred for all that the nymph-like, much-courted Simonetta stood

for is made remarkably clear in his *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, in which he denounces the way in which ‘le donne fiorentine hanno maritate le loro fanciulle’, claiming that ‘le menono e acconcianle là che paiano ninfe, e la prima cosa le menono a Santa Liperata’; condemns Florentine painters for depicting the Virgin Mary as a ‘meretrice’ rather than a ‘poverella [...] coperta che apena si gli vedeva el viso’; and criticises women who during religious festivals ‘vanno [...] spettorate più che altri giorni e hanno conversa la festa tutta in fare stimar sé e non in onore di Dio’ (1971: 22-26). Moreover, in a speech of 14 December 1494, at the very time that Sardi was writing Chapter XIII, he called for laws against excessive luxury in women’s dress, an oft-repeated appeal that would eventually bear fruit (Najemy 2006: 383).

Whilst Sardi, an ardent Medicean, disagreed with his fellow-preacher’s political ideas, and was even called upon to defrock him before his execution (Bianconi 1910: 82-83), it is clear from *De Anima Peregrina* that he fully supported these ethical reforms.²⁰ Savonarola, in fact, appears in Sardi’s depiction of Purgatory, in which the poet condemns him as a false prophet and for attacking the Church, but asserts that ‘in cielo lui sarà illuminato con quelle stelle, cioè con quelle anime che vi saranno vedute salve’, and has Savonarola himself state that ‘quando e’ fideli cristiani vivono male, io gli ridussi a ben vivere’ (from the commentary on Book II, Chapter XI, transcribed in Bianconi 1910: 54, 87). It comes as no surprise, then, that Sardi should express such distrust in the outwardly alluring ‘aspecto’ p, pondering whether she is a Christian or ‘infidel’ (ASMN MS IB 59, 29r-30r). When she tells him that she is ‘la Symonetta’ (XIII.41) he is initially amazed since, as he puts it in the commentary, ‘l’auctore conobbe una nobile et gentile donna chiamata Simonetta che per la sua bellezza et virtù fu

²⁰ This is striking since Sardi’s fellow monks in Santa Maria Novella were highly critical of Savonarola, as outlined by Marino 2002: 53-55.

grandemente in istima et amata da signori et gran maestri [...] et universalmente fu amata da ciaschuno che la conoscessi o sentissila nominare', and whose early death was accompanied 'con piancto di tucta la nostra città' (ASMN MS IB 59, 29r-30r). At first sight, this appears to mirror Lorenzo's idealised description of her in his *Comento*, despite the fiery location.

This impression is swiftly contradicted by the commentary, which proves to be the first literary source in the vernacular to refer to Simonetta as the 'donna [...] di M[arco] V[espucchi]' (ASMN MS IB 59, 29r), a significant development since it lends her a precise social identity. A note of realism has been struck, and with it Simonetta is no longer 'Donna Fiorenza' or star of Venus but simply a merchant's wife. Sardi is the only poet discovered to date, furthermore, to look behind Simonetta's charming 'façade' and to imply that, far from being an exemplar of moral beauty, she was an adulterer whose death was a direct result of her betrayal of her husband. '[...] sendo nella nostra città venuto Alfonso duca di Calavria', Sardi explains, '[...] et intendendo le bellezze di costei [Simonetta] se ne innamorò et del dardo et volto bellissimo et della sua onestà et gentileza percosse in modo el duca che fece ougni studio et pose ougni ingegno a scoprire el suo amore accostei' (ASMN MS IB 59, 29r-30r). As we have seen, we know that some kind of 'relationship' existed between Alfonso and Simonetta thanks to the poems that Luigi Pulci and Francesco Nursio Timideo addressed to the Neapolitan heir when she died, but these tell us nothing of the nature of their connection. This means that Sardi's work is the only surviving source to relate what took place, albeit one in which Simonetta is initially awarded the usual tributes to her beauty, chastity and nobility.

What happens next, however, is radically different to all previous accounts of Simonetta, and suggests that, whatever her previous idealisation in poetry, less flattering rumours about

her behaviour circulated during her lifetime. '[...] è da intendere', Sardi continues, 'che la casa dove abitava la decta Simonetta confinava con Arno fiume, immodo che una sera sendo caldo entrono rinfrescarsi nell'acqua el duca et lei. Qui si dice che la fe' barchetta- moralizza tu, lectore' (ASMN MS IB 59, 29r-30r). The image of a paddling Simonetta would be startling enough even without Sardi's assertion that Alfonso 'made a boat of her'. Whilst no direct interpretation for this phrase is forthcoming, a sexual transgression is clearly implied, and one which the reader is encouraged in no uncertain terms to condemn. For Sardi, moreover, it was no disease that killed Simonetta but the 'sdegno giusto' of her husband, which so troubled her that 'morte venne in lei et scolorì al mondo el bel disegno: cioè la morte oscurò el colorito volto della Simonetta, che era al mondo un bel disengno [*sic*] perché era de' belli visi che a di sua fussino visti' (ASMN MS IB 59, 29r-30r). This Simonetta is not a tragic beauty cut down at the height of her powers, but a dishonoured woman who deserved to die, and whose outward allure masked inner corruption. In this Savonarolan reading she is, therefore, less a symbol of Florence's political and cultural achievements than a representative of its degeneracy. She may appear to be an angel of virtue, as Poliziano and Lorenzo might have it, but now, rather than embodying the otherness of the spiritually divine she becomes the 'monster-woman' of uncontrolled female will, concealed even within one who appeared to be the purest of her sex (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 28). In a society in which women embodied either the virtue of Mary or the depravity of Eve, Simonetta, like Savonarola's Virgin-as-prostitute, has been exposed as a whore, falsely judged to have been a heavenly creature in a city seduced by the hollow glamour of earthly delights.

In denouncing Simonetta, moreover, Sardi not only censures Florentine society but rejects the cultural trends that had until recently dominated the city, and of which Simonetta was such an iconic figure. *De Anima Peregrina* contains very few allusions to the Greek and Roman

world, and only deals with philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras in order to criticise their teachings on the soul (Nardello 2002: 130-135). This strongly suggests that Sardi upheld Savonarola's anti-classical belief that Florence's fascination with all things 'pagan' was one of the reasons for its 'moral collapse' (Herzig 2008: 16-17). Who better, then, to expose to moral reprobation than Simonetta, so praised in the classicising works by Poliziano and his Laurentian peers that were readily and cheaply available in 1494?

Sardi's depiction of Simonetta then takes a turn for the bizarre. When asked by the poet-monk if she is the woman that he knew, she announces that she is not 'quella Simonetta' but is in fact 'Simonia' (ASMN MS IB 59, 29r-30r). In other words, she is the personification of the sin of simony, that is the buying and selling of ecclesiastical privileges, and not Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci herself. This is despite Sardi's evident interest in the noblewoman, and the fact that the figure originally introduces herself as 'la Symonetta'. This is a confusing development, but can be explained in a number of ways. First, it is clear that the resonance between 'Simonetta' and 'Simonia' must have played a part in Sardi's decision to connect the two. It should be noted, however, that at no other point in his journey through the elements does he feel it necessary to make a contemporary personality synonymous with a particular sin, so his decision to do so in this case goes beyond mere wordplay. What gradually becomes evident is that Sardi intends the reader to draw parallels between Simonetta and Simonia, thereby exposing the apparent glamour but ultimate worthlessness of both. As Simonetta was 'amata da un duca', for example, Simonia is 'amata da' papi et cardinali et da 'mperadori et re etc.', and as 'signori et gran maestri' flocked to admire the noblewoman's beauty, Sardi questions how Simonia can be loved 'da tanti senza offese', when usually 'quando e' sono più ad amare una persona ne seghuita offese, o d'occiosioni o d'altra offesa'. Even Simonetta's

golden hair becomes the ‘dorate penne’ on which Simonia is borne aloft, ‘perché nella Simonia el fine sie [*sic*] l’oro’ (ASMN MS IB 59, 29r-30r).

Having used Simonetta to expose the sickness at the heart of Florence’s culture, Simonia becomes Sardi’s means of critiquing the corruption that stalks its society. The priesthood has been thoroughly tainted by her, valuing the benefices that they are awarded not for ‘l’honesto amore [...], cioè la sollicita cura dell’anime, lo maestrare e’ populi, hedificarli nella legge di Christo’, but for ‘l’amore utile, cioè porsi in casa grano, vino, olio, legne, denarii, cera’. Neglectful of the fact that ‘questi beni spirituali et chiese [...] et spedali et benefitii’ stem from the Passion of Christ, they hunger for the financial rewards of ‘uno beneficio di milgliaia di fiorini’. Even those who resist these temptations are contaminated, since ‘se tu havessi solamente nella mente uno pensiero di volere conpiacere per acquistar bene spirituale [...] non è cancellato né domato tal pens[iero] ma è simonia peccando solamente nella mente tua’. In fact, ‘ciascuno religioso quasi cascha in questo peccato’ because ‘tucti ei preti che sono senza beneficio [...] cantono et predicano et uficiono [...] per guadangnare et potersi provedere alle cose necessarie’. Sardi includes himself in their number, forced to ‘love’ simony to survive. Simonia also infects those who have the power to grant benefices by proffering ‘tucte queste servitù et doni et presenti et lode che si fanno per acquistare benefici’. Nothing is denied her, ‘perché in corte chi loda e serve e presenta optiene ciò che vuole’. Under her malign influence, moreover, ‘poche case oggidì sono che non volglino el prete in casa’, a display of faith that has everything to do with appearances and nothing to do with genuine piety (ASMN MS IB 59, 29r-30r). The people of Florence, Sardi implies, with their respect for empty beauty, passion for material gain, and empty displays of piety value the appearance of goodness far more than its reality.

The sense of bitterness is palpable. Sardi appears never to have received any benefices, certainly never succeeded in publishing the poem that had eaten up more than two decades of his life, and saw his more courtly, classicising peers, such as benefice-recipient and one-time ‘live-in priest’ Angelo Poliziano,²¹ win fame. Indeed, in his self-commentary on II.24 the disillusioned poet laments ‘havere consumato in questa opera anni 22 [...] et ho speso più di fiorini trecento larghi d’oro in oro et anchora non me ne sono messo in piede um [*sic*] paio di scarpe. Oh, Dio, perché non mi facesti buffone?’ (transcribed in Nardello 2002: 121). By making Simonetta synonymous with Simonia, Sardi denounces the amorality of a society that has betrayed him, granting ecclesiastical privileges not to the truly devout but to those, like Poliziano, who write flattering poetry about the mistresses of the powerful. His Simonetta is the very embodiment of a Florence led astray by the false glitter of earthly rewards, and sick with social, cultural and ecclesiastical corruption. Once Lorenzo’s star, Simonetta has become a Savonarolan serpent, seducing the onlooker with her worldly charms but inwardly rotten to the core.

Conclusion

Simonetta, over the course of forty dramatic years in Florence’s history, went from being the embodiment of the city’s cultural and political achievements to an object of shame and revulsion. Rather than being a figure whose meaning has remained stable over the centuries, as critics such as Farina (2001) would have us believe, her significance to her poets and readers altered profoundly throughout the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, reflecting far-reaching changes in Florence’s political, cultural and religious identities.

Simonetta, by demonstrating how poets responded to these upheavals, creating, reworking

²¹ Poliziano, at the time resident in Palazzo Medici and at work on the *Stanze*, was ordained and appointed as prior of the church of San Paolo in 1477 thanks to the intervention of Lorenzo de’ Medici (see Poliziano’s letter to Lorenzo of 19 October 1477, in Poliziano 1976a: 55).

and circulating their verse as necessity and personal conviction demanded, offers a unique window onto this complex, changing world, and the artistic, political and moral concerns that characterised it. She also reveals the fickle, superficial nature of the hyperbolic lauding of women endemic to courtly, Petrarchan and Platonic verse, easily discarded with changing times and tastes. Even the goddess-like Simonetta can become a monster in the space of a few months. Whether star or serpent she is, along with her female poetic peers, a cipher denied a rounded, human identity by a patriarchal, polarising discourse that defines women as either angels or demons.

Coda: Girolamo Benivieni and the Mysterious Case of the Vanishing Simonetta

If we wish to take an even broader view of the impact of these huge political and religious changes on the afterlives of the ‘Simonetta poems’, and on Florence’s poetical and cultural landscape more widely, there is one writer who has the potential to provide unique insights: Girolamo Benivieni. This is partly by virtue of his remarkable longevity: by the end of 1494 he was the sole surviving Florentine poet to have written about Simonetta in the vernacular in the 1470s, Luigi Pulci having died in 1484, Bernardo in 1488, Lorenzo in 1492, and Poliziano and Baccio Ugolini in 1494. Benivieni, by contrast, lived until 1542. Not only this, but he revised his poetic *oeuvre* throughout his life in accordance with his changing beliefs and political circumstance. Most importantly, whilst Benivieni had been closely associated with Lorenzo, Poliziano, Ficino and Pico della Mirandola in the 1470s and 1480s, sharing their interest in Platonic theories of love and in translating classical texts, he became one of Savonarola’s most loyal devotees in the 1490s. In this section I therefore use Benivieni’s Simonetta as a case study, investigating how his portrayal of her changes over time and

reflecting on what this can tell us about the influence of moral and political reform on Florentine poetry over this near-sixty-year-period in the city's history.

It is logical to presume that Benivieni's two 'Simonetta sonnets' began life as occasional works, intended to console Giuliano following the death of his 'beloved'. Benivieni's verse, much of it Petrarchan-style love poetry, had been in circulation since before 1472, but his first attempt at putting it together as a *canzoniere* dates to 1489 (Roush 2002: 96-97). Entitled *Canzone e Sonetti di Girolamo Benivieni fiorentino*, the collection is, as Leporatti puts it, 'pervaded with an intense adhesion to Ficino's principles of love' (2002: 69), and contains eighty-one compositions by Benivieni, his vernacular translation of Poliziano's Latin rendering of Moschus's 'Amor fugitivus', a sonnet by Lorenzo, Poliziano and Pandolfo Collenuccio respectively, from a *tenzone* in which all four took part, and one further component by his brother, Domenico. Among these eighty-six pieces, which demonstrate the extent to which Benivieni's literary concerns at the time mirrored those of the Laurentian poetic *avant garde* and his privileged position within that group, are the earliest extant copies of 'Se morta vive ancor colei in vita', and 'Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è 'l chiaro sole'. In this initial form, the sonnets laud Simonetta's beauty and console Giuliano with the thought that she is in a happier world, where he will join her after his own death. As demonstrated by the transcription below,²² there is no ambiguity here as to the fact that the poems refer to an actual woman, lamented in Petrarchan and Platonic language, and that they were originally composed in the courtly genre of the *lirica in mortem*. They are, in fact, the only compositions in the entire *canzoniere* to belong to this type, suggesting the poetic and political significance that they (and Simonetta) held for Benivieni and his readers.

²² It is necessary to transcribe Benivieni's sonnets in full in order to appreciate how he later reworked them.

‘Ad Giuliano de’ Medici. Consolatione per la morte de Simonetta’

Sonetto quinto

Se morta vive ancor colei che in vita
Tanto a’ tuoi occhi lachrymosi piacque
Mentre che in queste humane membra giacque,
C’hora son terra in poca petra unita,

Felice è in grembo al suo Factor salita
Ad riveder la Patria ove ella nacque;
Ivi lieta si gode, ivi si tacque,
Quasi huom che torni a sua strada smarita.

Ivi ancor la vedrai più che mai lieta,
Più che mai bella, poi che in terra el velo
Lasserai di tua veste inferma et egra.

Et se Morte benigna e’l suo pianeta
L’han posta ad più felice stato in Cielo,
Pon fine al pianto, e del suo ben t’allegra.

Per la morte della Simonetta. In persona de Giuliano de’ Medici

Sonetto Sexto

Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è’l chiaro sole
Che già gran tempo vi fe’ lume in terra,
Ma ben lasciato ha’l cor qui in pianto e ‘n guerra
Ché di Morte et d’Amor si piange e duole.

Spent'hor son le belleze unice [*sic*] e sole,
Ch'un freddo sasso le ricuopre e serra,
Ma ben vive el disio, ch'el cor m'afferra
Con più salda cathena, che non suole.

Lasso, e ben so che vana è la speranza
Veder lei più, mentre el corporeo velo
Mirar tanto alto a' nostri occhi contende;

Ma se, nel brieve tempo che ci avanza,
Priego mortal là su si stima o intende,
Spero ancor viva rivederla in Cielo.

(Transcribed in Leporatti 2008: 218- 219)

The reader should also note that Benivieni 'published' the anthology in manuscript form, thereby choosing the more refined, exclusive option. Everything about these sonnets, therefore, from the means by which they were circulated, to their titles, to the texts themselves, is suggestive of a poet very much at home in the pseudo-courtly world of Laurentian Florence: committed to the task of revitalising the Tuscan vernacular, fascinated by Platonism, and an intimate of Lorenzo, Giuliano and Poliziano. This was, we should not forget, the same author who had played a key role in the *Bucoliche*, with its overtly classical themes and Medicean message, and whose *Canzona d'amore* remains one of the most significant testaments of the impact of Platonic theories of love on Florentine poetry of the fifteenth century.

The fact that Benivieni went on to rework these sonnets, completely removing from them all trace of Simonetta, is indicative of the sweeping political and cultural changes that were

taking place in Florence in the mid-1490s and early 1500s. He was, moreover, far from alone in his conversion to the Savonarolan cause, since the majority of the surviving poets and intellectuals associated with Lorenzo also joined the movement (Polizzotto 1994: 119, 143). This mass conversion becomes all the more striking when one takes the Ferrarese preacher's anti-classicism into account. For Benivieni and those like him, becoming a follower of Savonarola not only meant supporting his religious and political convictions but entailed the wholesale rejection of the values with which their work was infused. In art, Botticelli has (rightly or wrongly) come to symbolise this sense of spiritual crisis and repentance, abandoning his naked Venuses for 'mystic' images of the Nativity and Crucifixion (Steinberg 1977: 19-25). In poetry, his counterpart is Girolamo Benivieni.

Evidence of Benivieni's growing interest in the Savonarolan movement can be documented as far back as April 1494, which saw the publication of the second edition of the *Bucoliche* and Benivieni's removal of all classical terms from his eclogues in favour of their Christian equivalents (Weinstein 1970: 216-217). In the years that followed he was also responsible for translating Savonarola's works into Italian and Latin, for the preamble to the monk's *Compendio di rivelazioni*, and for composing a number of *canzoni* to be performed at Savonarolan festivals, including one that was sung as the Bonfire of the Vanities burned (Polizzotto 1994: 144 and Dall'Aglio 2010: 45). It is with his 1500 *Commento di Hieronymo B. sopra a più sue canzone et sonetti dello amore et della bellezza [sic] divina*, however, that the full extent of Benivieni's conversion becomes apparent, and nowhere more so than in his reinterpretation of the sonnet, 'Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è 'l chiaro sole'. In this radical reworking of his earlier compositions, revisions to the poems themselves and a self-commentary are used to erase all traces of Benivieni's courting of women. Instead, Benivieni insists, we are to understand the travails of his poetic persona as the struggle of the soul to

reach God, a reinterpretation that provides a middle ground between the Neoplatonic themes of his verse and his newfound Savonarolan vocation. In the new context of this ‘poetic production charged with patristic piety and an ethical-didactic intent’, as Roush puts it (2002: 98), what was formerly a ‘Simonetta sonnet’ must undergo a drastic transformation. Shorn of its title and largely rewritten, this poem’s sun is now ‘supercelestes Dio benedectio’ (46v), and the voice that speaks is no longer that of Giuliano de’ Medici but of the soul who longs to return to God:

Sonetto V (Parte Seconda)

Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è el nostro sole
Che già gran tempo ci fe’ lume in terra,
Ma ben lasciato ha el cor che, in pianto e’n guerra,
Di sé, dell’alma e del suo vel si duole:

Del suo corporeo vel che l’alme et sole
Beltà a’ nostri occhi involve, absconde et serra;
Di sé, che co’ suoi strali più non atterra
L’alma; di lei, che’l cor seguir non vuole.

Et perché io so che vana è la speranza
Di veder quel mentre el corporeo velo
Sguardar tanto alto a’ nostri occhi contende;

Se dentro al breve corso che ne avanza
Priego alcun per Lui, mosso in Lui ne ascende,
Spero anchor nudo en sé vederlo in cielo.

(46v- 47r)

Simonetta has been simply written out of Benivieni's poetic history. Indeed, the fact that no Florentine copy of his earlier Laurentian *canzoniere* has survived suggests that the poet's assertion in the 'Proemio' to the *Commento* that he had burned his earlier work may not be metaphorical (Leporatti 2008: 175). Added to this, the decision to have the work published in print is not only redolent of a convert keen to spread the Savonarolan word but of a poet intent on refashioning his literary and religious identity in front of the widest possible audience. This is a very public renunciation of his earlier ideals, and of Simonetta along with them. This 'editing out' of Simonetta is notable, moreover, for the year in which it occurred, which represents something of a watershed moment for her depictions in poetry. 1500 was the second occasion that the *Stanze* was published in print in Florence, and the last time until 1513, when the Medici had returned to power. In the same year, Antonio Tubini, Lorenzo Alopa and Andrea Ghirlandi, who had also been responsible for releasing the *Commento* and the 1500 edition of the *Stanze*, began to distribute the final Florentine copy of Luigi Pulci's *Giostra*, and the last documented version of the *Morgante (st. f.)* that would be published in the city until *circa* 1514.²³ Simonetta and her poets were losing their cultural and political significance as the Republic became better established, the memory of the Medici domination of the city faded, and Savonarolan ideas regarding love poetry, classical studies and the role of women continued to be of great influence

By the time that Benivieni published his *Opere* in the Florentine edition of 1519 the political and cultural scene had again altered drastically. The Medici, with whom he was again on friendly terms, had been back in control for several years, making this an apt moment to reassert his standing as 'a patriarch of Florentine letters' who had collaborated with Lorenzo,

²³ I am indebted to the Censimento delle Edizioni Italiane del XVI Secolo (EDIT16), available at <http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it/web_iccu/ihome.htm>, for providing the data for these observations.

Poliziano and Pico (Leporatti 2002: 78). This explains the reappearance in the *Opere* of, among other things, the ‘Amor fugitivus’ and the eclogues, the inclusion of a series of texts praising Lorenzo, and the first print publication of the *Canzona d’amor*, complete with Pico della Mirandola’s commentary. Benivieni begins, once more, to address ‘real’ people. For example, we find a ‘Deploratia’ for the death of the poet Feo Belcari, a ‘Consolatoria’ addressing the humanist Ugolino Verino on the loss of his son, and a sonnet composed ‘Nella morte della Falchetta de’ Rinuccini’.

Yet what at first glance appears to be evidence of a wholehearted return to the values of the Laurentian literary world is far from being so. Although the volume was intended to ‘re-launch the ideal of philosophical and amorous poetry that had flourished at the time of Lorenzo and Ficino’ (Leporatti 2002: 78), Benivieni manages to do this whilst remaining loyal to his Savonarolan beliefs. The *Canzona*, for example, is preceded by a prologue that dissociates the poet from the ideas expressed within it; the translation of an elegy by Propertius is given what Leporatti terms a ‘moralistic appendage’, denouncing Cupid as a symbol of sexual love (2002: 78-80); and the one poem that celebrates a contemporary woman, ‘Dimmi ove sono, ove sono hora, Falchetta’, was written for a woman who, as the sonnet itself states, was married. This is not, furthermore, the original version of the sonnet, which dates to 1477 and is preserved in Codici Gianni 47 in the Florentine State Archives. Here, lines 7-8 run not ‘onde anchor piove / nel tuo sposo a ognor qualche saecta?’ (Benivieni 1519: 116r-v), but ‘onde anchor piove/ ne’ l’ingordo mio cor qualche saecta?’ (53r), pas being in love with Falchetta before proposing the more chaste alternative that is recorded for posterity in the *Opere* (Leporatti 2008: 196-197). Benivieni’s views on love and sexuality have, we must infer, seen no real change in the years since the *Commento* was published.

It comes as no real surprise, then, to discover that the Simonetta poems do not reappear in their original form, even in an era when, if the publication in Florence of two editions of the *Stanze* in 1513 and 1518 is anything to go by, she was enjoying something of a return to political and cultural relevance. What we do find is a curious reworking of ‘Se morta vive ancor colei che in vita’, which becomes a ‘Consolatoria a sé medesimo per la morte di messer Domenico suo fratello’:

Se morto vive anchor colui ch’in vita
Troppo certo al tuo cor fu grato et piacque
Mentre ch’in quest’humane membra giacque,
Ond’era al suo disio la via impedita;

Se lieta et in grembo al suo fattore salita
Quest’anima gentil, dov’ella nacque,
Se da quest’impie ad quell’nitid’acque
Ti chiama alletta ogn’hor lusinga e ‘nvita;

S’ivi fruir la puoi più che mai bella,
Volendo poi che ‘l mal tessuto velo
Rotto fia di tua veste infetta et egra;

Apri hormai gli occhi, et per la via che quella
Ti scorse in terr’a lei tornand’ in cielo,
Pon fine al pianto, et del suo ben t’allegra.

(115v- 116r)

Two things stand out from this reinterpretation. Firstly, there is the far more moralistic tone: Benivieni did not just love his brother a great deal, as Giuliano loved Simonetta in the first

version of the poem, but was *too* fond of this mortal being whom he knew was doomed to die (2); and when Benivieni consoles himself with the thought that his brother's 'anima gentil' (6) will appear 'più che mai bella' (9) when he meets him once more we know that he is referring to the nobility of his soul, whilst the identical assertion made about Simonetta refers equally to her physical beauty (10). On top of this, there is the (literal) excision of the feminine in the first line, transforming 'Se morta vive ancor colei che in vita' into its masculine equivalent, and mirroring the elimination of Simonetta that characterises the entire text. Although Leporatti (2008: 194) states that the explanation for Benivieni's re-dedication of the poem is simply utilitarian, it is just as valid to see it as evidence of the permanent changes that Benivieni's Savonarolan experience had wrought upon his poetry, which were not erased even with the return of the Medici.

Benivieni was still struggling to reconcile poetry, religion and politics as late as 1532, the *terminus ante quem* for the final, unpublished revision of his *Commento* (BRF MS 2811), written in conjunction with his grandnephew, Lorenzo (Ridolfi 1964: 228; Leporatti 2008: 152; Leporatti 2012: 392). He had laid the groundwork for this new project via a series of deletions and corrections to his copy of the 1500 edition, from which he carefully excised all allusions that might offend Florence's Medici rulers (Ridolfi 1964: 222-226). As Ridolfi points out, Benivieni was in no sense renouncing Savonarola; on the contrary, he attempted to convert Giulio de' Medici to the cause both before and after he became pope. Benivieni was, rather, softening the stridently political aspects of Savonarolism to further the 'martyred prophet's' religious aims (1964: 227). The new draft of the *Commento* continues in this vein (1964: 224), and also has much in common with the moralising aspects of the 1519 *Opere*. Most notable is the reworking of the Platonic *Canzona d'amor*, which here takes the form of a *Canzone [...] dello amore celeste e divino secondo la verità della religione Christiana e della*

fede catholica, ‘realizzando un progetto comune di revisione dell’opera rimasto inattuato per la morte precoce [di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola]’ (Leporatti 2012: 374). Transcribed and published by Sears Jayne in 1984 (164-179), it mirrors the original closely in terms of style, structure and subject matter, thereby ‘[heightening] the central difference between the two poems’ (158-159), the later work designed as a rebuttal and rejection of its predecessor. According to Benivieni’s preface to the *Canzone [...] dello amore celeste e divino*, in writing it he set out to discern ‘lo oro dello amore christiano dalla alchimia dello amore platonico’, thus atoning for the youthful error that saw him abandon ‘la verità della christiana religione’ and sojourn instead ‘nella academia di Platone’ (BRF MS 2811, 93v; quoted in Jayne 1984: 165). In other words, much as in the *Opere*, Benivieni returns to the theme of love but in a manner that rejects the ‘sinful’ stance proposed in his earlier work. Similarly, we find that the reference to ‘amor’ (4) has been reinstated in ‘Sparito, occhi mie’ lassi, è ’l nostro sole’, only to be scorned as the obstacle ‘il quale serra ora con la sua [tepidità] gli occhi dello intellecto’ and so prevents them from contemplating the ‘vere belleze [sic] di Dio’ (BRF MS 2811, commentary, 25v):

Sparito, occhi mie’ lassi, è ’l nostro sole
Che già gran tempo ci fe’ lume in terra,
Ma ben lasciato ha ’l cor che ’n pianto e ’n guerra
Di sé, del’alma et del suo amor si duole.

Di amor, che gli occhi al’increase in sole
Sole vere belleze ingrato hor serra,
Di sé, che co’ suoi strali più non atterra
L’alma, di lei che più obbedir non vuole.

E perché io so che vana è la speranza
Di veder quel mentre il corporeo velo
Sguardar tanto alto a' nostri occhi contende;

Se dentro al breve corso che n'avanza
Priego alcun da Lui mosso alLui transcende
Spero anchor nudo e 'n sé vederlo in cielo.

(25v)

Beyond salving his poetic conscience, Benivieni had more forward-thinking reasons for this reinterpretation of his past works, having perceived that 'in quegli anni stava fermentando qualcosa di nuovo, e che con la nascente voga di un petrarchismo spirituale la sua voce poteva tornare a farsi ascoltare in tutta la sua autorevolezza' (Leporatti 2012: 396). At the end of his life, firm in his religious and moral convictions, Benivieni was still using his 'Simonetta sonnets' to adapt to changing cultural times. He had no wish, however, to acknowledge the woman who had once been his muse.

Girolamo Benivieni's amendments to his 'Simonetta sonnets' provide us, therefore, with a particularly fascinating insight into how Florence's cultural protagonists responded to the vast changes that were taking place around them. From Laurentian and Ficinian love poet, via fervent Savonarolan convert, to literary grandee who had made his peace with the Medici and his poetic past but remained profoundly altered by his association with the Ferrarese preacher, Benivieni's experience mirrors that of the city in which he spent his life. It also grants us a fresh perspective on how the depiction of women changed to match the moral concerns of the day. For a committed Savonarolist such as Benivieni, it was no longer acceptable, even in 1532, to vaunt his literary connection to a woman so linked in print to a man who was not her

husband, no matter that he was a Medici. She was no longer a fit representative for Florentine achievements and, despite the re-publication of the *Stanze* after Medici rule was resumed, she never entirely regained her previous political and cultural significance. Florence, beset by so many crises and changes in fortune, and having suffered the loss of Lorenzo, Poliziano and the Pulci brothers, had moved on, and Simonetta's one surviving poet had written her out of his *oeuvre*. The Laurentian adulation of feminine beauty that had so captured the poets and artists of Benivieni's generation was well and truly over.

CHAPTER FIVE

SIMONETTA, BOTTICELLI AND PIERO DI COSIMO:

THE COMMODIFICATION OF BEAUTY IN EARLY RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

Introduction

The previous four chapters have demonstrated the significance of the poetic Simonetta to the history of Florentine vernacular literature and culture. Yet for most she remains best known for her legendary connection with Botticelli, a myth that can be traced as far back as the works of John Ruskin (1906: 483-485) and Walter Pater (1986: 39). It was with Aby Warburg's seminal study of the *Primavera* and the *Birth of Venus*, however, that the idea gained a proper scholarly footing. Focusing on the resemblance between Poliziano's description of Simonetta and Botticelli's Flora, along with Vasari's somewhat tentative declaration that a portrait by the artist belonging to Duke Cosimo de' Medici was 'said to be' of Giuliano de' Medici's 'innamorata', Warburg claimed that several works by Botticelli commemorated Simonetta (1999: 133-142). The notion was leapt upon by followers of the nineteenth-century 'cult' of Botticelli, who proceeded to identify Simonetta in every Botticelli female (Levey 1960: 304). Despite fierce opposition from Herbert Horne (1987: 52-54), the legend continued to flourish until 1945, when Ernst Gombrich published his 'Neoplatonic' reassessment of Botticelli's oeuvre. For Gombrich and his colleagues, Ficinian theory was the key to understanding the paintings, with the Simonetta myth being a distracting irrelevance without a 'shred of evidence' to support it (1945: 9-10). Simonetta fell largely out of art historical fashion for some years, only to be rehabilitated by Charles Dempsey's 1992 re-examination of the *Primavera*, which agreed wholeheartedly with Warburg (1992: 123-160). This, in turn, has led to a resurgence of interest in Simonetta's 'role' in Botticelli's *oeuvre*,

epitomised by Giovanna Lazzi and Paola Ventrone's declaration that, from the banner the artist painted for Giuliano's joust onwards, 'il suo volto, idealizzato [...] rimbalzò come un'ossessione nella pittura del Botticelli, prestando i lineamenti di volta in volta a Veneri, Palladi, allegorie femminili, Madonne, fino alla Beatrice dei disegni per la Commedia dantesca' (2007: 49).

It is easy to dismiss such assertions as romantic, but there is at least one piece of documentary evidence for the existence of some kind of depiction of Simonetta, even if flood damage makes its interpretation tenuous. I refer to the much-debated letter that her father-in-law, Piero Vespucci, wrote to Lucrezia Tornabuoni from his cell in the Stinche in 1479, following his imprisonment for alleged involvement in the escape of one of the Pazzi conspirators. Amongst his desperate pleas for help, Piero appears to state that he gave Simonetta's 'immagine', along with all of her clothes, to Giuliano in return for money and other unnamed favours (Schmitter 1995: 52, n. 28). Alas, he gives no other details regarding the work's creator or its medium. In other words, there may well be something to the legends that link Simonetta to visual artists of the day, but we have no proof as to what form such a 'portrait' may have taken, or who was responsible for it. Attempts to ascertain whether Simonetta, or some archetypal representation of her, was truly Botticelli's model are, therefore, intriguing but ultimately fruitless, and have the unfortunate consequence of distracting attention from more answerable questions. I do not intend to add to the ink that has already been spilt in this endeavour, but neither can I ignore the fact that a large body of Renaissance paintings has been associated with Simonetta. As I shall prove, there are other interesting things to explore about these works besides whether or not Simonetta is actually represented therein. How, for example, can we explain the affinities between her portrayal in

verse and the way in which women are depicted in the visual art of the day, if we question the idea that her portrait has survived?

The answer lies in the commodification of female beauty in this period, and the manner in which it was used to advance particular social, political and cultural agendas. This phenomenon was felt beyond the borders of Florence, but manifested itself in specific ways within the city. I shall demonstrate how this was so in three stages, via analysis of individual ‘Simonetta paintings’. The first section of this chapter deals with the most famous paintings to have been connected to Simonetta, namely Botticelli’s *Primavera* (circa 1482; figure 17) and *Birth of Venus* (circa 1485; figure 19). Both Poliziano’s Simonetta and the artist’s mythological female figures were essential in crafting a verbal and visual language of *fiorentinità*, conveying the city’s pride in its cultural achievements and heritage, and its ‘flourishing’ under the Medici. Central to this argument is a discussion of how Botticelli created the artistic expression of Poliziano’s cult of *docta varietas*, or ‘learned variety’. Much as Botticelli was influenced by his poetic counterpart, however, he also uses Flora and Venus to make the case for the superiority of painting over verse.

Section Two examines the series of portrait-like images, created by Botticelli and his workshop, which have in the past been identified as likenesses of Simonetta. These include the National Gallery’s *A Lady in Profile* (circa 1490; figure 21), a very similar image owned by Tokyo’s Marubeni Corporation (figure 22), the Berlin Gemäldegalerie’s *Profile Portrait of a Young Woman* (circa 1475-80; figure 23), the *Idealised Portrait of a Lady* (circa 1480) belonging to the Städel Museum, Frankfurt (figure 24), and the privately-owned *Allegorical Portrait of a Woman* (figure 25). These are not ‘standard’ portraits of particular women, but genre-flouting depictions of generic, idealised beauties, or ‘ideal heads’. What I am concerned

with here is how these images demonstrate the value, both moral and monetary, that beauty had acquired in its own right in late *Quattrocento* Florence. As Poliziano and Botticelli both knew, there was money to be made in concocting a blend of ideal womanhood that combined chastity and sensuality to erotic effect. At the same time, it could be used to convey the splendours of Medicean Florence, and to suggest deeper philosophical meanings.

The final work under discussion is Piero di Cosimo's *Simonetta* (Musée Condé, Chantilly; figure 26). Scholars have dated it to anywhere between the early 1480s (Geronimus 2006: 55; Tazartes 2010: 31) and the second decade of the sixteenth century.²⁴ Notwithstanding this chronological uncertainty, the piece bears none of the hallmarks of post-Leonardo painting in Florence, and plays with the idea of the profile portrait, a form that was outmoded even in the late *Quattrocento* (Brown 2001b: 14). This strongly suggests that it belongs to the early phase of Piero's career, and thus to the late *Quattrocento*. I begin by reconsidering the authenticity of its inscription, 'Simonetta Ianuensis Vespuccia' ('Simonetta Vespucci of Genoa'). I accept that the evidence points towards its being original but reject the notion that the work is a literal likeness of the noblewoman. Moving beyond polarised approaches to *Simonetta* that characterise her either as the embodiment of innocence and virtue or as emblematic of sexual depravity, I embrace her ambiguity, comparing her to Giorgione's equally ambivalent *Laura* (figure 27). This *Simonetta* is at once lustful Egyptian queen and virtuous lady, depending on whether the viewer chooses to indulge his baser appetites or to contemplate divine beauty. Even the proverbially lovely *Simonetta* had the potential to be both beautiful and lethal, an implication that resonates with several of the 'Simonetta poems'.

²⁴ Duncan Bull, personal communication.

Poliziano, Botticelli and Imitation

Chapter Four (139-140) made the case for interpreting Poliziano's Simonetta as the embodiment of a Florence flowering under its 'Lauro', and as the 'patriotic' centrepiece of a *cento* formed from the interweaving of vernacular poetry, Latin literature, philosophical theories, and even ancient and contemporary art. From Aby Warburg onwards, scholars have rightly argued that there is a connection between this Simonetta and the strikingly similar Flora of Botticelli's *Primavera*. Most, however, are happy to accept the notion that the resemblances point to Simonetta's presence in both works. Likewise, the correspondence between Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and Poliziano's ekphrastic description of the same scene has fuelled speculation that the poet served as the painter's 'humanist adviser', dictating the themes and composition of his creations (see, for example, Warburg 1999: 90-91; Bull 2005: 201; and Cecchi 2005: 152). This, in turn, has led to the legend that Botticelli's Venus and the historical Simonetta are one and the same, or that the latter's features can at least be traced in the visage of the nymph on the image's right.

But there is another, more plausible explanation for the relationship between these most famous of Botticelli's works and the *Stanze*. Its origin is to be found in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century debate as to what might constitute a uniquely Florentine style of art and poetry, and in the creation of a verbal and visual language that expressed the city's cultural aspirations, and its pride in its literary and artistic achievements. Poliziano's beliefs about the role of imitation in literature, as expressed in his famous letter to Paolo Cortesi, are central to our understanding of this phenomenon. Building on Cristoforo Landino's approval of multiple literary models, Poliziano dismisses those, like Cortesi, who seek greatness through the slavish imitation of Cicero. True self-expression, he contends, lies in eclectic

imitation, or *varietas* (McLaughlin 1995: 173, 202-203). It is a theory that Poliziano puts into practice in works both Latin and vernacular, but nowhere more so than in the *Stanze*, which abounds with such anti-Ciceronian imagery (McLaughlin 1995: 213). Most important for our discussion here is the emblem of flowers of many colours, which Poliziano himself had explicitly equated with his cult of *docta varietas* in his 1473 *Elegy to Bartolomeo Fonzio* (McLaughlin 1995: 191-192). Simonetta, it should be noted, appears in ‘un fiorito e verde prato’ (I.37.6), wearing a dress that is ‘di rose e fior dipinta e d’erba’ (I.43.2), and bearing a garland ‘di quanti fior creassi mai natura’ (I.47.3). When she departs the scene, white, blue, yellow and scarlet blooms spring up beneath her feet (I.55.7-8). Even her face is ‘dipinto di ligustri e rose’ (I.44.6) and her lips are like ‘vïole’ (I.50.5). In this, and in the sheer number of echoes and quotations that make up her poetic being, Simonetta is the culmination of Poliziano’s use of eclectic imitation, the floral embodiment of *varietas* and of the flourishing of Florence.

The impact of such ideas went far beyond the realm of literature. As David Hemsoll has argued in relation to Giuliano da Sangallo (2003) and to Michelangelo (2012), artists and architects were equally concerned with expressing this new sense of *fiorentinità*, mingling prototypes and styles to develop a composite mode of self-expression that was uniquely Florentine. Botticelli’s contribution to this movement has, until now, remained largely unexplored. Nonetheless, if we study from this perspective his mythological paintings, and especially his depiction of women within them, he emerges as profoundly eclectic a figure as Poliziano. He, too, uses beautiful female figures as the apex of a celebration of all things Florentine and Medicean, and it is in this that we can find a more nuanced explanation for the parallels between Simonetta and the ‘painted ladies’ who have become associated with her.

The *Primavera* is a case in point. Whilst its lack of a coherent narrative has long perplexed scholars, its quotation from multiple sources is designed not to pose a riddle as to its meaning (see, for example, Poncet 2008: 535) but to assert Florentine achievement under Lorenzo. As Aby Warburg noted, the right-hand side of the painting is largely inspired by Ovid's description in his *Fasti* of the rape of the nymph Chloris by Zephyrus, and her subsequent transformation into Flora, the goddess of flowers (1999: 118-124). He also points out the significance to the cast of characters chosen of an Ode by Horace, the words of Seneca, Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, and Alberti's *De Pictura* (1999: 112-129). Yet other critics are confident that Botticelli cast his net of allusion far wider, drawing on works of both ancient and contemporary origin, and, whilst not all such interpretations are necessarily correct or directly relevant, many are convincing. For Marmor, for example, 'the *Primavera* is a visual variation on a theme from Dante, inspired by Landino's interpretation of the Earthly Paradise episode' (2003: 206). Acidini, meanwhile, finds the origins of Botticelli's fascination with plants and flowers in Pliny's *Natural History* (2009: 79). Dempsey (2012: 31) and Barolsky (2000: 32), on the other hand, are interested in how the work's female figures conform to vernacular poetic conventions of feminine beauty. Elsewhere, Barolsky connects Flora with Petrarch's floral Laura in his sonnet CXXVI, 'Chiare, fresche et dolci acque' (1994: 15), and Cole makes a case for the importance of the poetic *locus amoenus* (1998: 28-29). Barolsky is right, then, to state that the *Primavera* is 'saturated with poetical allusions [...] the first large-scale painted *poesia* of the Italian Renaissance' (1994: 21-23).

Still, this should not detract from the impact of visual works of art on the *Primavera*, the most obvious case being the ancient prototypes that inspired Botticelli's take on the Three Graces. Beyond this, Warburg (1999: 126-127) leads the way once more with his discovery of the similarities between Botticelli's Flora and the Uffizi's first-century AD statue of Pomona/

Flora, as noted in Chapter Four (142). Acidini Luchinat makes a similar observation regarding the second-century Farnese Flora (2001: 34). Other scholars have been just as assiduous in making connections between Botticelli's painting and works of the *Trecento* and *Quattrocento*, with varying degrees of justification. Zöllner, for instance, discusses the 'compositional parallels' that link the *Primavera* with Buonamico Buffalmacco's early fourteenth-century fresco of the *Triumph of Death* in Pisa's Camposanto (2005: 77-78). It is to the Camposanto that Luchs also turns, in this case to a maenad on a sarcophagus that may have provided an 'early model' for the central Grace (1980: 369). Garrard (2010: 95-96) and Cole (1998: 29) deal with the garden as a motif in *Quattrocento* Tuscan art. For Randolph, it is Donatello's statue of *Dovizia* that is the ultimate source for Botticelli's dynamic female figures (2002: 44-47). Beyond painting and sculpture, Barolsky relates the 'natural architecture' of the 'column-like trees' to contemporary classicising architecture, such as the porch of the Pazzi Chapel (2000: 6). For Cole, the 'ornamental naturalism' of Netherlandish tapestries is also a key point of reference (1998: 30).

Some critics even make connections between the *Primavera* and wider social and theatrical customs. Jayne (1993), for instance, argues that the dance of Three Graces is not mere artistic invention but gives permanent form to Lorenzo's *bassadanza*, 'Venus'. Dempsey is won over by the idea that the costume worn by the *Primavera*'s protagonists is directly descended from 'festival garb' (1992: 53). Whilst the destruction of the original garments means that such an assertion must remain speculative, there is certainly an affinity between the *Primavera*'s orange grove and Leone de' Sommi's description, in the fourth dialogue of his *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazione sceniche*, of how best to evoke a pastoral summer scene on stage. He advises, in fact, 'che con giudicio siano finti quei monti, quelle valli [...] od altre cose tali che vi occorrono facendo i lontani con le osservazioni prospettive', leaving

in front ‘tanto loco piano, a guisa di un prato fiorito, per recitarvi sopra ordinariamente quanto è larga una gran scena’. Fronds, flowers, and ‘arbori fruttuosi’ are also essential (1968: 66-67). The similarity between these edicts and the bowers, flowering meadow and hint of a distant landscape that characterise the *Primavera* is striking, suggesting that theatre may have shaped the painting’s depiction of an ideal pastoral scene.

There is, of course, no guarantee that all of these critical perspectives are accurate, or that Botticelli intended the viewer to connect the *Primavera* with every poem, work of art or tradition outlined above. Few paintings, indeed, have aroused such disagreement as to source material and meaning. That said, it is highly likely that some, if not many, are correct, a stance that is supported by an awareness that the Botticelli of the early 1480s was abandoning the doctrine of naturalistic imitation in favour of an approach to painting that ‘seems to have been founded on the related premises that art should be based more resolutely on the achievements of past artists, and that it should be attuned more attentively to the pursuit of beauty [...] adapting past prototypes to the formal principles of beauty that had been laid down by Ficino’ (Hemsoll 1998: 69-70). Botticelli, in other words, believed that art should imitate art, combining manifold archetypes in a quest for beauty that was as eclectic as anything that Poliziano had to offer.

The *Primavera* emerges from this reading as being as multi-layered as the *Stanze*. Whilst critics such as Burroughs, Poncet and Dempsey may argue for the supremacy of one text above all others (Poncet 2008: 535; Burroughs 2012: 71), or try to reconcile perceived ‘inconsistencies’ by reading the painting as ‘a species of *carmen rusticum*’ (Dempsey 1992: 49), there is no need to choose between sources, or to invent complex theories to explain its ambiguities. In other words, the multiplicity of the *Primavera*, and the ‘episodic’ positioning

of its figures, is an end in itself. Not only this, but the action takes place on a meadow carpeted with many types of flowers, which, as we have seen, was one of the images that Poliziano used to signal the presence of *varietas*. Even the individual plants convey this doctrine of multiplicity. This is true both in the sense that flowers that would ordinarily bloom in Tuscany at any time between March and May are here depicted as blossoming at the same moment, and by dint of the fact that Botticelli often combines the leaves and corollas of different species on a single stem, ‘which makes it seem as if the painter had assembled the various vegetal elements, either studied from life or taken from sketchbooks and herbals, in the studio’ (Acidini 2009: 74). What we are witnessing is Botticelli’s creation of a visual language of *fiorentinità* to match the poetic style that Poliziano had woven together in the *Stanze*, a pastiche of Florence-related literary, visual and theatrical sources that privileges none but pays tribute to all.

This approach freed the artist to ‘pick and choose’ the deities that he wished to portray, rather than leaving him bound to any one mythological narrative. This meant that, in one and the same scene, he could combine Venus, Mercury and the Three Graces. This is significant for the associations that each god would have triggered in its original viewers. Venus was not only the goddess of beauty, love and spring but was also credited with inspiring the Arts (Arscott and Scott 2000: 5; Tipping Compton 2009: 111-116). Mercury was similarly connected to literary and artistic activities, as is made clear by Andrea Alciato’s Emblem XCIX, in which the winged messenger presides over the Arts (Alciato 1626: 142-143), and by mid-fifteenth-century engravings attributed to Baccio Baldini of the planet Mercury and his children, who are shown variously painting the façade of a palace, sculpting portrait busts, printing and discussing books, and listening to an organist perform. The Three Graces, as we saw in Chapter Four (141), were similarly equated with beauty and civic harmony. The fact,

moreover, that Mercury is portrayed as clearing the sky suggests that he is intended to be understood as an allegorical peacemaker dissolving the cloud of Discord (Acidini 2009: 81). In other words, Botticelli has filled his painting with divinities of artistic endeavour and social accord. The *Primavera*, then, lauds Florence's literary, artistic and social achievements in an image that is the distillation of the city's cultural heritage.

Much like Poliziano's Simonetta, Botticelli's Flora, with her garlands, lapful of roses and flower-studded dress, embodies this floral celebration of all things Florentine. As Acidini has explained at length, 'Flora qui "è" Firenze, la città personificata che, assunte le sembianze del suo gentile e sempiterno spirito floreale, può nuovamente rallegrarsi profondendo il suo tesoro di rose coltivate *flore pleno*' (2010: 103). It is Lorenzo, moreover, who has brought about this transformation, as Botticelli conveys by presenting Flora as sheltered by, and flourishing beneath, laurel and orange trees, the citrus fruit being a well-known Medici symbol (Ames-Lewis 1979: 128-129; Cox-Rearick 1984: 79). Furthermore, she is far from being the only floral nymph to appear in Botticellian art of the era, as works in the National Gallery (*An Allegory, circa 1500*; figure 28) and Musée du Louvre-Lens (*Venus and Three Putti, late-fifteenth century*; figure 29) testify. These panels, of dubious attribution, depict reclining Venus-like figures with flowing blonde locks, attired in white dresses and accompanied by three putti. What is most interesting for the purposes of the present study is that the action takes place on a flower-covered meadow, from which rose bushes grow and behind which a city and river valley can be perceived. The putti, too, play with roses that they have gathered from a basket full to bursting with the blooms. In the National Gallery panel, additionally, a putto presses a bunch of grapes to the nymph's swelling belly, and what appears to be a pomegranate nestles under her arm, both redolent of fertility. The walls, bridge, towers, and San Miniato-al-Monte-like church make the city in the background of the image look very

much like Florence's Oltrarno. A close examination of the work suggests that the settlement once extended to the other bank of the river, again resembling Florence. It is possible, too, that the city depicted in the Louvre-Lens painting is also intended to be read as an idealised vision of Florence. This is significant because, as Luba Freedman has recently claimed, 'the representation of the Arno Valley in Florentine culture can be seen as ideological - a means of acknowledging the Medici family for cherishing and protecting Florence and its surroundings' (2013: 201). This all points to a reading of the paintings as using flowery female figures to personify Florence's flourishing under the Medici, providing further evidence for supporting a similar interpretation of Botticelli's Flora. Moreover, if the figures are indeed meant to be Venus, this suggests that we are being encouraged in all three works to identify the goddess as the mother of this new Rome, which is thriving under her protection (see Tipping Compton 2009: 9 on such representations of the goddess in the political propaganda of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici). We can trace similar ideas in Poliziano's *Stanze*, in which Venus and Cupid take an especial interest in the affairs of Florence and its most powerful family (II.2-16). It is no wonder, then, that Poliziano's Simonetta and Botticelli's Flora should be so alike, since both are designed to celebrate Florentine achievement under Lorenzo, and rely on *varietas* and imagery of flowers and fertility to do so.

There is little doubt that poet and artist moved in similar circles, and were searching for ways to express the ideas discussed therein. It does not follow, however, that Poliziano was Botticelli's 'humanist adviser', since the *Primavera* is far from being an illustration of the *Stanze*. Flora, in fact, provides evidence not simply of Botticelli's emulation of Poliziano but also of his attempt to prove that painting rivals poetry in its ability to convey love's mystery and power, as Leonardo was to claim a few years later (1947: 34). What is significant here is Botticelli's invention of a pictorial mode for conveying the metamorphosis of the virginal,

fleeing Chloris into the married, triumphant Flora. This is all the more startling since the *Fasti* do not actually describe this transformation; it is entirely Botticelli's creation, a declaration of his right to be awarded the same status as the greatest of poets (Barolsky 1994: 23). Even more astonishing is the subtlety with which Botticelli expresses this miraculous change. He did not paint two separate narrative scenes to tell the story, in the manner of mid-fifteenth century Apollo and Daphne *cassone* panels (see, for example, the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, *Daphne Pursued by Apollo/ The Metamorphosis of Daphne*; figures 30-31). Nor did he imitate Antonio del Pollaiuolo's take on Daphne and Apollo, which depicts the nymph mid-metamorphosis (National Gallery, *circa* 1470-1480; figure 32). Instead, he captures the entire narrative arc in a single scene, using the lightest of touches. Rather than portraying Chloris/Flora as a hybrid figure, *alla* Pollaiuolo, he suggests her violation by visualising the 'aura seminalis' of Zephyrus's breath, which streams from the wind god's mouth and enters that of Chloris, which instantly gives forth flowers (Barolsky 2000: 29). Equally suggestive of this immediate transformation are the silhouettes of flowers that can be glimpsed through the nymph's transparent drapery (Barolsky 2000: 30-31). One of the flowers that blossoms from Chloris' mouth merges with Flora's dress, even as her streaming hair and flailing arms overlap with her new incarnation, conveying her ultimate transformation into Flora. This ingenious metamorphosis is every bit as wondrous as Simonetta's apparition in the *Stanze*, using one image, rather than several verses, to express the transformative power of love, and in the process silencing those detractors of painting who criticised the form for its inability to relay a sequence of events. The *Primavera*, in other words, is the perfect illustration of Leonardo da Vinci's defence of painting:

Qual poeta con parole ti metterà innanzi, o amante, la vera effigie della tua idea con tanta verità, qual farà il pittore? Quale sarà quello che ti dimostrerà i siti de' fiumi, boschi, valli e campagne, dove si rappresentino i tuoi passati piaceri, con più verità del pittore?
(1947: 30)

The left-hand side of the painting contains a similar assertion of Botticelli's capacity to outdo the finest love poets of his day. Again, three protagonists are involved, but this time it is Cupid, Mercury and the central Grace, identified by Bull as Thalia, the youngest of the sisters (2005: 202-204), who command our attention. As many critics have noted, Amor's flaming arrow points directly at Thalia who, as if already pierced by the dart, is distracted from her dance by the oblivious Mercury, who is too absorbed in his meteorological endeavours to notice her melancholy gaze. What we have, in other words, is a tale of unrequited love which, like the *Stanze*, depicts the moment of *innamoramento* and the subsequent pain of unreciprocated desire. When we add to the mix the combined presence of Venus, Cupid, Flora and the Three Graces, all deities of beauty and love, it becomes clear, in the words of Dempsey (1992: 53), Barolsky (1994: 21-23) and Elam (2012: 233), that the *Primavera* is a painted love poem, but one that brooks no suggestion that visual art is inferior to literature. Marmor asks whether the *Primavera* could be 'Botticelli's attempt at a "paragone": a tour de force intended to demonstrate that the painter can- as Leonardo would later seek to demonstrate [...] - rival the poet' (2003: 2009). The answer is an emphatic 'yes'.

But there is another reason for the similarities between the poetic Simonettas and the women of the *Primavera*. In this case, it has to do with the way in which female figures in art and poetry were used to establish and promote norms of feminine loveliness and comportment. In the words of Lilian Zirpolo, 'works of art such as the *Primavera* [...] served as visual tools to provide women with models of expected behaviour and, at the same time, as reminders of their lesser role in society' (1991-2: 27). In order to understand how this was so,

it is important to bear in mind the reasons for which such a panel painting was commissioned in late fifteenth-century Florence. As John Kent Lydecker argues in his influential thesis of 1987, most moneyed (male) Florentines would embark on a scheme of decoration for a suite of rooms when they married. The *camera*, or chamber, ‘stood out as the symbolic and decorative centre’ of this new unit, and as ‘the concentration point for art in the home’, not ‘a mere empty space into which a certain number of objects were placed, more or less at random’, but ‘a complete decorative environment of considerable complexity’ (1987: 166-167). The works of art located within this locus of familial identity were carefully chosen to please the eye, impart moral instruction, and convey the virtue of the inhabitants (Rubin 2000: 33).

Three pieces of evidence suggest that the *Primavera* was created for such a context. First, it deals explicitly with themes of love and marriage, characteristic of works commissioned to celebrate a union. As Tipping Compton has pointed out, moreover, Botticelli’s goddess of love is the celestial Venus, Boccaccio’s Venus Magna, who inspires the concord and desire necessary for a prosperous marriage (2009: 114-115). Second, the first documented reference to the *Primavera*, in the 1499 inventory of the heirs of Giovanni di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, finds it in a *camera* belonging to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, mounted in the *spalliera* of a *lettuccio* (Dempsey 1992: 21-24). Since daybeds, and the panel paintings designed to decorate them, were generally purchased when a chamber was renovated for a newly espoused couple (Lydecker 1987: 252), this is a further indication that it was produced with such a purpose in mind. Many critics believe, in fact, that the painting was commissioned to celebrate Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco’s wedding to Semiramide Appiani of July 1482 (see, for example, Zirpolo 1991). It should be noted that there is no certainty that Lorenzo’s chamber was its original location, but given the scale of the *Primavera* and the fact that it was fashioned from poplar

wood, as was typical for *spalliera* panels, we can reasonably expect its 1499 setting to reflect its initial function.

The third clue is provided by a highly unusual *cassone* panel painted in around 1490 by Jacopo del Sellaio, now in the Abegg-Stiftung in Riggisberg (figures 55-56). Such chests were provided by a wealthy new husband to store his wife's trousseau and decorate the bridal chamber, and thus were specifically commissioned in the run-up to the nuptials (Strocchia 1998: 46-47). This particular *cassone* depicts the story of Cupid and Psyche, but with one intriguing addition: it contains 'una vera e propria ripetizione della parte centrale della *Primavera*' (Miziolek 2010: 76). The Three Graces dance in their diaphanous *camicie*; Venus, attired in the robes of her Botticellian counterpart, strikes the same pose and makes the same gesture of welcome; Zephyrus chases Chloris; and Flora steps forward with her lapful of flowers (Miziolek 2010: 76-77). The composition is not identical, but the viewer is clearly intended to recognise the source material. This suggests not only the fame that the *Primavera* had garnered but also, given that this quotation appears on a wedding chest, that the painting was associated with, and had been commissioned for, a marriage.

This being the case, the idea that the *Primavera*'s intended audience was male (Dempsey 1992: 157) tells only half the story. As critics such as Paola Tinagli (1997), Patricia Rubin (2000), and Jacqueline Marie Musacchio (2008) have explored at length, the works of art that decorated a Florentine *palazzo* were designed to be viewed by men and women alike, and to be instructive as to the roles that both were to play in upholding the honour of their union, and ensuring the smooth functioning of civil society. Venus, then, invites husband *and* wife to her realm of love and marriage. Beyond this, the female viewer was intended to absorb a number of other, gender-specific messages. Although, as Garrard states, it is the male figures who

‘initiate the significant movements of the painting’, whilst the ‘superabundant females are merely acted upon’ (2010: 103), it is Venus who dominates the painting. Feminine charms, Botticelli suggests, may only hold sway within the dream world of this *hortus conclusus*, and by extension within the domestic realm, but they are essential to a marriage. Even here, nonetheless, the female deities are shielded on all sides by vigorous males, who further enclose them within the orange grove. A woman’s place is in the home, the painting implies, whilst her passive nature is to be guided, protected and subjugated by her more dynamic partner.

We should not forget, moreover, that the *Primavera* depicts a rape, however metaphorical the insinuation. Whilst abhorrent to modern-day audiences, this was a recurrent motif in marriage-related art of the period (Zirpolo 1991-1992: 26). This is not to say that the painting should be read as an encouragement to violate women; far from it, particularly in a society in which women’s honour was dependent on their virginity before marriage and their chastity after it. Rather, the implication is that, as the terrified, stumbling Chloris is transformed into the radiant, literally blossoming Flora, a woman must submit to her husband in order to guarantee a happy and fruitful union. More than this, though, her submission ensures social order and stability, allowing Florence to flourish like the *Primavera*’s meadow, and to become the stamping ground of deities of civic harmony and cultural prosperity (Zirpolo 1991-1992: 26). Flora and Simonetta, then, both embody this same ideal of fertile, floral femininity, expressing the beauty and chastity required of women in Laurentian Florence.

The same method of analysis can be applied to the *Birth of Venus*, another of the mythological works of Botticelli with which Simonetta is frequently associated. Yet what most links Simonetta to this most famous of paintings is, once again, the employment of

varietas and sensual female beauty to celebrate Florentine and Medici achievements. A brief run-down of the visual sources that critics have identified as being an influence on the work demonstrates how Botticelli combined a multiplicity of ancient and modern precedents in an intricate game of allusion and counter-allusion. This is nowhere more evident than in the figure of Venus herself. Her connection to classical statuary, and to Pliny's description of Apelles's famous painting of Venus emerging from the sea, is clear (Bull 2005: 207). She is, however, far from being simply a 'genuine *Venus Pudica*', as Panofsky puts it (1972: 192). Even remaining within the realm of ancient art, it is evident that the painting draws just as much on the common classical trope that saw Venus depicted as standing or reclining on a shell. Whilst the painting, moreover, hails the Laurentian revival of interest in ancient culture, it also quotes from a myriad of Florence-related works of art. Acidini, for example, focuses on how Venus's hair borrows from the snaky locks of the Farnese Cup's Medusa, the prize piece of Lorenzo's collection of antiquities (2011: 115). Hemsoll, on the other hand, is interested in Botticelli's adoption of Ficinian precepts of beauty, analysing how Venus, with her 'clearly defined outlines and smoothly applied coloration', is designed 'to call conspicuous attention to her beauty, and thus to her identity as the personification of divine love as a philosophical ideal, and as a metaphorical embodiment of the most noble of all earthly desires' (1998: 70).

Literary sources have an equally important bearing on our understanding of the *Birth of Venus*. It is useful to begin, once again, with Warburg, the first to conduct a detailed examination of the impact on the painting of Poliziano's 'donzella non con uman volto' (I. 99.6) and, by extension, that of the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. He also draws attention to the significance of Alberti's instructions as to how to depict tresses rippling and twisting in the breeze (1999: 90-102). Schumacher, by contrast, is convinced that the painting's reliance on lineal elegance and 'striking contours' was inspired not by medieval art but by Pliny's

praise of linear styles in the *Naturalis historia* (2009a: 24). Given what we now know of Botticelli's eclectic approach to his source material, all of these readings could be true. Garrard is right, then, to maintain that Venus is 'a figure self-consciously striking a pose steeped in literary [and, we might add, artistic] signification' (2010: 113). Like Poliziano's Simonetta and the women of the *Primavera*, Venus is a complex mosaic of references to ancient art and literature, and to the poetry, painting and philosophy of *Trecento* and *Quattrocento* Florence. She is a visual assertion of the city's supremacy in classical learning, art and verse, and is another example of Botticelli's skill in crafting an artistic language of *varietas* and *fiorentinità*.

As with the *Primavera* there is a sense that Botticelli is paying homage to Poliziano and his *Stanze*, but also that he is attempting to surpass poetry. The *Birth of Venus* may bring to painted life Poliziano's description of the goddess with her divine beauty, accompanying zephyrs and molluscan mode of transportation (I.99.5-8), but it is no mere illustration of the text. Botticelli asserts this independence via a number of variations and inventions. First, as Zöllner notes, whilst Poliziano's Venus covers her breast with her left hand, Botticelli's does so with her right, a reversal that allows him to follow the *Venus Pudica* type (2005: 136). He is not simply copying the work of a poet, he implies, but claiming his place in a long and distinguished line of artists, and reinventing an ancient visual tradition in the process. Second, there is the fact that Botticelli's Venus is greeted not by the three *Horae* of the *Stanze* (I. 100-101), but by a sole nymph-like figure. By diverging so obviously from the poem, he clearly wanted the viewer to notice and appreciate the differences, creating a work that both enriches, and is enriched by, one's knowledge of the text, whilst standing alone as a work of artistic genius. The painter is not in the service of the poet, but is his equal, even his superior, summoning into being an exquisitely beautiful, utterly Florentine Venus in an image that

distils several stanzas of verse into one radiant creation. Botticelli is not just staking a claim to being the Poliziano of painting, however; as the first artist to create a large-scale depiction of the nude Venus since antiquity, not to mention the first to show her at the moment of her birth, he is clearly positioning himself as the new, very Florentine Apelles (Schumacher 2009a: 23-24). If Ugolino Verino's 1488 declaration that Apelles should "not be indignant that Sandro is now equated to him" (Schumacher 2009a: 24) is anything to go by, this is exactly what his contemporaries came to believe him to be.

Botticelli's removal of all but one of the waiting nymphs also served a compositional purpose, allowing him to create a triangular grouping that intentionally echoes Florentine depictions of the Baptism of Christ, most particularly that created by Ghiberti in around 1403 for the North Doors of Florence's Baptistery (figure 33), and Verrocchio's Uffizi *Baptism* of the 1470s (figure 34). In the words of Toby E. S. Yuen, 'Botticelli's composition retains the essentials of the familiar scene', from 'the shallow parallel plane on which the figures are evenly disposed with the water landscape steeply tilted behind them', to 'the central placement of the divinity balanced on either side by attendant figures' (1969: 176). The customary angels are replaced by Botticelli's zephyrs, and the Baptist with his outstretched arm becomes the nymph with her mantle (1969: 176). This is, of course, one more instance of Botticelli's employment of *varietas* to celebrate all things Florentine, John the Baptist being the city's patron saint. More than this, though, by inserting Venus and her companions into this religious scene, he lends her a sense of the sacramental, transforming this symbol of the Arts into the 'secular saint' of the rebirth of classical culture in the city. In this light, Botticelli's decision to replace Poliziano's *Horae* with their white dresses (I.100.5) with one florally-attired nymph takes on a precise meaning. We are looking, in other words, at another personification of Flora-Fiorenza, who in this case welcomes Venus to a Medicean orange

grove (Acidini 2010: 82). This is Florence as the new Athens, offering a flourishing, Medici-protected home to the goddess of beauty, love and art, much as the city had received the exiled scholars of Constantinople and styled itself accordingly as the refuge of Greek civilisation (2010: 82). That this represents the inauguration of Venus's mission in the city, and in the Western world more generally, is made clear by the bulrushes in the left-hand corner of the painting, redolent as they are of baptism and spiritual rebirth. All of this takes its place, moreover, alongside a fifteenth-century literary conceit, common to Lorenzo's sonnet LXV and to carnival songs, which calls upon Venus to come forth to Florence (Tipping Compton 2009: 152-153). The painting's depiction of rivulets lapping at the short green turf of the shoreline is, in fact, so close to Lorenzo's invocation to the goddess to come to her new 'patria' 'sopra il ruscello, / che bagna la minuta e verde erbetta' as to suggest that Botticelli intended to pay tribute as much to the Medici ruler's verse as to his beneficent effect on Florence. In the *Stanze*, the *Primavera* and the *Birth of Venus*, then, *varietas* and beautiful female (floral) figures are used to create a language and imagery of *fiorentinità*, lauding the cultural achievements of the city and its Medici overlords.

Beyond such elevated concerns, the appeal of the *Birth of Venus*, much like that of the poetic Simonetta, was predicated on its capturing of the blend of chastity and sensuality that was the ultimate in late-*Quattrocento* glamour. Venus's naked physicality must have been startling to the painting's original audience, particularly when combined with the erotic charms of her abundant hair, long, loose tresses being considered dangerously alluring and ensnaring at the time (Rogers 1988: 63). Yet her gaze is unreachable, and her head inclined in the attitude that Leonardo associated with feminine restraint and decorum (Rubin 1999: 184). She even attempts to cover herself, indeed is about to vanish beneath the mantle proffered by Flora. She is the goddess of love but, here at the moment of her birth, is still essentially a

modest virgin. Replete with Ficinian connotations of divine love she may be (see, for example, Panofsky 1972: 195), but, contrary to Garrard's assertion that she 'projects [...] opposing messages of divine chastity and human sensuality' (2010: 94), there was nothing contradictory for her fifteenth-century viewers in her embodiment of purity and seductive allure. Rather, this restrained yet 'sexy' combination was highly marketable, creating images that were both pleasingly erotic and sufficiently respectable to decorate a *palazzo*. This is attested to by the sheer number of late *Quattrocento* Venus-like 'femmine ignude' that have survived, despite the predations of the Bonfires of the Vanities and the intervening centuries. Several of these have been attributed to Botticelli's workshop, not surprising given the insistence of Vasari, Antonio Petrei and the Anonimo Magliabechiano as to the artist's pre-eminence in the field (Mascalchi 2011: 228). The fact that Lorenzo di Credi (Sframeli 2003: 45) and Lorenzo Costa (Dette 2009: 238-239) jumped on this highly successful bandwagon is a further indication of the popularity of such paintings. Both Botticelli and Poliziano, then, were masters in the art of depicting simultaneously chaste and sensual women, teetering on the boundaries between the earthly and the divine.

We can therefore conclude that the affinities that bind Poliziano's Simonetta to the mythological women of Botticelli lie in the unprecedented capabilities of poet and artist in creating a verbal and visual language of *fiorentinità*, which perfectly expressed the city's cultural preoccupations. It also allowed for a suitably elevated celebration of Florence's 'flourishing' under the Medici. They succeeded, moreover, in depicting female figures in such a way as to conform to contemporary notions of proper feminine behaviour, whilst still creating highly marketable images that appealed to fifteenth-century ideals of beauty and sensuality. Botticelli emerges from this assessment not as the illustrator of Poliziano's humanist instruction, but as a proud painter determined to assert the value of his medium.

There is no doubt that his works were the product of the same intellectual ideas and discussions that inspired Poliziano, but he should be treated as making an important contribution to such debates in his own right.

Botticelli's 'Ideal Heads'

So what of the series of portrait-like, Botticellian images that have been associated with Simonetta? What can they tell us about how and why representations of ideally beautiful women became so characteristic of late fifteenth-century Florentine art? Again, what interests me here is not to assess whether they portray Simonetta, but to understand why these images of beautiful women held such appeal, and to make sense of the affinities between these 'Simonetta paintings' and the 'Simonetta poems'. As we shall see, the paintings conform to some of the conventions of portraiture, and yet are not meant to be interpreted as 'standard' portraits of particular women. Rather, they are depictions of generically lovely female subjects, 'ideal heads' that mark the initiation of a new genre that was to find its most famous embodiment in the *Cinquecento* works of Titian and his Venetian compatriots (see, for example, Syson 2008). Leaving aside Piero di Cosimo's controversial *Simonetta*, whose complex imagery merits a discussion in its own right, our corpus is made up of five paintings by Botticelli and his school or workshop. A further image, attributed to Filippino Lippi, also appears to correspond to this type, but since it remains unauthenticated, shows evidence of later additions,²⁵ and is traceable only to a black and white copy in the Witt Library, it will play no further part in my discussion.

The Botticelli paintings that are the focus here are typically analysed as an homogenous group, more or less identical in function and meaning. Monika Schmitter's 1995 article,

²⁵ My thanks to Duncan Bull and Paul Taylor for this observation.

which deals with the examples in the National Gallery, the Gemäldegalerie, and the Städel Museum, exemplifies this approach. There is much to admire in Schmitter's important assessment of these works, but it does not tell the entire story. First, although the images have much in common, they are by no means directly comparable. We are looking, in fact, at three distinct types. The paintings in the National Gallery and Marubeni Collection appear to owe their existence to a sadly lost prototype, perhaps by Botticelli himself, so similar is the attire of their subjects and their overall composition. The worldly Berlin lady's clothing and hair bears little relation to that of her British and Japanese counterparts. The Frankfurt painting, by contrast, seems to be the fruit of pure fantasy. Finally, the Kisters Collection's so-called *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady* appears, at first glance, to depict a woman, framed by a marine landscape, expressing milk from her breast. However, a technical examination has proved that the image in its original state actually resembled a merging of the National Gallery, Marubeni and Frankfurt ladies, with breast, hands, arms and pastoral panorama the result of later modifications by Botticelli's workshop (Schumacher 2009d: 160-163). This suggests that such images were mass produced, but adapted to suit the proclivities of a particular buyer. This is a further indication that the paintings do indeed portray 'ideal heads' rather than specific women, but that they were designed with subtly different aims in mind. Each type warrants a separate assessment, which this chapter provides. Second, I take issue with Schmitter's belief that the works 'transform an actual woman [...] into an ideal based on Petrarchan poetry' (1995: 33). I shall argue, instead, that what we have in front of us is the fruit, like Botticelli's mythological women, of a distinctively late fifteenth-century commodification of female beauty, which draws on Petrarch's fantasy of ideal femininity but updates it in line with *Quattrocento* notions of restrained sensuality.

The Marubeni and National Gallery images, which teeter between the real and ideal, provide the starting point for my argument. On the one hand, as Schmitter demonstrates, several of their features suggest that they were intended to be read as portraits. Their dimensions, for example, are characteristic of late-fifteenth century portraiture, as are their architectural backdrops, and the near-profile alignment of the women's bodies (1995: 34-36). The pendant that both ladies wear, moreover, is relatively conventional (1995: 37), resembling, say, that displayed by Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni in Ghirlandaio's depictions of her. Since such jewels were a marker of marital status and class (Tinagli 1997: 51; Musacchio 2008: 9), this detail lends the women a precise social identity. Yet other attributes of the paintings appear to have arrived directly from the realm of fantasy. To begin with, the women face right rather than left, thereby disregarding one of the most fundamental rules of the era's profile portraiture. Their hair bears a passing resemblance to that typically modelled by women in portraits of the day, but the fabric that is woven into it has more in common with the coiffures sported by the three goddesses in the Botticellian *Judgement of Paris* owned by Venice's Palazzo Cini Gallery (figure 35). The abundant pearls that stud their braids are similarly atypical, as is the hint, more pronounced in the Marubeni painting, of long, swirling tresses. Most striking are the billowing mantles, draped over each lady's left shoulder, and the purple scarves that adorn their right arms.

It is these two traits that provide the most significant clues as to how we should interpret the works. As Leone de' Sommi was to recount in the mid-sixteenth century, 'un manto sontuoso, che da sotto ad un fianco si vadi ad agroppare sopra la oposita spalla' (1968: 52-53), was *de rigueur* when creating a theatrical costume for a nymph. If the goddesses of the *Judgement of Paris* and the Three Graces in Botticelli's Villa Lemmi frescoes (figure 36) are anything to go by, moreover, this 'look' was already well established by the last quarter of the

fifteenth century. We are meant to interpret the Marubeni and National Gallery women, then, as part nymph. The Kisters lady, with what was originally ‘a diagonally draped togalike robe’ (Schumacher 2009d: 162), also conforms to this type. The significance of the scarves is harder to assess. Thinner, gauzier versions are to be found on the *Birth of Venus*’s Flora (figure 20) and on the allegorical figure that decorates the *verso* of the National Gallery painting (figure 37), but the more substantial variety that embellishes the London and Tokyo ladies is unprecedented. Jane Bridgeman, however, may well be right in her suggestion that they have to do with jousting and favours.²⁶ There is a reasonable likelihood, therefore, that the women are being associated simultaneously with courtly pursuits and nymph-like apparel.

The National Gallery painting’s allegory sheds further light on how to interpret them. There has been some debate as to the significance of this winged figure, who is preparing to take flight from a rocky pinnacle surrounded by dense forest, and who holds an armillary sphere in one hand and what appears to be a clump of moss in the other (Zöllner 2005: 57-58). However, the general consensus is that it has to do with virtue, resurrection and immortality. Dülberg and Zöllner, for example, are more or less united in their belief that this angelic being, who has climbed the mountain of purification, ‘conveys the idea that the sitter, a paragon of virtue in life, will earn immortality’, and is about to reap the rewards of her purity by soaring heavenward. The trees are a Dantesque representation of the ‘earthly vale of sorrows’, the moss ‘a sign of eternal renewal’, and the sphere a ‘symbol of hope and eternity’ (Dülberg 1990 cited in Schmitter 1995: 48; Zöllner 2005: 57-58).

What we have here, then, are the remnants of a particular type of image of women that is intentionally evocative of portraiture, but at same time relates its subjects to classical glamour,

²⁶ Personal communication.

chivalric spectacle and supreme virtue. In other words, it is the painted equivalent of the poetic Simonetta, celebrated at once as courtly Lady, otherworldly nymph and chaste wife. As Poliziano found the literary means to capture the courted beauties of *Quattrocento* Florence and all that they represented for the city, so Botticelli and his workshop cultivated a similar aesthetic in paint. Both express civic pride in the loveliness of these distinctively Florentine beauties, celebrating ‘the city as the birthplace of divine and thus eternal beauty’ (Weppelmann 2011: 121; see also Ajmar and Thornton 1998: 148-149 and Syson 2008: 249 on the praise of local women in Renaissance Italian art). Far from being merely the expression of a generic Petrarchan ideal (Schmitter 1995: 45-46), these paintings are rooted in late-fifteenth century Florentine concepts of feminine loveliness and communal honour.

The Berlin lady is related to her British and Japanese counterparts, but differs too much simply to apply the same conclusions. In one sense, the painting is closer to standard portraiture than the Marubeni and National Gallery images, since not only does it contain a similar architectural backdrop but the woman portrayed faces left, following conventions regarding the orientation of female figures in such works. Her clothes, moreover, are devoid of nymph-like attributes, and appear to reflect the actual fashions of the day far more closely than any of the other works under discussion in this section. Her simple string necklace is comparable to that worn by the informally attired lady in Botticelli’s portrait of a woman in the Pitti Palace (*circa* 1475-1490; figure 38), and so may well be an accurate representation of the more casual styles reserved for the home. Yet it also accentuates the wide expanse of opalescent flesh that it encircles, and by extension the relatively low-cut neckline of the gown that it accessorises. Furthermore, as Schmitter points out, the woman’s bust is unusually large for the genre, ‘[drawing] attention to the female body in a way not usually seen in chaste portraits of wives, daughters, and mothers’ (1995: 39-40).

It is, however, in her unruly coiffure, a ‘tumbling profusion’ of bejewelled braids, cosmetic hair and sinuous tresses, in which the painting’s real erotic power lies (Simons 1995: 308-309; see also Rogers 1988: 63 on the sexual connotations of unbound hair). This near-fetishistic obsession with elaborate female headgear seems to have been peculiarly Florentine, and goes far beyond the limited Petrarchan descriptions of golden locks rippling in the breeze to which Schmitter (1995: 46), Clayton (2002: 143) and Gnann (2010: 284) look to explain the phenomenon. Acidini is nearer to the mark in stating that the ornate hairstyles of the women of Verrocchio, Leonardo and Piero di Cosimo ‘reflected a contemporary Florentine fashion, either genuine or yearned after, that held sway in the last quarter of the fifteenth century’ (2009: 76), and to which Michelangelo was later to return (Gnann 2010: 284). Leonardo, whose drawings of women often pay far more attention to hair than to facial features (Clayton 2002: 150), provides a further explanation. Next to a 1505-1506 study of the *Head of Leda*, complete with intricate braids, is a ‘curious note’, stating that “‘this kind [can be] taken off and put on without being damaged’”. The implication is that he associated such hairstyles with wigs (Clayton 2002: 154), presumably those worn by performers for plays and feast days. Such ephemeral events have left frustratingly little trace on the historical record, but the available evidence suggests that men played the majority of female roles in pageants and spectacles, particularly if any potentially revealing or provocative attire was required. For example, during the first of the *intermedi* staged for the 1589 wedding of Grand Duke Ferdinando de’ Medici and the French princess Christine of Lorraine, women interpreted only three of the twenty-one female roles, with their male colleagues selected to represent Venus and the Moon, among others (Warburg 1999: 364-365). Alternatively, as recorded in Marino Sanuto’s description of the Venetian carnival of 1530, courtesans might be called upon to appear as nymphs (Santore 2008: 20). Such dangerously alluring headdresses were, in other

words, never adopted by 'respectable' women. In all of these aspects, then, the Gemäldegalerie woman is far more sensual than her cohorts in the Marubeni Collection and National Gallery.

Her relatively lively expression is also worth bearing in mind. All of the images discussed so far place their women in front of a window, recalling the voyeuristic pleasure of Iulio's illicit encounter with the sensual Simonetta of the *Stanze* (I.38-56), and implying that the viewer is intruding into their private, domestic space. What the Berlin painting does is to combine this suggestion of prohibited gratification with the more forthright mien of its subject, who could almost be conversing with someone just outside the picture frame, perhaps her lover. Her dishevelled hair, particularly her long, unravelling ponytail, and the imperfect fastening of her sleeve that exposes more than a hint of undergarment, lend an extra frisson to this insinuation by suggesting a state of partial undress. Yet her appeal lies chiefly in her power to imply far more than she actually reveals. She may hint at the delights that lie beneath her dress and at the favours enjoyed by those with such privileged access, but she remains aloof, unreachable and almost entirely covered-up. The fact that she is not in strict profile, her right eye just visible to the viewer, adds to this tantalising effect (Schmitter 1995: 40). Profile portraits of women, fast going out of fashion in Florence, were particularly associated with chastity due to the subject's averted gaze and upright bearing (Brown 2001b: 14). By employing this outmoded format and then subverting it, the artist emphasises both the lady's chastity and her potential to engage with the spectator, rendering her at once distant and available (Schmitter 1995: 40). It is exactly this play on sensuality and respectability (Schmitter 1995: 48-50) that characterises Poliziano's Simonetta and, as we have seen, goes a long way to explaining the connection between the painted and poetic women of the day.

The Städel Museum lady takes this characteristic to its extreme. She certainly cuts the most fantastical and idealised figure of any of the women, her high forehead, pale skin and rosebud lips conforming closely to Petrarchan conventions (Brown 2001c: 182). The extent of this romanticisation of her feminine charms has recently been revealed by research into a drawing in the Ashmolean (WA1863.613; figure 39), generally attributed to a follower of Botticelli. Until recently, the work was judged to be a later copy of the Frankfurt ‘Simonetta’, which simplified much of the master’s exquisite detailing and exchanged the delicacy of the subject’s beauty for a heavier physiognomy. However, infrared reflectographs have revealed preparatory drawings beneath the Frankfurt painting’s surface that support the idea that the sketch preceded it. To quote Melli, ‘what needs to be stressed here is that the drawing seems to match the stage of the painting’s elaboration that preceded the introduction of [...] *pentimenti*, which is to say, the initial version of the painting as conceived in the preparatory drawing’ (2009: 105-106). The ‘imperfections’ of the model were thus ‘smoothed out and regularised’ to a quite striking degree as Botticelli completed the image, substituting her anxious stare, blunt nose and prominent chin with dreamy serenity (Melli 2009: 105-106). The Frankfurt lady was clearly intended to be the ultimate *Quattrocento* ‘pinup’, to borrow from Joanna Woods-Marsden’s assessment of the work (2001: 68).

Other features of the painting further distance it from reality. Gone is the portrait-like architectural framework common to the other ‘Simonettas’, to be replaced by a plain back background, which serves the dual purpose of rendering the woman even more ethereal (Zöllner 2005: 55), and of giving the picture an explicitly antique appearance by mirroring the colour scheme of the cameo that she wears as a pendant (Weppelmann 2011: 120). The inclusion of this ancient gem, a copy in reverse of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli’s carnelian depicting Apollo and Marsyas, is worthy of discussion in its own right.

Although it belonged to the municipality of Florence in 1428, it changed hands and locations many times over the course of the fifteenth century, only returning to Florence in 1487 when it was purchased by Lorenzo (Körner 2009: 67). The uncertain dating of the painting leaves us, as Schumacher points out, with two possible theories as to its insertion here. If the picture was created in the earlier 1480s, explaining why Botticelli worked from a casting of the work rather than the original, the cameo would be read purely as a ‘learned allusion to humanistic knowledge of antiquity’ (Schumacher 2009c: 154-155). This notion is supported by Botticelli’s re-imagining of the material from which it was fashioned, replacing its reddish-brown with black and white, and thereby underlining the lady’s radiant profile and statue-like presence. The painting would then be read as yet another ‘self-confident’ attempt on Botticelli’s part to assert the importance of his medium in the revival of ancient art forms, and ‘to measure himself against classical sculpture’ (Schumacher 2009b: 152-154). In its pairing of a delicately-coloured and seemingly ‘alive’ woman with a ‘manufactured’, monochrome gem, it is even possible to read the work as a Leonardesque assertion as to the primacy of painting over sculpture and bas-relief (see, for example, Leonardo 1947: 42-43), with Apollo, god of the higher Arts, triumphing over baser imitations of his attributes as represented by the upstart Marsyas. It is worth pointing out, moreover, that the artist may have chosen the painted cameo’s colour scheme not only for its visual impact but because he simply was not aware of its inaccuracy. After all, the carnelian had not been seen in Florence for many decades, with copies taking the form of bronze plaquettes that gave no hint of its colouring (Brown 2001b: 182). On the other hand, if the picture was completed after Lorenzo acquired the gem it would be legitimate to interpret its role in the painting as being essentially celebrative, lauding Medici efforts to bring the best of the classical world to Florence (Schumacher 2009b: 154-155). The image could then be viewed as functioning

synecdochically, with the beauty of its lady expressing the family's embellishment of the city. Botticelli would certainly not have been the only artist to incorporate a visual reference to the gem in his work, since Bertoldo di Giovanni 'based his representation of Apollo on it and turned the figure into a portrait of Lorenzo' in his *Quies* (Fusco and Corti 2006: 124-127).

In either case, it is clear that we are dealing with an extremely idealised representation of femininity that is more interested in its decorative effect and classical overtones than in portraying a specific individual. The fact that a hint of a breastplate can be glimpsed beneath the woman's robe, making her almost Athena-like, is another indication of the artist's priorities. Indeed, since the lower part of the painting was shortened at some point in its history (Cecchi 2005: 226), it is reasonable to assume that it was once far more evident that the lady was wearing armour. The painting's colossal scale also contributes to its ornamental quality (Schmitter 1995: 36), as does the knowledge that traces of nails can still be observed along the edge of the work, which suggests that it was originally 'integrated into wooden wall panelling', and may have been 'tailored for an elevated position within a lavish arrangement of room decoration' (Schumacher 2009b: 115). The Frankfurt woman is, in other words, even more unattainable than her sisters, an impossibly lovely artistic mirage. Even the slight sense of movement that pervades the piece conveys a sense of 'futile pursuit' (Schmitter 1995: 48). In her combination of vernacular and classical beauty, in fact, she is more like Botticelli's Venus than the other 'Simonettas', a goddess-like figure distilling a number of feminine, cultural and possibly political ideals into a single image.

Yet, in a pattern that is now familiar to us, 'in part it is the woman's chastity, her refusal of the lover, that is sexually exciting', making her 'endlessly desirable' (Schmitter 1995: 49-50). Her body is turned towards the viewer, making her breasts more pronounced (1995: 36,

49-50), and, like her Berlin counterpart, she is just out of her profile, giving ‘the slightest suggestion of the sitter’s availability to engage with the viewer’ (1995: 40). Like the Gemäldegalerie woman, moreover, her stand-out feature is her hair, an even more elaborate vision of feathers, ribbons, braids, jewels and curls, ‘alternatively tightly braided and spilling wantonly loose’ (Woods-Marsden 2001: 68) and thus almost a metaphor for the blend of chastity and eroticism that lends the painting its allure. The profusion of pearls threaded into her coiffure is equally multivalent. As Karen Raber explores in depth, the ‘luminescent whiteness’ of pearls ‘signified purity from biblical and classical times on’, yet, prone to degradation, they could also be shorthand for degeneracy, venality and indulgence in precisely the same sources (2011: 159-163). The Frankfurt lady plays on this ambivalence, bedecked in symbols of a chastity that is as fragile as the gems themselves, at once unattainable and corruptible. The fabulous luxury of her jewels, moreover, brings to mind Bella Mirabella’s comment that whilst ‘the practice of ornamentalism [...] could signal beauty, [...] virtue and good grace’, it could equally ‘drift over the edge of social acceptance into the excessive, seeming deceptive, distorted, or unnatural’ (2011: 3).

The braids that meet between her breasts, another of her more arresting features, are similarly ambiguous. For Simons, they emphasise her ‘curvaceous breasts’ (1995: 308-309), whilst Zöllner is convinced that they suggest that untying them ‘would be tantamount to loosening her clothing’ (2005: 125). This is only part of the story, however. As Schmitter notes, a number of Botticelli’s mythological, allegorical and biblical women share this characteristic with the Städel Museum lady, including *Fortitude* (figure 40), *Judith* (figure 41), the Venus of his *Venus and Mars* (figure 42), and one of the *Primavera*’s Graces (figure 43; 1995: 36). To this list we can also add a blonde female figure on the left of the altar in his Sistine Chapel portrayal of the *Temptations of Christ* (figure 44). We can therefore concur

with Schmitter's assertion that 'such hairstyles belong to an imaginary realm', distancing the Frankfurt 'Simonetta' from social convention and lived reality (1995: 36).

Yet this idiosyncratic trope is not only to be found in the works of Botticelli, and its appearance in prints and paintings attributed to other artists is particularly instructive. Notable among these is Bartolomeo di Giovanni's little-known *Venus* (figure 45), commissioned in 1487 for the marriage of Lorenzo Tornabuoni and Giovanna degli Albizzi, and originally located in what was, in modern parlance, the couple's bedroom (Van der Sman 2010: 69). What is most interesting about the piece and its companion, *Apollo*, is their quite deliberate association with the bride and groom. The god and goddess stand in niches emblazoned, respectively, with the arms of the Tornabuoni and Albizzi families, personifying virtues and qualities that the viewer is meant to associate with the room's occupants. Whilst Lorenzo's courtly cultural ambitions are represented by the *lira da braccio*-wielding deity of poetry and music, Giovanna becomes his Venusian counterpart, complete with modestly-inclined head and lapful of roses. In her newly married state, the work proclaims, she will come to embody Florentine beauty, fertility and virtue. The fact that this *Venus* also models a pair of Botticellian braids that meet between her breasts suggests that the attribute connoted virtuous beauty as much as erotic power. Much the same can be said of the biblical heroine in *Judith and the Head of Holofernes* (British Museum number 1852,0301.3; figure 46), one of the forty-two engravings known collectively as the Otto Prints (*circa* 1470) and attributed to Baccio Baldini (Zucker 1980: 217). This is the second instance, in fact, in which the braids are linked to the beautiful, virtuous Judith, who saves Israel by using her seductive power to seduce and kill the Assyrian general. What this all tells us is that whilst they were clearly viewed as a marker of sensuous allure, such braids also denoted a loveliness in service to a

higher cause, associated with feminine virtue, ideal love and the woman whom Ghirlandaio would later portray as the Florentine wife *par excellence*.

The Frankfurt lady, with her gem-studded tresses, exemplifies this chaste appeal. Her exquisite, ornamental beauty is to be enjoyed as a pleasure for the eye, but it is as cool and impenetrable as the armour that guards her breast. She may be adorned with scarlet ribbons, a ruby and a red underdress, and have the rosy lips to match, but her *gamurra*, feathers, pearls and skin are of the purest white. She shares this dual colour scheme, moreover, with the Venuses of Botticelli's Villa Lemmi frescoes and *Judgement of Paris*. Like Poliziano's Simonetta, then, she is Venus-like in her beauty and sensuality but guards her chastity with the stern resolve of Minerva (Zöllner 2005: 56).

The ideal heads, to conclude, are as indicative of the new value apportioned to physical beauty as the poetic Simonetta. As the exquisite cadences of Poliziano's *Stanze* won him the continued support of the Medici, so Botticelli and his workshop converted this obsession with female charm into financial reward. Poet and artist were equally aware of the limitations within which they had to work, eschewing blatant eroticism for complex, composite images that conformed to contemporary notions of decorum, whilst combining purity and sensuality to arousing effect. They demonstrate, moreover, the extent to which female loveliness was used as a metaphor for the glories of Medici-controlled Florence. Finally, both Poliziano and Botticelli were virtuosic in their ability to suggest that deeper moral and philosophical meanings lay behind their exquisite creations, not the least of these for Botticelli being the Leonardo-style insinuation that painting was poetry's superior in its ability to conjure feminine beauty into life. It is for these reasons that a genuine connection can be made between Simonetta and the 'ideal heads'.

Piero di Cosimo's *Simonetta*

If anything, Piero di Cosimo's depiction of a woman with a naked torso, a snake entwined around her neck and the inscription 'Simonetta Ianuensis Vespuccia' has attracted more attention and controversy than Botticelli's 'Simonettas'. Like them, the image hovers between reality and fantasy, and between portrait and ideal, yet it stands apart for its sheer complexity and for the shades of light and dark that permeate it. Much of the debate surrounding the painting has focused on the authenticity of the inscription. Technical analysis suggests that it may very well be original, yet critics have been reluctant to accept this, citing Vasari's description of the piece as 'una testa bellissima di Cleopatra con uno aspido avvolto al collo' (1976: 71) as proof that the reference to Simonetta was added when the Vespucci purchased it, probably at the end of the sixteenth century (de Boissard 1988: 118-120; Fermor 1993: 93; Forlani Tempesti and Capretti 1996: 100; Tinagli 1997: 75-77; Laclotte and Thiébaud 2003: 93). Some scepticism as regards the art historical claims that have been made about Simonetta is, as we have seen, sensible. In this instance, however, there are compelling reasons for taking a less cynical approach. First, an x-ray of the picture has demonstrated that nothing was ever painted beneath the inscription, leaving an empty horizontal strip five centimetres-long that is not duplicated at the painting's upper edge (Flambard, Kaserouni and Pinault 2003: figure 17, *s.p.*; Syson 2008: 254, n. 38). In other words, *Simonetta* would have made little sense compositionally without the band, which in itself would have had no obvious function without the lettering that surmounts it (Geronimus 2006: 56). The edges of the drapery that covers the woman's shoulders are clearly delimited at its upper border, an effect that was probably emphasised by an incision (Flambard, Kaserouni and Pinault 2003: figure 17, *s.p.*). Its craquelure pattern, moreover, is 'continuous and homogenous with the rest

of the paint surface' (Geronimus 2006: 56). All of the technical evidence thus indicates that the inscription was completed contemporaneously with the rest of the work.

Most scholars, however, remain unaware of Gabriele Donati's discovery of important documentary evidence that also supports this thesis. As he points out, we know from Vasari that in the mid-sixteenth century *Simonetta* was in the possession of the sculptor Francesco da Sangallo, whose father and grandfather had been depicted by Piero di Cosimo in his famous double portrait of *circa* 1485. In 1550-1552, Francesco received the following hand-delivered note from the historian and collector Paolo Giovio (Donati 2001: 82):

Maestro Francesco honorando, jo mandai hier Sereno per la Simonetta, et non fusti in casa. Siate contento, se vi piace, di darla a questo messo, perché non servirà ad altri che a me. Valete. Vostro el vescovo Jovio

It is improbable that the 'Simonetta' in question was a flesh and blood woman, given the 'tono grottesco' that Giovio's request that she be 'given' to his messenger would assume. 'Ben maggiore consistenza assume l'ipotesi di un nome adoperato per indicare sinteticamente un determinato oggetto, nella maniera in cui si diceva "il Petrarca" per indicare il volume del *Canzoniere*' (2001: 82). It seems highly likely, then, that we are looking at a reference to Piero di Cosimo's *Simonetta*, proving that the inscription was almost certainly in place by the time that Vasari recorded the work's presence in Francesco's household. We can therefore state with a fair degree of confidence that the inscription is in Piero's own hand. This is not to say that we are dealing with an accurate portrayal of Simonetta's physical features, Piero having been no more than fifteen years old when she died, although it is possible that the 'immagine' of Simonetta mentioned by Piero Vespucci may have resembled it in some way. However, it does mean that the painting was intended to represent her and the ideas that she embodied,

and it is this assessment of its significance that forms the point of departure for my analysis of the work.

Two principal schools of thought have dominated previous analyses of the *Simonetta*. The first of these, spearheaded by Elisabeth de Boissard (1988), Dennis Geronimus (2006) and Luke Syson (2008), holds that the lady portrayed is a blameless beauty, whose nudity is a metaphor for the purity of her soul. For Syson, for instance, ‘the picture [...] has a wonderful innocence’ (2008: 250). Geronimus is even more gushing in his praise of Simonetta’s ‘marmoreal presence’ and ‘whisper of a disarming smile’, and of the ‘sense of tender innocence [...] reflected in the pert profile’s soft contour and gentle radiance’ (2006: 59). Both are sympathetic to the notion that the figure should be identified as Simonetta (Geronimus 2006: 56; Syson 2008: 250). De Boissard (1988: 120), Michel Laclotte and Dominique Thiébaud (2003: 93), meanwhile, maintain that the snake is a Neoplatonic symbol of death, and that the lady signifies the ideal beauty that is only visible once the spirit has left the prison of the body.

The other faction, by sharp contrast, is convinced that the painting portrays Cleopatra, and thus condemns the sins of lust and avidity. Sharon Fermor is the staunchest advocate of this theory, claiming that the piece was inspired by Boccaccio’s damning portrayal of Cleopatra in *De Mulieribus Claris* (1993: 96). In this reading, Simonetta/Cleopatra is all ‘seductive appeal’, her ‘elaborate, Medusa-like hairstyle [...] an erotic device’, and her pearls a reference to the banquet in which Cleopatra drank a pearl dissolved in vinegar (1993: 96). ‘It may thus have functioned as an image of, and warning against, the vice of *luxuria*’ (1993: 96). Woods-Marsden also detects something ‘Medusa-like’ in this ‘erotically charged pseudo-portrait’ of Cleopatra, an ‘image of female sexuality’ that she characterises as being ‘at the opposite pole

to the inanimate, decorous profiles and chastely controlled hair in portraits of newlyweds' (2001: 68-69). For Tinagli, similarly, the painting becomes 'an exemplum of the dangers of lust', dependent on its 'seductive attractions' for its effectiveness as a 'moral warning' (1997: 75-77). In an intriguing offshoot from the majority approach, Edward J. Olszewski identifies the woman not as Cleopatra but as another woman bitten by a (metaphorical) snake, the unhappy adulteress of Boccaccio's *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*, and thus interprets the painting as 'a moralising tale of marital faithlessness', and as 'a warning to its recipient, perhaps a young bride, to be faithful to her husband' (2002: 9).

The point is that scholars have tended to view the picture either as asserting the power of divine beauty, or as cautioning the viewer against the perils of unbridled female lasciviousness. The fact that it provokes such contrasting readings reveals a fundamental ambiguity in its imagery, one that critics appear to feel the need to dispel. Yet it is in this very ambivalence that the work's power lies. It symbolises neither innocence nor lust alone but portrays both the joys and the pitfalls of love, just as Poliziano focuses on the seductive moment of Simonetta and Julio's meeting, when her beauty and sensuality have the potential to lead the young Medici along the path of virtue or towards his baser instincts. Even the proverbially beautiful Simonetta can be lethal to those who love her, and can encourage them towards vice as well as goodness. Beauty, in sum, can be a blessing, but it can also be extremely hazardous.

The one thing upon which all critics of the *Simonetta* agree is its loveliness and visual appeal. With her white skin, long neck, high forehead, ornately coiffured golden hair and rosebud lips she is very much akin to the Botticelli 'ideal heads'. Set off against the black cloud that frames her face, her luminous beauty is even more remarkable (Geronimus 2006:

59). What are we to make, however, of the figure's nakedness, the snake that encircles her throat and the fact that she appears not in front of a window or monochrome background but is placed outdoors, apparently standing on a cliff in a marine landscape? The association that the work creates between the conventions of portraiture and nudity is certainly startling, but perhaps not quite as unusual as has previously been surmised. Indeed, the fact that the painting so closely resembles a little known marble relief in the style of, or possibly by the hand of, the young Verrocchio (*circa* 1460-5; figure 47) suggests that Piero di Cosimo was drawing on a pre-existent type, largely erased by the Bonfires of the Vanities (Pope-Hennessy and Lightbown 1964a: 168-169; Simons 1995: 303). The survival of an even earlier marble bust, portraying a woman whose classical garment has slipped down to expose one of her breasts, thought to be the product of Bernardo Rossellino's workshop (Simons 1995: 303), is further evidence that such a subgenre pre-dated Piero. The sculptures of Tullio Lombardo, particularly *A Couple* (*circa* 1490, Ca' d'Oro, Venice; figure 48) and the so-called *Bacchus and Ariadne* (*circa* 1505, Kuntshistorisches Museum, Vienna; figure 49), may also point to the existence of once widely accepted but now largely forgotten conventions (see Luchs 2009: 66-69 and Blake McHam 2009: 70-73 for more information on these works). We are evidently missing a great deal of the context that would have helped us to explain the image.

However, we should not underestimate the painting's enticing qualities. As Tinagli points out, the woman's torso is 'slightly twisted towards the picture plane, so that both her naked breasts are offered to the viewer's gaze', as well as being framed by the shawl (1997: 75-77). She may be marmoreal in her opalescence and smooth perfection, but the fold of skin between her chest and upper arm suggests softness and pliability to the touch. Yet Simonetta is equally characterised by her profile alignment and her association with a woman who was dead by the time the work was painted and thus entirely unreachable. She is, moreover, akin to the

Frankfurt lady in her intermingling of white skin and pearls with the scarlet of her rubies and of the drapery that adorns her hair and shoulders. Her elaborate coiffure and multitude of gems, similarly, are counteracted by the hint of a smile that plays about her lips and by her lively upward gaze. What we have here, then, is another figure that teeters between the erotic and the pure, much like the 'Simonettas' of Poliziano and Botticelli.

The same could be said of Giorgione's *Laura* (circa 1506), another alluring woman associated with a literary figure and thus important context for understanding the *Simonetta*. With its semi-naked subject and the extraordinary sensuality of the breast 'nestling' in the fur of her mantle (Anderson 1996: 216), opinion has been 'fiercely divided' as to whether the work is 'a marriage portrait, the companion piece then being missing, or whether the woman represented is a courtesan' (1996: 299-300). Nudity, as we know, could be indicative of both chastity and wantonness, and does not allow us to reach any easy conclusions. The laurel that frames the woman would seem to be a reference to Petrarch, yet even here we are not on solid ground since this is hardly the blonde, idealised beauty of the *Canzoniere* (1996: 216). It could, on the other hand, be 'the laurel of the modest and faithful wife' (Junkerman 1993: 55) if the painting were not so atypical in other ways. The fact that a red robe lined with fox fur is listed in an inventory of Giorgione's possessions suggests that this may be the very item of clothing that we see in the painting, raising the probability that the woman depicted was a model and therefore a prostitute (Schier 2014: 27-28). But the scarf that she wears is the white of chastity rather than the yellow that was the marker of the 'whore' (Anderson 1996: 216). What is more, much like *Simonetta*, the appeal of the image is predicated on such ambiguities, with the woman's gesture suggesting that 'the visual opportunity is momentary and may not last', and her gaze steadfastly refusing to meet that of the viewer (Junkerman 1993: 52). Despite a recent attempt to identify *Laura* with a Venetian noblewoman (Schier 2014), the

painting, like that of Piero di Cosimo, remains essentially unclassifiable and is all the more powerful for it. In both paintings, then, the viewer is supposed to revel in the nudity of the beautiful woman before him, much as Francesco Nursio Timideo lauds Simonetta's 'fulgenti pomi' in his elegy (277-278),²⁷ but her sensuality is tempered and rendered deliberately ambivalent. Simonetta does not embody lust, in other words, but neither is she entirely chaste. To quote Simons, she 'exists on the borders between various categories and is all the more appealing for that' (1995: 305). In drawing these conclusions it is worth bearing in mind that when Piero wanted to portray lust in his *Allegory*, he chose the monstrous, misshapen figure of a mermaid to do so, rather than a beautiful woman (Geronimus 2006: 71; figure 54).

The pastoral scene in front of which Simonetta stands also merits careful consideration. John Graham is convinced that it portrays Portovenere, her putative birthplace (1970: 13-14). Whether or not this is the case, if we accept that the inscription is original it is not beyond the realms of possibility that it is meant to represent the Ligurian coast, particularly given that the painting specifically identifies Simonetta as being Genoese. Fermor, on the other hand, argues that the decision to place the figure in an open landscape is deliberately provocative, and is 'far removed from the enclosed gardens or distant landscapes of conventional female portraiture' (1993: 94). Just how shocking this would have been at the time is up for debate given, for example, Leonardo's predilection for pairing portraits of women with outdoor surroundings. One could, by contrast, read the image's cliff-top setting as expressing Platonic beliefs as to the divine beauty inherent in both nature and the human form (see, for example, Ficino 1987: V.4, 85), thereby stressing the loveliness of the female figure. On the other hand, the wild, untamed landscape has much in common with the bucolic scenes of Piero's

²⁷ It is important to note that Piero di Cosimo may have known the poem, since a copy was available in the Medici Library.

mythological works, meaning that Simonetta resembles the nymph-like women who people these works and cavort with satyrs. Again, the way forward is to accept this ambivalence between eroticism and reticence, a duality to which the artist himself points through the dead and living trees that border, respectively, the left- and right-hand extremities of the painting.

The snake complicates matters further. Some critics, such as de Boissard (1988: 120), interpret it in the light of the *ouroboros*, the snake biting its tail that symbolised immortality and eternity. For those scholars who identify the painting's subject as Cleopatra, it is easily explained as an attribute of the Egyptian queen (see, for example, Fermor 1993: 96). In truth, the snake was a supremely multivalent device at this time. Most obviously, serpents were associated with Eve and original sin, yet this is far from being the whole story. As Geronimus points out, in ancient Greece and Rome snakes were frequently associated with healing and renewal, are sometimes connected to wisdom in biblical contexts, and are one of the attributes of Prudence in a number of Renaissance artworks (2006: 67). Between Andrea Alciato's *Book of Emblems* and Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, moreover, serpents are linked to a whole host of possible meanings, from the protection of virgins, intelligence and the public good, to envy, sin and complaints to God (Alciato 1626:1-2, 7-8, 31-32, 97-98, 101-102, 175-176, 195-196, 198-199, 221-222, 276-277, 286-287; Ripa 1709: 41, 59, 64). For Ficino, in his *Platonic Theology*, the snake is even likened to the soul, which prepares itself for death as a serpent readies itself 'to slough its skin and to emerge from its prison-house into the light, alive and unharmed, as when it emerged into the light from its mother's womb' (2003: IX. 5. 27, 87-89). So how should we interpret it here?

The most fruitful approach, once more, is to admit that Simonetta's snake is deliberately ambiguous. It is circular, like the *ouroboros*, and yet is not actually biting its tail. Neither is it

attacking its bearer, in stark contrast to sixteenth-century portrayals of the Egyptian queen, which tend to show her at the moment of her death, nearly always in full-length, completely naked and reclining in a landscape (Fermor 1993: 98). It is more ornamental than terrifying, in fact, an effect that is enhanced by the golden chain around which it is entwined, which may be a visual pun on the similarity between *catena* and Cattaneo (Geronimus 2006: 66-67). On the other hand, it can still be interpreted as an omen of death and possibly of the disease that was to kill Simonetta (2006: 67). It may also have inspired Michelangelo's more violent depiction of Cleopatra (Gnann 2010: 287). It is through this ambiguity that the painting's message is expressed, in a hybrid image that can become either Simonetta or Cleopatra, depending on the perspective of the onlooker. Just as the serpent has the potential to bite its tail and become the *ouroboros*, so this Simonetta can be the ideal beauty who will lead the viewer to contemplate virtuous and divine love, and thus take the first step on the path to immortality. When the onlooker dies he will be able to cast off his mortal body, like the snake sloughs its skin, and will be granted eternal life. Yet, as the threatening clouds loom, so Simonetta can also be dangerous. The snake can just as easily transform into a symbol of sin and lust for the unwise lover who allows his baser appetites to get the better of him. For this viewer, only death awaits, as the dead trees suggest.

The serpent's venomous nature is particularly significant. It refers to the well-established poetic tradition lamenting the 'dolce veleno' of love (Petrarch, CCVII.84), and the cruelty of the beloved's chaste refusal to capitulate to her admirer's advances. For Ficino, too, love is a 'venenosa freccia' that wounds the lover to the heart (1987: VII. 4, 192). In Chapter Two (56) we saw how such tropes colour Iulio's meeting with Simonetta in the *Stanze*, which leaves the young man 'come un forsennato' (I.56.3), penetrated by fire and bathed in an icy sweat (I. 41.1-5). This Simonetta has the potential to be equally perilous to those who encounter her, as

deadly as Cleopatra, that legendary destroyer of men. Female beauty, the painting implies, can be just as fatal to the ‘new Romans’ of fifteenth-century Florence. Even a woman as proverbially lovely and virtuous as Simonetta is not safe, Piero suggests. After all, death made her abandon her earthly ‘lovers’ to a life of suffering, as all of the ‘Simonetta poets’ relate. It is tempting to think, too, that Piero knew of the less flattering rumours that Tommaso Sardi reports as to Simonetta’s sexual conduct. In this case, might we not be looking at the artist’s mode of conveying that we should revel in the exquisiteness of this woman even as her admirers did, but that we should be equally aware that a lovely façade may mask darker realities?

The *Simonetta* is certainly not the only work of the period to suggest that love, and the physical female charms that summon it into being, can have a sting in its tail. Lucas Cranach the Elder and his workshop, for instance, are noted for their numerous depictions of Cupid being stung by bees and complaining to a naked, alluring Venus. The focus here, particularly in the copy possessed by the Metropolitan Museum of Art with its moralising inscription (figure 50), is clearly on the dangerous nature of transitory sexual and worldly pleasures (Waterman 2013: 90-93). The idyll by Theocritus that provided the inspiration for Cranach’s tearful Cupids was also well-known on the Italian peninsula, if Alciato’s Emblem CXIII, whose motto quotes wholesale from the poem, is anything to go by (Alciato 1626: 162-163).

Within late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century Florence, moreover, several artists were ploughing a similar furrow. Botticelli’s *Venus and Mars* (National Gallery, circa 1485; figure 42) is a case in point. Commentators often connect alert Venus and slumbering Mars with the mythological paradigm of war vanquished by love, and by extension with the peace supposedly brought about by the Medici (Zöllner 2005: 125; Bayer 2008a: 234; Acidini 2009:

89-91). This may very well be the case but, as Rubin argues, the painting also ‘[operates] in a dialectic with danger’ (2000: 33). Whilst Venus remains serene, alert and fully clothed, ‘Mars is shown in a blissful state of sexual exhaustion, [...] [evoking] a perilous confusion of sexual roles and gender identity’, in a work that abounds with humorous erotic imagery (2000: 35-36). More than this, he has been ‘stripped of the signs of his virility, his armour and, with it, his capacity to act’ (2000: 33). He is also about to suffer an uncomfortable reawakening, courtesy of one of the satyrs and his ‘vaginal conch’ (Ruvoldt 2004: 17-18). A further nasty surprise awaits him, since he seems certain to disturb the wasps’ or bees’ nest²⁸ just behind his head and to be badly stung in the process. This is not to deny that the insects, if wasps, refer to the Vespucci, who may well have commissioned the piece (Bayer 2008a: 234). Rather, in this reading they become a playful reference both to Botticelli’s patrons and to Mars’s painful fate. Venus calmly watches the proceedings, aware of the peril in which her lover has been placed but seemingly unconcerned (Ruvoldt 2004: 17-18). If a man allows himself to fall prey to the power of a woman, Botticelli remarks, he should beware the ‘amorose vespe’ that will plague him (Petrarch, CCXXVII.5). Piero di Cosimo’s *Simonetta* therefore takes its place alongside a range of Renaissance artworks commenting on the delights, but also the hazards, of female beauty.

It is not even the only Florentine image of the era in which snakes are used to make this point. The engravings attributed to Baccio Baldini are particularly instructive in this regard. For example, in the British Museum’s finer copy of *Venus and her Children* (1845,0825.467; figure 51), the coils of a serpent’s tail appear to dangle from the goddess’s throne.²⁹ In another

²⁸ In the course of researching this chapter, I contacted three noted experts on the ecology of bees and wasps (namely Dr. Lynn Dicks, Prof. Dave Goulson and Prof. Francis L. W. Ratnieks) in an attempt to establish the genus of the insects depicted by Botticelli. Their lack of consensus leads me to agree with Prof. Ratnieks that the level of stylisation is too great to permit a scientifically sound identification.

²⁹ Jennifer Ramkalawon, curator of prints and drawings at the British Museum, has confirmed this interpretation.

of the so-called Otto Prints, moreover, the border of leaves, flowers and music-making *putti* that encircles a dancing couple is bedecked with snakes (British Museum number 1852,0301.1; figure 52). Not only this, but one of the serpents is about to bite the genitalia of the *putto* on the lower right-hand side of the image. Love, it is clear, could have unpleasant side effects. Piero's Simonetta, then, is as venomous as she is beautiful.

Conclusion

What all of the 'Simonetta poems and paintings' have in common is their fascination with female beauty, whether defined as a positive or negative force. It could be used to fashion a language of *fiorentinità* that celebrated Florence and its *de facto* Medici rulers, transforming feminine loveliness into a metaphor for the city's cultural 'flourishing' under Lorenzo.

Equally, it was Botticelli's means of asserting the significance of the visual arts in a society that still held painting to be inferior to poetry. It could, moreover, contain moral messages as to the power of beauty to lead the mind to higher thoughts or to drag it down to the abyss. At the same time, poets and artists were quick to recognise the financial rewards to be gained from dwelling on the physical charms of women. They therefore created sensual but chaste feminine figures capable of promoting norms of appropriate female behaviour whilst still being suitably arousing for their male audiences and, in the case of painting, providing pleasing yet seemly decoration for the *palazzi* of the wealthy. Simonetta and her sisters, in other words, allowed the Florentine élite to revel in feminine loveliness that now had a value in its own right, safe in the knowledge that its respectability was assured. Whether or not Simonetta actually appears in any work of visual art, the same archetypes of beauty that govern her portrayal in verse are at play in the era's painted depictions of ideally lovely women. With the fall of the Medici and the rise of Savonarola, all such representations of women were condemned and swiftly fell out of vogue. We will never know how many images

of beautiful women were consumed, along with Benivieni's 'Simonetta sonnets', on the Bonfires of the Vanities. It was perhaps there that the painted or sculpted Simonetta referred to by Piero Vespucci met her end, carrying into oblivion the last remaining physical traces of the woman whose exquisite beauty had captivated Florence for so brief a spell.

CONCLUSION

Her Renaissance heyday may be long gone, but Simonetta continues to capture the popular imagination. Since her ‘rediscovery’ in the nineteenth century, in fact, she has inspired an ever-expanding series of poems, novels, novellas, operas, television programmes, websites and even fancy dress costumes (Lazzi and Ventrone 2007:1-4; Carrai 2007: 94). She is, moreover, destined to make her silver screen debut in 2015.³⁰ These new Simonettas, not entirely unlike their Renaissance predecessors, are more expressive of the fantasies and preoccupations of the author and his or her era than they are revealing of the woman that they purport to bring to life. In Ruggero Leoncavallo’s *I Medici* (1893), for example, she becomes a virtuous, doomed, Poliziano-quoting consumptive. Part of the composer’s abortive vision of a three-part ‘epic “national poem”’ to match Richard Wagner’s *The Ring of the Nibelung*, she combines Verdian tragedy and *Quattrocento* verse in a celebration of *italianità* (Nicolodi 2003: 383). Writing more than a hundred years later in *Il misterio di Simonetta* (1998), Claudio Angelini transforms Simonetta into a late twentieth-century sex object, an erotic dream of sensual and spiritual fulfilment who transcends the corruption of both Renaissance and *Tangentopoli*-stricken Italy to join her time-travelling journalist-lover in a paradisiacal afterlife. More recently, the sellers of a ‘Simonetta Vespucci costume’ have capitalised on the contemporary obsession with all things undead by listing their ‘shimmering purple’ dress under ‘Vampire Costumes’, playing on the bizarre myth of Giuliano’s attempts to make his dying beloved immortal.³¹ Entertaining and, by turns, disturbing as these and the many other modern Simonettas are, my Conclusion will take as its case study one of the most

³⁰ Vespucci (2015), available online: <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2194880/>> [accessed 15 August 2014]; The Secret of Botticelli (2015), available online: <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3214626/>> [accessed 15 August 2014].

³¹ Simonetta Vespucci costume, available online: <<http://epicloot.no/product/simonetta-vespucci-costume/>> [accessed 15 August 2014].

accomplished and thought-provoking of these re-interpretations, to be found in Salman Rushdie's 2008 novel, *The Enchantress of Florence*. By analysing Rushdie's approach to the noblewoman and contrasting it with my own, I reveal the ingenuity of the award-winning author's take on Simonetta but also the originality of my own thesis, which complicates and enriches the legends of beauty in which Rushdie delights.

Rushdie's Simonetta, the first 'enchantress of Florence', plays an important if brief role in this complex East-meets-West tale of magic, beauty and exile. Its plot is as follows. At an unspecified date in the sixteenth century, a Florentine stranger, styling himself as the 'Mogor dell'Amore' and claiming the name of Niccolò Vespucci, arrives in the Mughal capital of Fatehpur Sikri with a story for the ears of the emperor, Akbar the Great, alone. Over the ensuing 400 pages, between flashbacks, dreams, memory palaces and multiple narrators, we learn of Qara Kōz or 'Lady Black Eyes', Akbar's long-lost great-aunt, whom the Mogor claims is his mother. Given up as a spoil of war when a child, she chooses not to return to her family when her original captor is overthrown but to forge her own destiny, using the power of her (literally) enchanting beauty to inspire love and thus to survive. Excised from Mughal history, fate eventually leads her to the 'love of her life', Antonino Argalia 'the Turk', commander of the Sultanate army, native of Florence and childhood friend of Niccolò Machiavelli and Agostino Vespucci, who will become the Mogor's father. Renaming her Angelica, Argalia brings Qara Kōz to his home city, which for a time falls under her spell.

It is in the telling of Argalia's story or, more specifically, in the young 'Ago' Vespucci's 'tall tales about the most beautiful girl in the whole history of the city, or possibly since the earth was formed' (Rushdie 2009: 167-168), that we encounter Simonetta. In this version of events, Simonetta possesses a 'pale, fair beauty so intense' that men and women alike are left

in ‘a state of molten adoration’ (168). Her ‘powers of enchantment’ are such that rumours of miracles grow, and prayers are secretly directed to her (168-169). Lorenzo and Giuliano de’ Medici are both ‘crazy about her’ and hold a tournament in her honour at which the younger Medici carries a banner containing her portrait, ‘proving that he had beaten his brother to her hand’ (169). They even go so far as to move her into a suite of rooms in Palazzo Medici, at which point her husband, ‘Horned Marco [Vespucci] [...] the Fool of Love’, who previously regarded her beauty as a ““public resource””, begins denouncing her as a whore and becomes ‘the only man in the city capable of resisting her beauty’ (169). ‘Then Simonetta fell sick and died and it was said on the streets of Florence that the city had lost its enchantress, that a part of its soul had died with her, and it even became a part of the common parlance that one day she would rise again [...]’ (169-170). Desperate to keep her alive, Giuliano (according to Ago) has her turned into a vampire, only for her to throw herself to a more permanent death from the top of the Palazzo Vecchio (170). Marco, ‘whose selfhood had been so eroded by her loss that when she died he sent all her clothes and all the paintings of her he possessed across to the Palazzo Medici so that the Duke [*sic*] could have what remained of her’, hangs himself from the Bridge of the Graces (346). ‘Alessandro Filipepi’, erroneously nicknamed ‘Little Barrels’ by Simonetta herself (168), continues to paint her, ‘as if by painting her he could raise her from the dead’ (170). Indeed, he is so ‘besotted’ with her that he wishes to be buried at her feet- ‘he wasn’t, obviously [...]’ (337). Simonetta also appears in the Medici family’s ‘magic mirror’, the purpose of which is ‘to reveal to the reigning Duke the image of the most desirable woman in the known world’ (336). It darkens after her death, only to be reawakened by the arrival of Qara Kōz in the city (336-337), ‘a dark beauty to fill the hole left in [the people of Florence’s] hearts by Simonetta Vespucci’s death’ (347), who is initially regarded as ““Simonetta Due”” and then later as ““Angelica the First”” (350).

From this short summary of Simonetta's role in *The Enchantress of Florence*, one could be forgiven for thinking that Rushdie's interest lay simply in exploring Florentine myths of beauty and art. It is true to say that his account of Simonetta is particularly inventive, embroidering on the fabric of legend with a wit that is far from characteristic of the solemn, po-faced eulogies to her loveliness generally to be found in modern texts. What makes Rushdie's interpretation of Simonetta unique, however, is the context in which it appears: a globe-spanning paean to feminine beauty and a powerful declaration as to the potential for cultural harmony between East and West. Florence, proverbial home of (European) beauty and land of Beatrice and Laura, may be the titular setting of the book. Rushdie has talked, indeed, of his especial admiration and affection for the Tuscan capital.³² Yet, unsurprisingly for an author as multicultural in his fixations as Rushdie, his purview is far wider than one city or country alone, no matter how remarkable. The international scope of his enquiries first manifests itself in the epigraphs that open the book, a translation of an excerpt from Petrarch's sonnet XC and a quotation from the work of the Urdu-Persian poet, Mirza Ghalib, thereby establishing immediately the 'parallelism and equal validity' of Eastern and Western narratives (Parashkevova 2012: 181). As the Petrarch extract and its woman beyond mortal ken make clear, one of Rushdie's central themes is the *donna angelicata* or, to use his terminology, the enchantresses who haunt the book from Simonetta to Akbar's 'dream wife', Jodha, to Qara Köz and beyond. As this cosmopolitan list and the Persian verse intimate, though, this is not simply an Italian ideal. Rather, it is as composite and eclectic as anything to be found in the works of Poliziano and Botticelli, weaving together references to literature, art and history across time and space in a secular celebration of sensuality, damning equally

³² See Salman Rushdie's *Enchantress*, *The Book Show*, ABC Radio National, 21 April 2008, available online: <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/salman-rushdies-enchantress/>3268052#transcript>> [accessed 6 August 2014].

Savonarolan ‘Weepers’ (Rushdie 2009: 185-186) and puritanical Islamic ‘Water Drinkers’ (2009: 252-253). For Rushdie, what makes Florence and Fatehpur Sikri stand out, beyond the cultural boom that both were experiencing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, is what he views as the ‘sexually open’ nature of their societies.³³ Florence is even described in ‘gendered terms’ by the Mogor as an ““enchantress”” that resembles ““a pair of woman’s lips [...] puckering for a kiss”” (Weickgenannt Thiara 2011: 424; Rushdie 2009: 176). This convergence of artistic and venereal prowess is more than a mere coincidence. What *The Enchantress of Florence* posits, in fact, is that this ‘ethos of decadence’ is not just an accessory to but ‘a necessary condition for an emergent secular humanism’ in Italy and India (Neuman 2008: 679). Rushdie’s enchantresses are therefore inextricably linked with the ‘explosions in consciousness’ taking place in East and West in an era that, according to the author, saw the birth of the modern world (Ramanathan 2012: 111-114).³⁴

More than this, as I have already intimated, they are central to his examination of the similarities that bind together the parallel worlds of Florence and Sikri. The ruling metaphor of *The Enchantress of Florence* is that of the mirror, in ‘a profusion of echoes, mirrorings, and doubles, which range from the purely imaginative to those drawn from historical reality’ (Sasser 2011: 193). From the ‘parallel [whore]houses’ of Skanda and Mars in Sikri and Florence (Neuman 2008: 679) to the matching pairs of obese and skeletal prostitutes to be found in each city (Rushdie 2009: 192); from the duality that informs Rushdie’s imagined epistolary exchange between Akbar and Queen Elizabeth I of England, to the questioning of power common to the Mughal emperor and to Niccolò Machiavelli (Sasser 2011: 194-195);

³³ See Salman Rushdie’s *Enchantress*, *The Book Show*, ABC Radio National, 21 April 2008, available online: <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/salman-rushdies-enchantress/>>3268052#transcript> [accessed 6 August 2014].

³⁴ Quotation from Salman Rushdie on *The Enchantress of Florence*, *Allan Gregg in Conversation*, TVO, 18 November 2010, available online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_27N4bOOrSY> [accessed 6 August 2014].

from ‘the interplay of Renaissance Florence’s secular humanist discourse and Akbar’s policies of tolerance and inclusivity’ (Parashkevova 2012: 189-190) to the ‘great brutality’ of early modern Italy and India³⁵, everything and everyone has its equivalent. Like Qara Kōz and her nearly-but-not-quite-identical servant, the Mirror, ‘each world reflects the other [...] alike in beauty but not [quite] the same’ (McQuillan 2013: 91). ‘One should not pretend that there were not differences’ and ‘great mutual suspicions’ between East and West, then as now;³⁶ Fatehpur Sikri and Florence can even appear to be each other’s opposites (Weickgenannt Thiara 2011: 423). In the end, however, humanity is defined by kinship rather than dissimilarity, for good or ill (Anthony 2008). As the Mogor puts it, “‘This may be the curse of the human race [...] Not that we are so different from one another, but that we are so alike’” (Rushdie 2009: 171).

These observations are nowhere more relevant than in Rushdie’s portrayal of his ‘enchantresses’, the embodiment of a fascination with beauty and a privileging of the imagination that has opened the way for a Renaissance in both Florence and Sikri. Not only do they abound in East and West, but they inspire artists Florentine and Sikrian alike to produce masterpieces. In Italy, in Rushdie’s version of events, Botticelli depicts Simonetta ‘many times, before and after she died, painted her clothed and naked, as the Spring and the goddess Venus, and even as herself’ (2009: 168). His counterpart in Sikri is Dashwanth, another famous painter whom Rushdie has ‘borrowed’ from the historical record (see Cleveland Beach 1982 for further details), and who was partly responsible for ‘one of the starting points of the book’, the series of sixteenth-century paintings known as the *Hamza*

³⁵ See Salman Rushdie’s *Enchantress*, *The Book Show*, ABC Radio National, 21 April 2008, available online: <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/salman-rushdies-enchantress/>3268052#transcript>> [accessed 6 August 2014].

³⁶ See Salman Rushdie on *The Enchantress of Florence*, *Allan Gregg in Conversation*, TVO, 18 November 2010, available online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_27N4bOOrSY> [accessed 6 August 2014].

Nama (Rushdie, quoted in Fernandes 2008). It is Dashwanth who brings Qara Kōz to life, falling ‘hopelessly in love’ with his subject (2009: 157). Just as Akbar notes the resemblance between the two (2009: 171), so the reader is clearly intended to draw parallels between Dashwanth, Botticelli, the artistic traditions that they represent, and the ability of each to give shape to the collective and individual imagination (Bădelescu 2012: 140). More than this, Simonetta, Qara Kōz and their ilk are the fruit of a painstaking weaving together of art, verse lyric and epic, novels, mythology, folktales and even film from across the eastern and western worlds, executed with a complexity and panache to make even Poliziano envious (see, for example, Bharat 2009: 313- 315; Conrad 2009: 436; Ganapathy-Doré 2010: 3-8; Goonetilleke 2010: 179-180; Meuret 2011: 261-267; Ben Amara 2011: 12-13; Parashkevova 2012: 178-181).

Qara Kōz is the prime example. She is at once the ‘Lady Black Eyes’ of Chaghatai poetry (Rushdie 2009: 156), a reinvention of Khanzada Begum, the surrendered sister of the first Mughal emperor,³⁷ a new Laura and, renamed ‘Angelica’ by Argalia (2009: 283-284), openly inspired by Ariosto’s ‘princess of Cathay and India’ (2009: 139). As Rushdie tells it, he became aware that, despite the affinities between Renaissance Italy and Mughal India, no one ever travelled from Sikri to Europe at the time, and certainly not a woman. What in his words ‘gave him permission’ to invent such a story was his discovery of the *Orlando Furioso*, in which just such a journey is undertaken by an Indian princess.³⁸ Ariosto’s epic, then, to which Argalia also owes his name and his entourage of giants, is one of Rushdie’s key texts, to which *The Enchantress of Florence* partially owes its concentric structure and its tales of

³⁷ See Salman Rushdie’s *Enchantress*, *The Book Show*, ABC Radio National, 21 April 2008, available online: <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/salman-rushdies-enchantress/>>3268052#transcript> [accessed 6 August 2014].

³⁸ See Salman Rushdie: *Enchantress of Florence*, *WGBH Forum Network*, published on 17 April 2014 (otherwise s.d.), available online: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SupoDk3T4vY>> [accessed 6 August 2014].

magic and beautiful sorceresses. But it is far from being Rushdie's only source. Homer's *Odyssey*, for example, is an equally plentiful source of adventure and enchantment, as are the 'myriad hued *Arabian Nights*', the princesses of such epics as the *Mahabharata*, and the amorous beauties of the *Kathasaritasagar*, an eleventh-century Sanskrit collection of Indian legends and folktales (Bharat 2009: 313-314). There is something Cleopatra-like, too, in her beauty and alliances with successive conquerors (Ganapathy-Doré 2010: 8), a fact that is emphasised by Rushdie's comparison of her to the Egyptian queen (2009: 272). In the 'entirely chaste' devotion that she inspires (Rushdie 2009: 342-343), moreover, she recalls not only the verse of Petrarch, Dante and Boiardo but the Platonic theories of thinkers such as Pico della Mirandola, all of whom are mentioned by name in the course of the text (2009: 340, 343). Fashioned from this elaborate web of references to cultural artefacts both Asian and European, she unites with a man who is both Florentine and 'Turk' and who can claim at least five different epithets (2009: 226, 234-235, 309). Fluent in Chaghatai, Persian and Italian (2009: 281, 308), she travels further from east to west with every move that she makes, from Samarkand (in modern-day Uzbekistan; 2009: 135), to Herat (Afghanistan; 2009: 268-269), to Tabriz (Iran; 2009: 272), to Chaldiran (Turkey; 2009: 278-281), and to Florence (2009: 347-349), finally disappearing into the New World (2009: 421-422). Even her putative son is 'a literal manifestation of the connection between East and West' (Gates 2008), claiming several different names and, in the title *Mogor dell'Amore*, 'combining the majesty of Mughal kings and the charm of the Italian lover' (Ganapathy-Doré 2010: 3).

The spell cast by her beauty does not last forever: Lady Black Eyes can no longer sustain 'the enchantment of forty thousand individuals, month after month, year after year' (Rushdie 2009: 355), is denounced as a witch (2009: 374), and barely escapes the bloodthirsty mob that kills Argalia and his soldiers (2009: 378-383). The world, as Akbar foresees, will become 'a

dry hostile antagonistic place' (2009: 440), riven by discord and by the misunderstandings that plague Elizabeth and Akbar's attempts at communication.³⁹ Yet, Rushdie has demonstrated, it has the potential to become "a single waking dream" of beauty and harmony (2009: 60). Much like Ariosto, then, Rushdie has used a historical fantasy to shine a light on present-day concerns, criticising 'those who hold that Islamic culture has always been irreconcilably antithetical to humanist thought' (Dent 2008). The difference, as Vassilena Parashkevova so astutely points out, is that 'here enchantment rather than disenchantment is posited as the "cure", an alternative to the conceptualisation of the East-West encounter as a clash of civilisations' (2012: 196). As Rushdie himself has said, *The Enchantress of Florence* is essentially an 'engagement of civilisations novel', which is structured as a romance to convey his central message: that, whether they fight or embrace each other, East and West are bound by love.⁴⁰

Simonetta and her idealised sisters are also at the heart of another of Rushdie's major themes: the power of storytelling. One of the most striking aspects of his enchantresses, at least for someone who has spent the last five years researching Simonetta, is the way in which they hover between the historical and the fictional. Qara Köz, as we have already seen, is almost entirely the creature of Rushdie's imagination, woven together from art, poetry and Mughal history. The reader of this thesis will appreciate, too, the way in which the 'Simonetta myths' occupy a liminal space between legend and fact. What may be less obvious is that the tale of Angélique, the memory palace, belongs to the same category, since whilst Jacques Coeur was indeed a 'merchant of Montpellier' (Rushdie 2009: 237) who appears to have had

³⁹ See Salman Rushdie's *Enchantress*, *The Book Show*, ABC Radio National, 21 April 2008, available online: <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/salman-rushdies-enchantress/>3268052#transcript>> [accessed 6 August 2014].

⁴⁰ See Salman Rushdie on his Latest Book, *Newsnight*, BBC, 29 July 2008, available online: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/7530137.stm>> [accessed 6 August 2014].

a single female child, she was named Perette and seems to have led a fairly conventional life (Ganapathy-Doré 2010: 8). Rushdie's Angélique, in other words, exists at the point where history and invention meet. The same could be said of Jodha, whose origins are remarkably similar to those of Simonetta. The subject, like Simonetta, of intense interest since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Goonetilleke 2010: 179), she only truly exists in the popular imagination. As Rushdie has discussed, Akbar's legendary queen is just that: a legend who does not appear in the historical record but who has gained an immense hold over people's perceptions of Akbar, his court, and the women who inhabited it.⁴¹ Aware that, to paraphrase Ruby Lal, Jodha is more persuasive as a 'phantom' than a 'real historical figure' (2008: 34), Rushdie does not attempt to transform her into a flesh-and-blood woman. Rather, he allows her to remain in the realm of the imaginary as Akbar's dream wife, a fantasy incarnate (Roy 2008: 34). Despite being Akbar's favourite queen she frets that, since she has "the misfortune not to exist", she will not be able to compete with her rivals (Rushdie 2009: 55-56). Yet, as history has proved, the opposite is true: the subject of song, portraiture and verse, "in the end none of the queens will exist any more than she does [...] and her fame will echo down the ages. Thus, in reality, while it is true that she does not exist, it is also true to say that she is the one who lives" (2009: 34, 56). Rushdie's observation here could equally be applied to Simonetta and the other enchantresses: none of these women are 'real'; they owe their existence to popular or personal imagination; but this is precisely where their enchantment lies. A 'good story' has more staying-power than any supposedly 'objective' account of events. Indeed, as Rushdie has argued, history itself is a construct, with 'each age

⁴¹ See Salman Rushdie on *The Enchantress of Florence*, *Allan Gregg in Conversation*, TVO, 18 November 2010, available online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_27N4bOOrSY> [accessed 6 August 2014].

[retelling] the stories of the past according to its own interests.’⁴² To put it another way, we choose the stories in which we want to believe, altering our perceptions of past and present in the process. Rushdie’s ‘Angelicas’, his ‘dream angels’ (Rushdie 2009: 308), enchant because they are the essence of fantasy, common to storytelling traditions the world over.

“Storytelling in this novel is then a form of enchantment: both a bewitching and a sense of wonder or delight’ (McQuillan 2013: 94).

Stories, however, are not just an entertaining diversion. Rather, they are a matter of life and death. For the Mogor, the story that he must tell the emperor may ‘make his fortune or else cost him his life’ (Rushdie 2009: 12), may allow him “to step into the tale he is telling and begin a new life inside it’ or leave him as one of ‘those poor souls whose lives terminate before they stop breathing’ (2009: 255-256; 435). This is, as Rushdie puts it, ‘high-stakes poker’.⁴³ Argalia, too, learns at an early age that ‘the untruth of untrue stories could sometimes be of service in the real world’, using an improbable tale of a giant in an inn to save his skin when he is discovered as a stowaway on Andrea Doria’s ship (2009: 211). They are postmodern Scheherazades, dependent on storytelling to survive (Parashkevova 2012: 178). More than this, divested of stories, fantasy and illusion life becomes unbearable, as Angélique discovers when she is emptied of the tales that she has been carrying: “While you were anaesthetised to the tragedy of your life you were able to survive. When clarity was returned to you, when it was painstakingly restored, it could drive you mad’ (Rushdie 2009: 240-241). Equally, a convincing story can ensnare even the most powerful and lead them into disaster, as the Mogor’s story threatens the stability of Akbar’s rule and his kingdom

⁴² See Rushdie’s comments on this phenomenon in Book Discussion on *The Enchantress of Florence*, Miami Book Fair, BookTV, 16 November 2008, available online: <<http://www.c-span.org/video/?282405-10/book-discussion-enchantress-florence>> [accessed 19 August 2014].

⁴³ A Conversation with Salman Rushdie, FORA.tv at City Arts and Lectures, 18 June 2008, available online: http://fora.tv/2008/06/18/A_Conversation_with_Salman_Rushdie> [accessed 6 August 2014].

(McQuillan 2013: 93). The storyteller or artist is similarly at risk of being subsumed by their own creation and of mirroring the fate of Dashwanth, who disappears inside his own painting (Rusdhie 2009: 158; Bharat 2009: 320). ‘Language upon a silvered tongue affords enchantment enough’ (Rushdie 2009: 93).

At the end of *The Enchantress of Florence* all such enchantments are broken: the Mogor, it turns out, is not the son of Qara Köz but is rather the fruit of an incestuous relationship between Agostino Vespucci and his daughter with the Mirror (Rushdie 2009: 440-442); Sikri’s ‘golden life-giving lake’ dries up when the Mogor is driven out, leading to the city’s abandonment (2009: 436-438); the magic mirror is smashed (2009: 355), and Lady Black Eyes is ‘lost for ever’ in a New World that fails to provide a ‘middle passage’ to India (2009: 418, 421-422). Yet despite all this, she survives and succeeds in returning home, conjured into existence by ‘the emperor’s fancy, his *khayal*’ (2009: 408), ‘not the mannish shorn-haired creature she had become to escape from Florence, but the hidden princess in all her youthful glory, the same irresistible creature who had entranced Shah Ismail of Persia and Argalia the Turk, the Florentine Janissary’ (2009: 440). Stories, love and fantasy may be fleeting and fragile, a ‘beautiful lie’ in the ‘harsh truth’ of a ‘war-torn world’ (2009: 53) but, like Qara Köz and her fellow enchantresses, they continue to captivate us. We need legends of beauty and adventure, the fables that Rushdie so prizes,⁴⁴ because they tap into our deepest desires and can be ‘all things to all people’, just as the hidden princess becomes in her absence ‘an exemplar, a lover, an antagonist, a muse [...] one of those vessels into which human beings pour their own preferences, abhorrences, prejudices, idiosyncrasies, secrets, misgivings and joys’ (2009: 252-252).

⁴⁴ See Salman Rushdie’s *Enchantress*, *The Book Show*, ABC Radio National, 21 April 2008, available online: <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/salman-rushdies-enchantress/>3268052#transcript>> [accessed 6 August 2014].

For Rushdie, in sum, Simonetta, Qara Köz and their peers fascinate precisely because they are cultural constructs, living dreams crafted from fears and predilections common to all humans. They recur in different traditions because the yearning for beauty and love is universal, as is the longing to escape from brutality into fable and fantasy. In this sense, my thesis, with its analogous focus on the construction of feminine beauty in literature and art, has similar preoccupations to *The Enchantress of Florence*. In tracing Simonetta's transition from star to serpent, moreover, it echoes Rushdie's analysis of the tearing down of female idols, 'the short journey from *enchantress* to *witch*' (Rushdie 2009: 375) that leads to Lady Black Eyes's fall from grace.⁴⁵ This, however, is where the resemblances end. Rushdie's achievement is to unify the different cultural traditions with which he works and thus to make them speak to contemporary concerns regarding the so-called clash between East and West. By bringing Simonetta and her counterparts into the twenty-first century, he illustrates the commonalities that have bound us together since 'the dawn of the modern world', and which still (have the potential to) unite us. Notwithstanding the years that Rushdie spent planning and researching the novel (Ghosh 2011: 21), and the lengthy bibliography with which it concludes (Rushdie 2009: 444-451), historical accuracy is not of the utmost importance. Rather, it is the legends and stories that we tell about ourselves that are key. As Justin Neuman puts it, *The Enchantress of Florence* may be dressed in 'the guise of an impeccably researched historical novel', but it is in truth 'a globe-traversing prose romance' (2008: 676).

My approach to Simonetta has, in effect, been the reverse: to strip away the layers of myth that surround her and to return her to as specific a historical context as possible. Building on the methodologies developed by Terence Cave, I acknowledge the significance of Simonetta's

⁴⁵ See Rushdie's comments on the subject in Salman Rushdie on *The Enchantress of Florence*, Allan Gregg in *Conversation*, TVO, 18 November 2010, available online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_27N4bOOrSY> [accessed 6 August 2014].

‘afterlives’, those ‘revenant narratives’ that signal her ‘haunting of the cultural imagination’ (Holland and Scholar 2009: 8), and which have had great impact on the manner in which she has been interpreted. My real point of departure, however, has been my determination to understand her ‘prehistories’ on their own terms, to encounter the ‘Simonetta poems and paintings’ in ‘the present tense of their articulation’ and to avoid the temptation to ‘[turn] these early modern signs into the origins of the story that makes us modern’ (Holland and Scholar 2009: 4), *alla* Rushdie. I accept that beauty in Florence had a philosophical and poetic charge, born in part of fantasy and fear, but I assert that these desires and anxieties were specific to the years that saw the creation of the works of visual and verbal art with which Simonetta is associated. Beauty, I emphasise, could be commodified and assigned a price-tag, in a practical estimation of its charms that is many miles from Rushdie’s universalising approach to its appeal.

By Rushdie’s measure this makes me a ‘sceptic’ of ‘sour temperament’, one of the ‘dry-as-dust quibblers’ whose rejection of the enchantments of legend and fable is dull, self-defeating and destined to fail (Rushdie 2009: 352-353). I must admit that, to a certain extent, Rushdie has a point. Just as Machiavelli’s truth-telling ‘dark mirror’, *Il Principe*, is rejected by its Medici recipients (2009: 361, 364), historical narratives are often spurned when they contradict widely accepted beliefs about particular people and time periods. My thesis, too, is not necessarily going to change popular perceptions of Simonetta, whatever my initial hopes of provoking just such a sea-change. The legend of ‘la bella Simonetta’, tragic lover of artists and rulers, is simply too good a story to be abandoned in favour of rigorous historical analysis, too close to the perennial obsession with the young, gifted and dead. Yet by bringing together the corpus of poems that describe Simonetta, by putting them side-by-side with the artworks that have been connected to her, and restoring them all to the political, cultural,

social and religious contexts that brought them into being, I have discovered another story, one that is also worth telling and is arguably more interesting. 'Simonetta', the cultural construct, reveals far more to us about late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century Florence than 'la bella Simonetta' ever could, uncovering the complexities of a society devoted to the spiritual and pecuniary value of beauty; that used women to personify its achievements whilst holding little respect for them; and in which poetic and artistic fervour existed alongside, and was informed by, political necessity. It is my hope that this Simonetta- no less than Rushdie's Lady Black Eyes- has returned home.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Literature

Simonetta Vespucci costume, available online: <<http://epicloot.no/product/simonetta-vespucci-costume/>> [accessed 15 August 2014].

Vespucci (2015), available online: <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2194880/>> [accessed 15 August 2014]; Anon., *The Secret of Botticelli* (2015), available online: <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt3214626/>> [accessed 15 August 2014].

Simonetta Vespucci, *Atlantide*, 21 March 2012, available online: <<http://www.la7.it/atlantide/pvideo-stream?id=i527995>> [accessed 30 October 2012].

Simonetta Cattaneo-Vespucci, available online: <<https://www.facebook.com/#!/simonetta.cattaneovespucci?fref=ts>> [accessed 8 November 2012].

Tradimento per la morte di Giuliano de' Medici (1889; 1478). In: F. Flamini, *Versi in morte di Giuliano de' Medici*, *Propugnatore*, 318-330.

MS Arezzo 181 (c. 1476-1500), Biblioteca Città di Arezzo (BCA), Arezzo.

Libro dei Morti, September 1475-August 1487, *Arte dei Medici e Speziali*, 246, Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), 8r.

Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer (2003; c. seventh century-fifth century BC). Loeb Classical Library. Ed. and trans. M. L. West. Cambridge, Mass.; London, Harvard University Press.

Alberti, L. B. (1994) *I Libri della Famiglia* (1434). Turin, Nuova Universale Einaudi.

Alciato, A. (1626) *Emblemi di Andrea Alciato Uomo Chiarissimo dal Latino nel Vulgare Italiano Ridotti*. Padova, P. P. Tozzi.

Alighieri, D. (2008) *Vita Nuova* (c. 1308). Milan, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore.

Angelini, C. (2007) *The Mystery of Simonetta*. Toronto, Guernica.

Barbaro, F. (1548) *Prudentissimi et Gravi Documenti Circa la Elettion della Moglie, dello Eccellente et Dottissimo M. Francesco Barbaro, Gentilhuomo Venitiano al Molto Magnifico et Magnanimo M. Lorenzo de' Medici, Cittadin Fiorentino, Nuovamente dal Latino Tradotti per M. Alberto Lollo Ferrarese* (1416). Venice, Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari.

Benivieni, A. (c. 1580) *Vita di Girolamo Benivieni*, Codici Gianni 43, Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.

Benivieni, G. (2008) *Canzone e Sonetti di Girolamo Benivieni fiorentino* (c. 1489). In: R. Leporatti, *Canzone e Sonetti di Girolamo Benivieni fiorentino*. Edizione Critica. *Interpres*, 27, 214-298.

- Benivieni, G. (1519) *Opere di Hierony. Beniuieni Compresse nel Presente Volume*. Florence, Per li heredi di Philippo di Giunta.
- Benivieni, G. (1500) *Commento di Hierony. B. Sopra a Più Sue Canzone et Sonetti dello Amore et della Belleza Diuina*. Florence, Antonio Tubini & Lorenzo di Francesco Venetiano & Andrea Ghyr[landi].
- Benivieni, G. (c. 1489) Canzone e Sonetti di Girolamo Benivieni fiorentino. Come, Dove, Quando et Di Cui Prima Se Inamorò et Qual Fructo Ne Seguitasse, MS Parmense 3070, Biblioteca Palatina (B.Pal.Pr.), Parma.
- Benivieni, G. (c. 1489) Canzone et Sonetti de Girolamo Benyvieni fiorentino. Come, Dove, Quando et Di Cui Prima Se Inamorò, et Quale Fructo ne Seguitasse, MS Sessoriano 413, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma (BNCRM), Rome, 413r- 435r.
- Benivieni, G. (1477) Dimmi ove sono, ove sono hora, Falchetta, Codici Gianni 47, Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence, 53r.
- Benivieni, G. and L. Benivieni (c. 1530) Rime, Con Commento, MS Riccardiano 2811, Biblioteca Riccardiana (BRF), Florence.
- Bettini, S. (1476) Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 27 April, XXXIII, no. 311, Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato (MAP), Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.
- Boccaccio, G. (1834) *Opere Volgari di Giovanni Boccaccio* (c. 1330-1375). Florence, Per IG. Moutier.
- Braccesi, A. (1967) Appendix IV. The Poems of Alessandro Braccesi, trans. by J. F. C. Richards (c.1470-1480). In: J. Walker, *Ginevra de' Benci* by Leonardo da Vinci. Offprint from: National Gallery of Art. Report and Studies in the History of Art 1967, Washington D.C, 36-37.
- Feliciano, F. (c. 1471-1475) *Letters and Sonnets*, MS Harley 5271, British Library (BL), London.
- Ficino, M. (2003) *Platonic Theology. Volume III, Books IX-XI* (1482). Trans. M. J. B. Allen with J. Warden. Cambridge Mass.; London, The I Tatti Renaissance Library; Harvard University Press.
- Ficino, M. (1987) *El Libro dell'Amore* (1469). Ed. S. Niccoli. Firenze, Olschki.
- Ficino, M. (1975) *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino, Vol. 1* (1457-1476). London, Shephard-Walwyn.
- Homer (1995) *The Odyssey*. Loeb Classical Library (c. late-eighth century BC). Trans. A. T. Murray. Cambridge, Mass.; London, Harvard University Press.
- Landino, C. (1967) Appendix III. The Poems of Cristoforo Landino, trans. by J. F. C. Richards (c.1470-1480). In: J. Walker, *Ginevra de' Benci* by Leonardo da Vinci. Offprint from: National Gallery of Art. Report and Studies in the History of Art 1967, Washington D.C, 28-35.

- Lapaccini, F. (1975) *L'Armeggeria di Tommaso Benci* (c. 1464). In: A. Lanza, *Lirici Toscani del Quattrocento. Vol. 2*. Roma, Bulzoni Editore, 1-16.
- Leonardo da Vinci (1947) *Trattato della Pittura* (c. 1500-1519). Lanciano, Carabba Editore, available online: <<http://www.liberliber.it/libri/l/leonardo/index.php>> [accessed 3/7/2013].
- Leoncavallo, R. (2010) *I Medici* [CD]. Hamburg, Deutsche Grammophon.
- Macinghi Strozzi, A. (1914) *Lettere ai Figlioli* (c. 1447-1470). Lanciano, R. Carabba.
- Medici, L. de' (1992) *Opere* (mid-late fifteenth century). Ed. T. Zanato. Florence, Olschki.
- Meglio, Giovan Matteo di (1977) *Rime* (mid-fifteenth century). Florence, L. S. Olschki Editore.
- Naldi, N. (1943) *Epigrammaton Liber. Edidit Alexander Perosa* (late fifteenth and early sixteenth century). Budapest, K. M. Egyetemi Nyomada.
- Nursio Timideo, F. (c. 1476) *Francisci Nursii Timidei Veronensis Regii Secretarii Carmen austerum in Funere Symonette Vespucciae Florentinae: Ad Illuxtrissimum Alphonsum Calabrie Ducem*, MS II II 75, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF), Florence, 192v-202r.
- Nursio Timideo, F. (c. 1476) *Francisci Nursii Timidei Veronensis Regii Secretarii Carmen austerum in Funere Symonette Vespucciae Florentinae: Ad Illuxtrissimum Alphonsum Calabrie Ducem*, MS Ital. 1543, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Paris, 199r-207r.
- Petrarch, F. (2009) *Canzoniere* (c. 1327-1358). Ed. A. Chiari. Milan, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore.
- Petrarch, F. (1996) *Trionfi, Rime Estravaganti, Codice degli Abbozzi* (c. 1370). Eds. V. Pacca and L. Paolino. Milano, Mondadori.
- Plato (1935) *The Republic. Books VI-X* (c. 308 BC). Loeb Classical Library. Trans. P. Shorey. London, Heinemann.
- Poliziano, A. (2006) *Poesie di Angelo Poliziano* (c. 1473-1494). Ed. by F. Bausi. Turin, Unione-Tipografico-Editrice Torinese.
- Poliziano, A. (2004) *Stanze Orfeo Rime* (1475-1478). Ed. D. Puccini. Milan, Garzanti Editore.
- Poliziano, A. (2000) Angelo Poliziano to Cassandra Fedele, the most learned girl in Venice (c. 1491). In: C. Fedele, *Letters and Orations*, ed. and trans. by D. Robin. Chicago; London, The University of Chicago Press, 90-91.
- Poliziano, A. (1989) *Sylva in Scabiem* (c. 1479). Ed. by P. Orvieto. Rome, Salerno Editrice.
- Poliziano, A. (1985) *I Detti Piacevoli* (late-fifteenth century). Ed. by M. Fresta. Montepulciano, Editori del Grifo.

- Poliziano, A. (1976a) *Prose volgari inedite e poesie latine e greche edite e inedite* (c. 1469-1494). I. Del Lungo (ed.). Hildesheim; New York, Georg Olms.
- Poliziano, A. (1976b) Epistola Proemiale alla Raccolta Aragonesa (c. 1477). In G. Contini (ed.) *Letteratura Italiana del Quattrocento*. Florence, Sansoni, 129-133.
- Poliziano, A. (1964a) In Albieram Albitiam, Puellam Formosissimam, Morientem. Ad Sismundum Stuphum Eius Sponsum (c. 1473). In: F. Arnaldi, L. Gualdo Rosa and L. Monti Sabia (eds.) *Poeti Latini del Quattrocento*. Milan; Naples; Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1022-1039.
- Poliziano, A. (1964b) In Puellam Suam. In: F. Arnaldi, L. Gualdo Rosa and L. Monti Sabia (eds.) *Poeti Latini del Quattrocento* (c. 1469-1494). Milan; Naples; Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1050-1059.
- Poliziano, A. (1964c) In Violas. In: F. Arnaldi, L. Gualdo Rosa and L. Monti Sabia (eds.) *Poeti Latini del Quattrocento* (c. 1480-90). Milan; Naples; Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1020-1023.
- Poliziano, A. (1964d) In Lalagen. In: F. Arnaldi, L. Gualdo Rosa and L. Monti Sabia (eds.) *Poeti Latini del Quattrocento* (c. 1469-1494). Milan; Naples; Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1038-1041.
- Poliziano, A. (1958) *Della Congiura dei Pazzi (Coniurationis commentarium)* (1478). A. Perosa (ed.). Padua, Antenore.
- Poliziano, A. (1951) *Epigrammi greci* (c. 1469-1494). Ed. and trans. by A. Ardizzoni. Florence, La Nuova Italia.
- Pulci, B. (2007) Venite, sacre e gloriose dive (c. 1476). In: F. Barricalla *L'Elegia di Bernardo Pulci per la morte di Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci Secondo La Lezione della Stampa Miscomini Firenze 1481 (ST. F.)*, BA thesis, Università degli Studi di Genova, 19-24.
- Pulci, B. (2007) Se viva e morta io ti dove' far guerra (c. 1476). In F. Barricalla *L'Elegia di Bernardo Pulci per la morte di Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci Secondo La Lezione della Stampa Miscomini Firenze 1481 (ST. F.)*, BA thesis, Università degli Studi di Genova, 36.
- Pulci, B. (c. 1476) Venite, sacre e gloriose dive, MS Acquisti e Doni 288, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (BML), Florence, 69r-73r.
- Pulci, B. (c. 1476) Se viva e morta io ti dove' far guerra, MS Acquisti e Doni 288, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (BML), Florence, 73v-74r.
- Pulci, B. (c. 1476) Venite, sacre e gloriose dive, MS Riccardiano 2823, Biblioteca Riccardiana (BRF), Florence, 156v-160r.
- Pulci, B. (c. 1476) Se viva e morta io ti dove' far guerra, MS Riccardiano 2823, Biblioteca Riccardiana (BRF), Florence, 185v.
- Pulci, B. (c. 1476) Venite, Sacre e Gloriose Dive, MS Parmense 201, Biblioteca Palatina (B.Pal.Pr.), Parma, 186v-190v.

- Pulci, B. (c. 1476) *Se Viva e Morta Io Ti Dove' Far Guerra*, MS Parmense 201, Biblioteca Palatina (B.Pal.Pr.), Parma, 54v.
- Pulci, B. et al (1481 *st.f.*) *Bucoliche Elegantissimamente Composte da B. Pulci, etc.* Florence, Antonio Miscomini.
- Pulci, B. et al (1494) *Bucoliche Elegantissimamente Composte da B. Pulci, etc.* Florence, Antonio Miscomini.
- Pulci, L. (2000) *Lucretia a Lauro Epistola Prima* (c. 1466-1468). In: D. Bisconti, *La Pistola I de Luca Pulci entre louange courtisane et poésie pastorale. Chroniques italiennes*, 63/64(3/4), 119-138 (135-138).
- Pulci, L. (1986) *Opere Minori* (late-fifteenth century). P. Orvieto (ed.). Milan, Mursia.
- Pulci, L. (1985) *Com'Hai Tu, Crudel Morte, Un Sì Bel Viso* (c. 1476). In S. Carrai *Le muse dei Pulci: studi su Luca e Luigi Pulci*. Naples, Guida Editore, 89.
- Pulci, L., (attrib. to) (1889) *Morale mandato a Madonna Lucretia da Luigi Pulci per la morte di Giuliano* (1478). In: F. Flamini, *Versi in morte di Giuliano de' Medici, Propugnatore*, 330-334.
- Pulci, L. (1886) *Lettere di Luigi Pulci a Lorenzo il Magnifico e Ad Altri* (1465-1484). S. Bongi (ed.). Lucca, Tipografia Giusti.
- Ripa, C. (1709) *Iconologia, or, Moral Emblems* (1593). London, P. Tempest, available at: <http://archive.org/details/iconologiaormora00ripa> [accessed 20/9/013].
- Rushdie, S. (2009) *The Enchantress of Florence*. London, Vintage.
- Sardi, T. (1929) *De Anima Peregrina. Poema di fra Tommaso Sardi Domenicano del Convento di Santa Maria Novella in Firenze*. M. Rooke (ed.). Menasha, The Collegiate Press.
- Sardi, T. (sixteenth century) *De Anima Peregrina*, MS Plut.41.24, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana (BML), Florence.
- Sardi, T. (1493-1515) *De Anima Peregrina*, MS IB 59, Archivio di Santa Maria Novella (ASMN), Florence.
- Sardi, T. (c. 1513) *De Anima Peregrina*, MS 55 K 1, Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana (Bibl. Cors.), Rome.
- Sardi, T. (c. 1511) *De Anima Peregrina*, MS Banco Rari 17, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF), Florence.
- Sardi, T. (c. 1509) *De Anima Peregrina*, MS Banco Rari 46, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (BNCF), Florence.
- Savonarola, G. (1971) *Prediche Sopra Amos e Zaccaria* (1496). Vol. II. P. Ghiglieri (ed.). Rome, Angelo Belardetti Editore.

- Sommi, L de' (1968) *Quattro Dialoghi in Materia di Rappresentazioni Sceniche* (c. 1565-1566). F. Marotti (ed.). Milan, Edizioni il Polifilo.
- Ugolini, B. (1998) Quanto poté natura, studio et arte (c. 1474). In: A. Curti, *Le rime di Baccio Ugolini. Rinascimento*, 38, 163-203 (198).
- Ugolini, B. (1479) Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 14 September, XXVI, no. 263, Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato (MAP), Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.
- Ugolini, B. (1479) Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 30 August, XXVI, no. 241, Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato (MAP), Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.
- Ugolini, B. *et al* (c. 1474-1477) *Alexandri Pueri Senensis multorum nostri temporis Poetarum Epigrammata foeliciter incipienti*. Rome, Apud Sanctum Marcum (Vitus Puecher), available online: <http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb372474218> [accessed 21 February 2013].
- Ugolini, B. (c. 1476) Quanto studio poté natura et arte, MS 2823, Biblioteca Riccardiana (BRF), Florence, 185v.
- Ugolini, B. (1476) Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 14 July, XXXIII, no. 534, Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato (MAP), Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.
- Ugolini, B. (1474) Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 21 May, 30, no. 40, Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato (MAP), Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.
- Ugolini, B. (1473) Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 18 November, XXIX, no. 1024, Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato (MAP), Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.
- Ugolini, B. (1473) Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 5 November, XXIX, no. 974, Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato (MAP), Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.
- Ugolini, B. (1473) Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 27 October, XXIX, no. 930, Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato (MAP), Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.
- Vasari, G. (1976) *Le Vite De' Più Eccellenti Pittori, Scultori e Architettori nelle Redazioni del 1550 e 1568, Vol. IV, Testo* (1868). Florence, Sansoni Editore.
- Vespucci, P. (1476) Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 18 April, XXXIII, no. 266, Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato (MAP), Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.
- Vespucci, P. (1476) Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 20 April, XXXIII, no. 279, Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato (MAP), Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.
- Vespucci, P. (1476) Letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, 22 April, XXXIII, no. 290, Archivio Mediceo Avanti il Principato (MAP), Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Florence.
- Virgil (1974) *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI* (c. 37-19 BC). Loeb Classical Library. Trans. H. Rushton Fairclough. Cambridge, Mass.; London, Harvard University Press; William Heinemann Ltd.

Secondary Literature

- Salman Rushdie: Enchantress of Florence, *WGBH Forum Network*, 17 April 2014, available online: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SupoDk3T4vY>> [accessed 6 August 2014].
- Salman Rushdie's Enchantress, *The Book Show*, ABC Radio National, 21 April 2008, available online: <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/salman-rushdies-enchantress/>>3268052#transcript> [accessed 6 August 2014].
- A Conversation with Salman Rushdie, FORA.tv at City Arts and Lectures, 18 June 2008, available online: http://fora.tv/2008/06/18/A_Conversation_with_Salman_Rushdie> [accessed 6 August 2014].
- Salman Rushdie on his Latest Book, *Newsnight*, BBC, 29 July 2008, available online: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/7530137.stm>> [accessed 6 August 2014].
- Book Discussion on *The Enchantress of Florence*, Miami Book Fair, BookTV, 16 November 2008, available online: <<http://www.c-span.org/video/?282405-10/book-discussion-enchantress-florence>> [accessed 19 August 2014].
- Salman Rushdie on *The Enchantress of Florence*, *Allan Gregg in Conversation*, TVO, 18 November 2010, available online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_27N4bOOrSY> [accessed 6 August 2014].
- Acidini, C. (2011) Cosimo, Piero and Lorenzo. From Money to Maestri. In: T. Parks and L. Sebregondi (eds.) *Money and Beauty. Bankers, Botticelli and the Bonfire of the Vanities*. Florence, Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi; Giunti, 103-117.
- Acidini, C. (2010) *La Primavera Perfetta. Storia Dei Fiori A Firenze Tra Arte e Scienza*. Florence, Casa Editrice Le Lettere.
- Acidini, C. (2009) For a Prosperous Florence. Botticelli's Mythological Allegories. In: A. Schumacher (ed.) *Botticelli. Likeness, Myth, Devotion*. Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 73-96.
- Acidini Luchinat, C. (2001) *Botticelli. Allegorie Mitologiche*. Milan, Electa.
- Ajmar, M. and D. Thornton (1998) When is a portrait not a portrait? *Belle Donne* on Maiolica and the Renaissance Praise of Local Beauties. In: N. Mann and L. Syson (eds.) *The Image of the Individual. Portraits in the Renaissance*. London, British Museum Press, 138-153.
- Ames-Lewis, F. (1979) Early Medicean Devices. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 42, 122-143.
- Anderson, J. (1996) *Giorgione. The Painter of "Poetic Brevity"*. Paris; New York, Flammarion.
- Anthony, A. (2008) The Bookers' Favourite. *The Observer*, 6 April 2008, available online: <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/apr/06/classics.salmanrushdie>> [accessed 6 August 2014].

- Armstrong, A. (2012) *The Virtuoso Circle: Competition, Collaboration, and Complexity in Late Medieval French Poetry*. Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.
- Arscott, C. and K. Scott (2000) Introducing Venus. In: C. Arscott and K. Scott (eds.) *Manifestations of Venus. Art and Sexuality*. Manchester; New York, Manchester University Press, 2-23.
- Bădelescu, D. (2012) Rushdie's Sorcery with Language. *Philologica Jassyensia*, 8(2), 129-142.
- Baldass, L. (1926) Eine Reliefbüste von Tullio Lombardi. *Jahrbuch der Preußischen Kunstsammlungen*, 47, 109-111.
- Barolsky, P. (2000) Botticelli's 'Primavera' and the Poetic Imagination of Italian Renaissance Art. *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, 8(2), 5-35.
- Barolsky, P. (1994) *The Faun in the Garden. Michelangelo and the Poetic Origins of Italian Renaissance Art*. University Park, Pa., The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Barricalla, F. (2007) *L'Elegia di Bernardo Pulci per la morte di Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci Secondo La Lezione della Stampa Miscomini Firenze 1481 (ST. F.)*. Unpublished BA thesis, Università degli Studi di Genova.
- Battera, F. (1990) L'edizione Miscomini (1482) delle *Bucoliche Elegantissime Composte*. *Studi e Problemi di Critica Testuale*, 40, 149-185.
- Bausi, F. (2006) Introduzione e Nota Biografica. In: A. Poliziano *Poesie*. Torino, UTET, 9-60.
- Bausi, F. (1997) Introduzione. In: A. Poliziano *Poesie volgari*. Rome, Vecchiarelli Editore, v-xli.
- Bayer, A. (2008a) From Cassone to Poesia: Paintings of Love and Marriage. In: A. Bayer (ed.) *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 230-237.
- Bayer, A. (2008b) 140c. The Betrothal of Jason and Medea. In: A. Bayer (ed.) *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 303-306.
- Ben Amara, R. (2011) Frontiers and Thresholds in Rushdie's Writings. *Between*, 1(1), 1-16.
- Benassi, S. (1994) La Filosofia e Le Lettere: La Configurazione Mito-Poietica in Poliziano. In: L. Secchi Tarugi (ed.) *Poliziano Nel Suo Tempo. Atti del VI Convegno Internazionale (Chianciano-Montepulciano 18-21 luglio 1994)*. Florence, Franco Cesati Editore, 117-133.
- Bennett, J. M. (2006) *History Matters. Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism*. Manchester, University of Manchester Press.
- Bergstein, M. (1991) Marian Politics in Quattrocento Florence: The Renewed Dedication of Santa Maria del Fiore in 1412. *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44(4), 673-719.

- Bettella, P. (2005) *The Ugly Woman. Transgressive Aesthetic Models in Italian Poetry from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*. Toronto; Buffalo; London, University of Toronto Press.
- Bettinzoli, A. (2009) *La Lucerna di Cleante. Poliziano tra Ficino e Pico*. Florence, Leo S. Olschki Editore.
- Bharat, M. (2009) *Rushdie the Novelist from Grimus to The Enchantress of Florence*. New Delhi, Pencraft International.
- Bianconi, A. (1910) *Girolamo Savonarola giudicato da un suo contemporaneo. Documenti inediti di Tommaso Sardi pubblicati da Alfredo Bianconi*. Rome, Ermanno Loescher & Co.
- Bigi, E. (1967) *La Cultura del Poliziano e Altri Studi Umanistici*. Pisa, Nistri-Lischi Editore.
- Bisconti, D. (2000) *La Pistola I de Luca Pulci Entre Louange Courtisane et Poésie Pastorale. Chroniques italiennes*, 63/64(3/4), 119-138.
- Blake McHam, S. (2009) 02. “Bacchus and Ariadne”. In: A. Luchs (ed.) *Tullio Lombardo and Venetian High Renaissance Sculpture*. Washington, DC; New Haven, Conn.; London, National Gallery of Art; Yale University Press, 70-73.
- Bloch, H. R. (1991) *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*. Chicago; London, The University of Chicago Press.
- Boissard, E. de (1988) *Chantilly, Musée Condé. Peintures de l'Ecole Italienne*. Paris, Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux.
- Bolzoni, L. (2010) *Il Cuore di Cristallo. Ragionamenti D'Amore, Poesia E Ritratto Nel Rinascimento*. Turin, Giulio Einaudi editore.
- Boncompagni, B. (1854) *Intorno ad Alcune Opere di Leonardo Pisano, Matematico del Secolo Decimoterzo*. Rome, Tipografia delle Belle Arti.
- Borsook, E. and J. Offerhaus (1981) *Francesco Sassetti and Ghirlandaio at Santa Trinità, Florence. History and Legend in a Renaissance Chapel*. Doornspijk, Davaco Publishers.
- Branca, V. (1986) Tra Ficino “Orfeo Ispirato” e Poliziano “Ercole Ironico”. In: G. C. Garfagnini (ed.) *Marsilio e Ficino e il Ritorno di Platone, Studi e Documenti. Vol. II*. Florence, Leo S. Olschki Editore, 459-475.
- Brannigan, J. (1998) *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. Basingstoke, Macmillan.
- Bronfen, E. (1992) *Over her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- Brooke Eittle, R. (2008) The Venus Dilemma: Notes on Botticelli and Simonetta Cattaneo Vespucci. *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, 27(4), 3-10.
- Brown, D.A. (2001a) 30. Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni. In: D. A. Brown (ed.) *Virtue and Beauty. Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*. National Gallery of Art, Washington; Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 190-193.

- Brown, D.A. (2001b) Introduction. In: D.A. Brown (ed.) *Virtue and Beauty. Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*. National Gallery of Art, Washington; Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 12-23.
- Brown, D.A. (2001c) 28. Young Woman (Simonetta Vespucci?) in Mythological Guise. In: A. Brown (ed.) *Virtue and Beauty. Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*. National Gallery of Art, Washington; Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 182-185.
- Brundin, A. (2008) *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation*. Aldershot, Ashgate.
- Bryce, J. (2012) 'Male Friendship, Adolescent Passion, and Political Tensions in a Letter of 1465 to Lorenzo de' Medici', paper presented to Europe in the Later Middle Ages, Oxford Centre for Medieval History, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, 28 February 2012.
- Bryce, J. (2009) The Faces of Ginevra de' Benci: Homosocial Agendas and Female Subjectivity in Later Quattrocento Florence. In: F. Kiefer (ed.) *Masculinities and Femininities in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 131-158.
- Bryce, J. (2002) Lorenzo de' Medici, Piombino, and Naples: cultural politics from the *Raccolte Aragonesi* to the *Comento*. In G. Talbot & P. Williams (eds.) *Essays in Italian Literature and History in honour of Doug Thompson*. Dublin, Four Courts Press, 11-27.
- Bryce, J. (2001) Performing for Strangers: Women, Dance, and Music in Quattrocento Florence. *Renaissance Quarterly*, 54(4), 1074-1107.
- Bull, M. (2005) *The Mirror of the Gods*. New York; Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Bullard, M. M. (1994) *Lorenzo il Magnifico. Image and Anxiety, Politics and Finance*. Florence, Leo S. Olschki Editore.
- Burckhardt, J. (1960) *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*. Trans. S.G.C. Middlemore with Irene Gordon. New York, The New American Library.
- Burroughs, C. (2012) Talking with Goddesses: Ovid's *Fasti* and Botticelli's *Primavera*. *Word and Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 28(1), 71-83.
- Cadogan, J. K. (2000) *Domenico Ghirlandaio. Artist and Artisan*. New Haven; London, Yale University Press.
- Calasso, R. (2010) *La Follia che Viene dalle Ninfe*. Milan, Adelphi Edizioni.
- Carrai, S. (2007) Simonetta. In T. Crivelli (ed.) *Selvagge e Angeliche. Personaggi Femminili della Tradizione Letteraria Italiana*. Leonforte, Insula, 85-94.
- Carrai, S. (1999) *I Precetti di Parnaso. Metrica e Generi Poetici nel Rinascimento italiano*. Rome, Bulzoni Editore.
- Carrai, S. (1985) *Le Muse dei Pulci: Studi su Luca e Luigi Pulci*. Naples, Guida Editore.
- Castagnola, R. (1988) Milano e Ludovico il Moro: Cultura Lombarda nel Codice Italiano 1543 della Biblioteca Nazionale di Parigi. *Schifanoia*, 5, 101-185.

- Cecchi, A. (2005) *Botticelli*. Milan, Federico Motta Editore.
- Celenza, C. S. (2010a) Preface. In: C. S. Celenza (ed.) *Angelo Poliziano's Lamia: Text, Translation, and Introductory Studies*. Leiden, Brill Academic Publishers, ix-xi.
- Celenza, C. S. (2010b) Poliziano's *Lamia* in context. In: C. S. Celenza (ed.) *Angelo Poliziano's Lamia: text, translation, and introductory studies*. Leiden, Brill Academic Publishers, 1-45
- Cerracchini, L. G. (1738) *Fasti Teologali ovvero Notizie istoriche del Collegio de' Teologi della Sacra Università Fiorentina: Dalla Sua Fondazione Sino All'Anno 1738*. Florence, Francesco Moücke.
- Chambers, D. S. (1995) The Earlier 'Academies' in Italy. In D. S. Chambers and F. Quiviger (eds.) *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century*. London, The Warburg Institute, 1-14.
- Clayton, M. (2002) *Leonardo da Vinci. The Divine and the Grotesque*. London, Royal Collection Enterprises, Ltd.
- Cleveland Beach, M. (1982) The Mughal Painter Daswanth. *Ars Orientalis*, 13, 121-133.
- Cole, A. (1998) The perception of beauty in landscape in the quattrocento. In: F. Ames-Lewis and M. Rogers (eds.) *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*. Aldershot; Brookfield, Ashgate, 28-43.
- Conrad, J. (2009) [Review of *The Enchantress of Florence*, by S. Rushdie]. *Marvels and Tales*, 23(2), 433-436.
- Coonin, A. V. (2009) The Most Elusive Woman in Renaissance Art: A Portrait of Marietta Strozzi. *Artibus et Historiae*, 30(59), 41-64.
- Cox, V. (2008) *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400-1650*. Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press.
- Cox, V. (2005) 'Sixteenth-Century Women Petrarchists and the Legacy of Laura'. *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 35(3), 583-606.
- Cox-Rearick, J. (1984) *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Crabb, A. (2000) *The Strozzi of Florence: Widowhood and Family Solidarity in the Renaissance*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.
- Croce Bellentani, M. (1978) *Il Tempo di Simonetta la Bella Cattana*. Genoa, Sabatelli Editore.
- Cropper, E. (1995) The Place of Beauty in the High Renaissance and its Displacement in the History of Art. In: A. Vos (ed.) *Place and Displacement in the Renaissance*, 159-205.
- Cropper, E. (1976) On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style. *The Art Bulletin*, 58(3), 374-394.
- Curti, A. (1998) Le rime di Baccio Ugolini. *Rinascimento*, 38, 163-203.

- Curti, A. (1995) *Baccio Ugolini, Letterato e Familiare Mediceo*. Unpublished BA thesis, Università degli Studi di Bologna.
- Davie, M. (1989) Luigi Pulci's *Stanze per la Giostra*: verse and prose accounts of a Florentine joust of 1469. *Italian Studies*, 44, 41-58.
- Dall'Aglio, S. (2010) *Savonarola and Savonarolism*. Trans. J. Gagné. Toronto, CRRS Publications.
- Decaria, A. (2009) *Luigi Pulci e Francesco di Matteo Castellani. Novità e Testi Inediti Da Uno Zibaldone Magliabechiano*. Florence, Società Editrice Fiorentina.
- Dempsey, C. (2012) *The Early Renaissance and Vernacular Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.; London, Harvard University Press.
- Dempsey, C. (1992) *The Portrayal of Love. Botticelli's Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Dent, S. (2008) [Review of *The Enchantress of Florence*, by S. Rushdie]. *New Humanist*, 4 March 2008, available online: <<http://rationalist.org.uk/1745>> [accessed 6 August 2014].
- DePrano, M. (2008) 'No painting on earth would be more beautiful': an analysis of Giovanna degli Albizzi's portrait inscription'. *Renaissance Studies*, 22(5), 617-641.
- Detle, G. (2009) 34/35. Sandro Botticelli, Workshop, *Venus*. Sandro Botticelli, Workshop, *Venus*. In: A. Schumacher (ed.) *Botticelli. Likeness, Myth, Devotion*. Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 236-239.
- Donati, G. (2001) Francesco da Sangallo, Paolo Giovio e la 'Simonetta' di Piero di Cosimo. *Prospettiva*, 101, 81-85.
- Elam, C. (2012) Art and Cultural Identity in Lorenzo de' Medici's Florence. In: F. Ames-Lewis (ed.) *Florence*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 208-251.
- Fantazzi, C. (2001) Poliziano's *Fabula di Orfeo*: a contaminatio of classical and vernacular themes. *Revista de estudios latinos (RELat)*, 1, 121-136.
- Farina, R. (2001) *Simonetta. Una Donna Alla Corte Dei Medici*. Turin, Bollati Boringhieri.
- Fermor (1998) Poetry in motion: beauty in movement and the Renaissance concept of leggiadria. In: F. Ames-Lewis and M. Rogers (eds.) *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*. Aldershot; Brookfield, Ashgate, 124-133.
- Fermor, S. (1993) *Piero di Cosimo. Fiction, Invention and Fantasia*. London, Reaktion Books.
- Fernandes, N. (2008) Salman Rushdie on *The Enchantress of Florence*. *Time Out*, 21 April 2008, available online: <<http://www.timeout.com/london/books/salman-rushdie-on-a-the-enchantress-of-florence>> [accessed 6 August 2014].

- Ferruolo, A. B. (1955) Botticelli's Mythologies, Ficino's *De Amore*, Poliziano's *Stanze Per La Giostra*: Their Circle of Love. *The Art Bulletin*, 37(1), 17-25.
- Fineschi, V. (1782) *Saggio di un Poema Inedito Intitolato Anima Peregrina: Estratta Da Un Codice Della Libreria Del Convento Di S.M. Novella*. Florence, Francesco Moücke.
- Flambard, A. G. Kaserouni and C. Pinault (2003) Catalogue illustré des peintures italiennes du musée Condé. In : V. Durey *et al Les peintures italiennes du musée Condé à Chantilly*. Trieste, Editoriale Generali, 263-291.
- Flamini, F. (1888) La vita e le liriche di Bernardo Pulci. *Propugnatore*, 1(1), 217-248.
- Fletcher, J. (1989) Bernardo Bembo and Leonardo's Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci. *The Burlington Magazine*, 131(1041), 811-816.
- Forlani Tempesti, A. and E. Capretti (1996) *Piero di Cosimo. Catalogo completo*. Florence, Octavo Franco Cantini Editore.
- Freedman, L. (2013) The Arno Valley Landscape in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painting. *Viator*, 44(2), 201-242.
- Fusco, L. and G. Corti (2006) *Lorenzo de' Medici. Collector and Antiquarian*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Gallagher, C. and Greenblatt, S. (2000) *Practicing New Historicism*. Chicago; London, The University of Chicago Press.
- Ganapathy-Doré, G. (2010) Travelling Desires and Imaginary Bridges Between Renaissance Italy and Mughal India in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*. 2(2), 1-15.
- Garin, E. (1957) L'ambiente del Poliziano. In: Convegno Internazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, *Il Poliziano e il suo tempo: atti del IV Convegno internazionale di studi sul Rinascimento, Firenze, Palazzo Strozzi, 23-26 settembre 1954*. Florence, G. C. Sansoni Editore, 17-39.
- Garrard, M. D. (2010) *Brunelleschi's Egg. Nature, Art, and Gender in Renaissance Italy*. Berkely; Los Angeles; London, University of California Press.
- Garrard, M. D. (2006) Who Was Ginevra de' Benci? Leonardo's Portrait and Its Sitter Recontextualized. *Artibus et Historiae*, 27(53), 23-56.
- Gates, D. (2008) A World of Marvels. [Review of *The Enchantress of Florence*, by S. Rushdie]. *New York Times*, 8 June 2008, available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/08/books/review/Gates-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0> [accessed 6 August 2014].
- Geronimus, D. (2006) *Piero di Cosimo. Visions Beautiful and Strange*. New Haven; London, Yale University Press.
- Ghosh, B. (2011) Once There Was Cosmopolitanism: Enchanted Pasts as Global History in the Contemporary Novel. *Ariel*, 42(1), 11-33.

- Gilbert, S. M. and S. Gubar (2000) *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven; London, Yale University Press.
- Gilson, S.A. (2009) *Dante and Renaissance Florence*. Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Giuliani, G.C. (1881). *Dialogo in Volgare Veronese del Secolo XV*. Verona: Stab. Tipo-Litografico G. Vianini.
- Giunta, G. (2002) *Due Saggi Sulla Tenzione*. Rome; Padua, Editrice Antenore.
- Gnann, A. (2010) *Michelangelo. The Drawings of a Genius*. Ostfildern; Vienna, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Albertina.
- Godman, P. (1998) *From Poliziano to Machiavelli: Florentine Humanism in the High Renaissance*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Goffen, R. (2002) *Renaissance Rivals. Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian*. New Haven; London, Yale University Press.
- Goonetilleke, D.C.R.A. (2010) *Salman Rushdie*. Second Edition. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gombrich, E. (1945) Botticelli's Mythologies: A Study in the Neoplatonic Symbolism of His Circle. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 8, 7-60.
- Gorni, G. (1972) Storia del Certame coronario. *Rinascimento*, 12, 135-181.
- Graham, J. H. (1970) *Sandro Botticelli and the Rebirth of Simonetta Vespucci*. Unpublished Masters thesis, University of Florida.
- Greene, T.M. (1982) *The Light in Troy. Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*. New Haven; London, Yale University Press.
- Gundle, S. (2007) *Bellissima: feminine beauty and the idea of Italy*. New Haven; London, Yale University Press.
- Hankins, J. (2004) *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance. Vol. II, Platonism*. Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.
- Hankins, J. (1991) The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence. *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44(3), 429-475.
- Hemmings, C. (2011) *Why Stories Matter. The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Durham; London, Duke University Press.
- Hemsoll, D. (2012) Imitation as a Creative Vehicle in Michelangelo's Art and Architecture. In: J. A. Franklin, T.A. Heslop and C. Stevenson (eds.) *Architecture and Interpretation. Essays For Eric Fernie*. Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 221-241.
- Hemsoll, D. (2003) The Laurentian Library and Michelangelo's Architectural Method. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 66, 29-62.

- Hemsoll, D. (1998) Beauty as an aesthetic and artistic ideal in late fifteenth-century Florence. In: F. Ames-Lewis and M. Rogers (eds.) *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*. Aldershot; Brookfield, Ashgate, 66-79.
- Herzig, T. (2008) *Savonarola's Women. Vision and Reform in Renaissance Italy*. Chicago; London, The University of Chicago Press.
- Hoffmann, S. (2011a) 55. Lorenzo de' Medici. In: K. Christiansen and S. Weppelmann (eds.) *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 181-182.
- Hoffmann, S. (2011b) 58. Angelo Poliziano. In: K. Christiansen and S. Weppelmann (eds.) *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 187-188.
- Holland, A. and R. Scholar (2009) Introduction. In: A. Holland and R. Scholar (eds.) *Pre-Histories and Afterlives. Studies in Critical Method for Terence Cave*. London, Legenda, 1-14.
- Holmes, M. (1997) Disrobing the Virgin: The *Madonna Lactans* in fifteenth-century Florentine art. In: G.A. Johnson and S. F. Matthews Grieco (eds.) *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 167-195.
- Horne, H. (1908) *Botticelli, Painter of Florence*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Jardine, L. (1997) *Worldly Goods. A New History of the Renaissance*. London, Papermac.
- Jardine, L. (1985) 'O Decus Italiae Virgo', or The Myth of the Learned Lady in the Renaissance. *The Historical Journal*, 28(4), 799-819.
- Jayne, E. (1993) A Choreography by Lorenzo in Botticelli's *Primavera*. In: B. Toscani (ed.) *Lorenzo de' Medici. New Perspectives*. New York, Peter Lang, 163-177.
- Jayne, S. (1984) Benivieni's Christian *Canzone*. *Rinascimento*, 24, 153-179.
- Jones, B. (1992) *The Emperor Domitian*. London; New York, Routledge.
- Junkerman, A. C. (1993) The Lady and the Laurel: Gender and Meaning in Giorgione's *Laura*. *Oxford Art Journal*, 16(1), 49-58.
- Kelly-Gadol, J. (1977) Did Women Have a Renaissance? In: R. Bridenthal and C. Coonz (eds.) *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*. Boston; London, Houghton Mifflin, 137-164.
- Kennedy, W. J. (1989) Petrarchan Figurations of Death in Lorenzo de' Medici's Sonnets and *Comento*. In: M. Tetel, R. G. Witt and R. Goffen (eds.) *Life and Death in Fifteenth-Century Florence*. Durham; London, Duke University Press, 46-67.
- Kent, D. (2009) *Friendship, Love, and Trust in Renaissance Florence*. Cambridge, Mass.; London, Harvard University Press.
- Kent, F. W. (2013a) Lorenzo de' Medici and the Love of Women. In F. W. Kent, *Princely Citizen. Lorenzo de' Medici and Renaissance Florence*. Turnhout, Brepols, 41-66.

- Kent, F. W. (2013b) 'Lorenzo ... Amico degli uomini da bene': Lorenzo de' Medici and Oligarchy. In: F. W. Kent, *Princely Citizen. Lorenzo de' Medici and Renaissance Florence*. Turnhout, Brepols, 227-244.
- Kent, F. W. (2004) *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence*. Baltimore; London, John Hopkins University Press.
- Kidwell, C. (2004) *Pietro Bembo: Lover, Linguist, Cardinal*. Montreal; Kingston, Ontario, McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Kirkham, V. (2001) Poetic ideals of love and beauty. In: D. A. Brown (ed.) *Virtue and Beauty. Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*. Washington, National Gallery of Art, 50-61.
- Kolsky, S. (2005) *The Ghost of Boccaccio. Writings on Famous Women in Renaissance Italy*. Turnhout, Brepols Publishers.
- Körner, H. (2009) Simonetta Vespucci. The Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction of a Myth. In: A. Schumacher (ed.) *Botticelli. Likeness, Myth, Devotion*. Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 57-70.
- Kristeller, P. O. (1979) *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Kristeller, P. O. (1963) *Iter Italicum: a finding list of uncatalogued or incomplete humanistic manuscripts of the Renaissance in Italian and other libraries. Vol. I, Italy: Agrigento to Novara*. London, Warburg Institute.
- Kristeller, P. O. (1956) *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*. Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura.
- Laclotte, M. and D. Thiébaud (2003) Les Primitifs italiens du musée Condé. In: V. Durey *et al Les peintures italiennes du musée Condé à Chantilly*. Trieste, Editoriale Generali, 79-99.
- Lal, R. (2008) The Novelist as Conjuror: The Power of Make-Believe Worlds. [Review of *The Enchantress of Florence*, by S. Rushdie]. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(41), 33-34.
- Lawless, C. (2003) Women on the margins: the "beloved" and the "mistress" in Renaissance Florence. In: C. Meek and C. Lawless (eds.) *Studies on medieval and early modern women. Pawns or players?* Dublin, Four Courts Press, 111-130.
- Lazzaro, C. (1991) The Visual Language of Gender in Sixteenth-Century Garden Sculpture. In: M. Migiel and J. Schiesari (eds.) *Refiguring Woman. Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*. Ithaca; London, Cornell University Press, 71-113.
- Lazzi, G. (2005) Simonetta Vespucci, modella e modello. In: P. Viti (ed.) *Letteratura, verità e vita. Studi in ricordo di Gorizio Viti*. Vol. I. Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 219-226.
- Lazzi, G. and P. Ventrone (2007) *Simonetta Vespucci. La nascita della Venere fiorentina*. Florence, Edizioni Polistampa.

- Leporatti, R. (2012) Girolamo Benivieni tra il Commento di Pico della Mirandola e l'Autocommento. In: M. Danzi and R. Leporatti (eds.) *Il Poeta e il Suo Pubblico. Letteratura e Commento dei Testi Lirici nel Cinquecento*. Geneva, Librairie Droz, 373-397.
- Leporatti, R. (2008) Canzone e Sonetti di Girolamo Benivieni fiorentino. Edizione Critica, *Interpres*, 27, 144-298.
- Leporatti, R. (2002) Venere, Cupido e i Poeti d'Amore/ Venus, Cupid and the Poets of Love. In: F. Falletti and J. Katz Nelson (eds.), *Venere e amore. Michelangelo e la nuova bellezza ideale/ Venus and Love. Michelangelo and the new ideal of beauty*. Florence, Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 64-89.
- Lerner, G. (1979) *The Majority Finds its Past. Placing Women in History*. New York; Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Levi d'Ancona, M. (1983) *Botticelli's Primavera: A Botanical Interpretation Including Astrology, Alchemy, and the Medici*. Florence, Leo S. Olschki Editore.
- Levey, M. (1960) Botticelli and Nineteenth-Century England. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 23(3/4), 291-306.
- Luchs, A. (2012) Verrocchio and the bust of Albiera degli Albizzi: portraits, poetry and commemoration. *Artibus et Historiae*, 66, 75-98.
- Luchs, A. (2009) 01. A Couple. In: A. Luchs (ed.) *Tullio Lombardo and Venetian High Renaissance Sculpture*. Washington, DC; New Haven, Conn.; London, National Gallery of Art; Yale University Press, 66-69.
- Luchs, A. (1989) Tullio Lombardo's Ca' d'Oro Relief: Self-Portrait with the Artist's Wife? *The Art Bulletin*, 71(2), 230-236.
- Luchs, A. (1980) A Maenad from Pisa in the *Primavera*. *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 24(3), 369-370.
- Luciano, E. (2001a) 11. Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni. In: D. A. Brown (ed.) *Virtue and Beauty. Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*. National Gallery of Art, Washington; Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 131-132.
- Luciano, E. (2001b) 10. Ludovica Tornabuoni. In: D. A. Brown (ed.) *Virtue and Beauty. Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*. National Gallery of Art, Washington; Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 127-129.
- Lungo, I. del (1897) *Florentia. Uomini e Cose del Quattrocento*. Florence, G. Barbera Editore.
- Lydecker, J. K. (1987) *The domestic setting of the arts in Renaissance Florence*. Unpublished PhD thesis, The John Hopkins University.
- MacCarthy, I. (2012) Grace. In: I. MacCarthy (ed.), *Renaissance Keywords*. Oxford, Legenda, 63-78.

- MacLachlan, B. (1993) *The Age of Grace. Charis in Early Greek Poetry*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Mandosio, J.-M. (1994) Filosofia, Arti e Scienze: L'Enciclopedismo di Angelo Poliziano. In: L. Secchi Tarugi (ed.) *Poliziano Nel Suo Tempo. Atti del VI Convegno Internazionale (Chianciano-Montepulciano 18-21 luglio 1994)*. Florence, Franco Cesati Editore, 135-164.
- March, J. (2001) *Cassell's Dictionary of Classical Mythology*. London, Cassell and Co.
- Marchese, V. (1855) *Scritti vari del P. Vincenzo Marchese*. Florence, Felice Le Monnier.
- Mariani, I. (2014) *The Vespucci family in context: art patrons in late-fifteenth century Florence*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh (forthcoming).
- Marino, E. (2002) Girolamo Savonarola ed il poeta Feo Belcari nel poema dantesco "Anima Peregrina" del domenicano fra Tommaso Sardi (d.[?] 1517). *Memorie Domenicane*, 33, 1-94.
- Marmor, M. C. (2003) From Purgatory to the 'Primavera': Some Observations on Botticelli and Dante. *Artibus et Historiae*, 24(48), 199-212.
- Martelli, M. (1996) *Letteratura fiorentina del Quattrocento: Il Filtro Degli Anni Sessanta*. Florence, Le Lettere.
- Martelli, M. (1995) *Angelo Poliziano: Storia e Metastoria*. Lecce, Conte Editore.
- Martelli, M. (1992) La cultura letteraria nell'età di Lorenzo. In G.C. Garfagnini (ed.) *Lorenzo il Magnifico e il suo tempo*. Florence, Leo S. Olschki Editore, 39-84.
- Martelli, M. (1985-1986) Schede sulla cultura di Machiavelli. *Interpres*, 6, 307.
- Martelli, M. (1980) Nota a Naldo Naldi, *Elegiarum*, I 26 54. *Interpres*, 3, 245-254.
- Martines, L. (2001) *Strong Words. Writing and Social Strain in the Italian Renaissance*. Baltimore; London, The John Hopkins University Press.
- Martines, L. (1972) L'Ambiente Politico del Poliziano. In: G. Tarugi (ed.) *Civiltà dell'umanesimo: atti del VI, VII, VIII Convegno Internazionale del Centro di Studi Umanistici, Montepulciano, Palazzo Tarugi, 1969, 1970, 1971*. Florence, Olschki, 163-171.
- Mascalchi, S. (2011) 7.20. Sandro Botticelli (Alessandro Filipepi, Florence 1445-1510). Workshop. *Venus*, c. 1482. In: T. Parks and L. Sebreghondi (eds.) *Money and Beauty. Bankers, Botticelli and the Bonfire of the Vanities*. Florence, Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi; Giunti, 228-229.
- Mazzotta, G. (2001) *Cosmopoiesis. The Renaissance Experiment*. Toronto; Buffalo; London, University of Toronto Press.
- Maxson, B. J. (2014) *The Humanist World of Renaissance Florence*. Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press.

- McLaughlin, M. (2000) Poliziano's *Stanze per la giostra*: Postmodern Poetics in a Proto-Renaissance Poem. In: J. Everson and D. Zancani (eds.) *Italy in Crisis, 1494*. Oxford, Legenda, 129-151.
- McLaughlin, M. L. (1995) *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance. The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- McLean, P. D. (2007) *The Art of the Network. Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence*. Durham; London, Duke University Press.
- McQuillan, M. (2013) 'Illuminated by a ray of sun at midnight': *The Enchantress of Florence*. In: R. Eaglestone and M. McQuillan (eds.) *Salman Rushdie. Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, 86-98.
- Meli, P. (2006) Jacopo III nell'Italia degli Stati regionali. In: P. Meli and S. Tognetti (eds.) *Il Principe e il Mercante nella Toscana del Quattrocento. Il Magnifico Signore di Piombino Jacopo III Appiani e le Aziende Maschiani di Pisa*. Florence, Leo S. Olschki Editore, 17-66.
- Melli, L. (2009) Botticelli as a Draftsman. His Studies of Heads. In: A. Schumacher (ed.) *Botticelli. Likeness, Myth, Devotion*. Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 99-109.
- Meuret, I. (2011) A Tale of Mutual Fascination: Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*. In: M. Maufort and C. De Wagter (eds.) *Old Margins and New Centers. The European Literary Heritage in an Age of Globalization*. Brussels, Peter Lang, 261-271.
- Mirabella, B. (2011) Introduction. In: B. Mirabella (ed.) *The Art of Renaissance Accessories*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1-10.
- Miziolek, J. (2010) I decori e le storie dipinte sui cassoni. In: C. Paolini, D. Parenti and L. Sebregondi (eds.) *Virtù d'amore: pittura nuziale nel Quattrocento fiorentino*. Florence, Firenze musei; Giunti, 69-77.
- Moi, T. (2002) *Sexual/ Textual Politics. Feminist Literary Theory*. London; New York, Routledge.
- Moss, A. (2003) *Renaissance Truth and the Latin Language Turn*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Musacchio, J. M. (2008) *Art, Marriage and Family in the Florentine Renaissance Palace*. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Musumeci, A. (1981) 'Il Poliziano e la disposizione avversativa'. In: G. Tarugi, (ed.), *Ecumenismo della Cultura. Vol. 1. Teoria e prassi della poetica dell'umanesimo; onoranze a Giovanni Boccaccio*, 1981. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 81-92.
- Najemy, J. M. (2006) *A History of Florence*. Malden; Oxford; Carlton, Blackwell Publishing.
- Nardello, C. (2002) *Anima Peregrina. Il Viaggio Dantesco Del Domenicano Tommaso Sardi. Miscellanea Marciana*, 17, 119-176.
- Neri, A. (1885) La Simonetta. *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 5, 131-147.

- Neuman, J. (2008) The Fictive Origins of Secular Humanism. [Review of *The Enchantress of Florence*, by S. Rushdie]. *Criticism*, 50(4), 675-682.
- Nicolodi, F. (2013) Italian Opera. In: D. Charlton (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 383-402.
- E. J. (2002) Piero di Cosimo's *Lady Fiammetta*. *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, 21(2), 6-12.
- Orvieto, P. (2009) *Poliziano e l'Ambiente Mediceo*. Roma, Salerno Editrice.
- Orvieto, P. (1978) *Pulci medievale: Studio Sulla Poesia Volgare Fiorentina Del Quattrocento*. Rome, Salerno Editrice.
- Orvieto, P. (1973) Angelo Poliziano, 'compare' della brigata laurenziana. *Lettere Italiane*, 25, 301-318.
- Panofsky, E. (1972) *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*. New York; London, Harper and Row.
- Paoluzzi, M. C. (2002) 115. Tommaso Sardi. *Anima Peregrina*. In: A. Cadei (ed.) *Il Trionfo Sul Tempo. Manoscritti Illustrati Dell'Accademia Nazionale Dei Lincei*. Modena, Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, 264-269.
- Parashkevova, V. (2012) *Salman Rushdie's Cities. Reconfigurational Politics and the Contemporary Urban Imagination*. New York; London, Continuum.
- Pater, W. (1986) *The Renaissance (1870)*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Patetta, F. (1917-1918) Una raccolta manoscritta di versi e prose in morte d'Albiera degli Albizzi. *Atti della R. Accademia delle Scienze di Torino*, 53, 290-294, 310-328.
- Patetta, F. (1899) Di Una Raccolta di Componimenti e di Una Medaglia di Alessandro Cinuzzi, Senese Paggio Del Conte Gerolamo Riario. *Bullettino Senese di Storia Patria*, 6, 151-176.
- Percopo, E. (1897) *Una Tenzione su Amore e Fortuna nel Quattrocento*. Naples, Luigi Pierro Tipografo-Editore.
- Pernicone, V. (1952) Sul Testo delle Stanze del Poliziano. *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 129, 1-25.
- Phillips, K. and B. Reay (2011) *Sex before Sexuality. A Premodern History*. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Piccolomini, E. (1875) *Intorno alle condizioni ed alle vicende della Libreria Medicea privata*. Florence, coi tipi di M. Cellini.
- Pirrotta, N. (1982) *Music from Poliziano to Monteverdi*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Polcri, A. (2010) *Luigi Pulci e la Chimera. Studi Sull'Allegoria Nel Morgante*. Florence, Società Editrice Fiorentina.

- Polizzotto, L. (1994) *The Elect Nation. The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Poncet, C. (2008) The Judgement of Lorenzo. *Bruniana e Campanelliana. Ricerche filosofiche e materiali storico-testuali*, 14(2), 535-553.
- Pope-Hennessy, J. with R. Lightbown (1964a) *Catalogue of Italian Sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Volume I: Text, Eighth to Fifteenth Century*. London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Pope-Hennessy, J. with R. Lightbown (1964b) *Catalogue of Italian Sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Volume III: Plates*. London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Pozzi, G. (1979) Il ritratto della donna nella poesia d'inizio Cinquecento e la pittura di Giorgione. *Lettere Italiane*, 31(1), 3-30.
- Puccini, D. (2004) Note. In: A. Poliziano *Stanze Orfeo Rime*. Milano, Garzanti Editore.
- Schmitter, M. A. (1995) Botticelli's Images of Simonetta Vespucci: Between Portrait and Ideal. *Rutgers Art Review*, 15, 33-57.
- Raber, K. (2011) Chains of Pearls: Gender, Property, Identity. In: B. Mirabella (ed.) *The Art of Renaissance Accessories*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 159-181.
- Ramanathan, G. (2012) *Locating Gender in Modernism. The Outside Female*. New York; London, Routledge.
- Randolph, A. W. B. (2002) *Engaging Symbols. Gender, Politics and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*. New Haven; London, Yale University Press.
- Re, C. (1906) *Girolamo Benivieni Fiorentino. Cenni Sulla Vita E Sulle Opere*. Città di Castello, Casa Tipografico-Editrice S. Lapi.
- Richardson, B. (2009) *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Ridolfi, R. (1964) Girolamo Benivieni e una Sconosciuta Revisione del suo *Canzoniere*. *La Bibliofilia*, 66, 213- 234.
- Robertis, D. de (1988) Le Violette sul Seno della Fanciulla. In: G. Besomi *et al* (eds.) *Forme e vicende per Giovanni Pozzi*. Padua, Editrice Antenore, 75-99.
- Rochon, A. (1963) *La jeunesse de Laurent de Médicis (1449-1478)*. Paris, Les Belles Lettres.
- Rogers, M. (1988) The Decorum of Women's Beauty: Trissino, Firenzuola, Luigini and the Representation of Women in Sixteenth Century Painting. *Renaissance Studies*, 2, 47-88.
- Roush, S. (2006) Piagnone Exemplarity and the Florentine Literary Canon in the *Vita di Girolamo Benivieni*. *Quaderni d'italianistica*, 27(1), 3-20.
- Roush, S. (2002) *Hermes' Lyre. Italian Poetic Self-Commentary from Dante to Tommaso Campanella*. Toronto; Buffalo; London, University of Toronto Press.

- Roy, R. (2008) Enchanting Tales of Jodha-Akbar. *International Institute for Asian Studies Newsletter*, 84, 34-35, available online: <http://www.iias.nl/nl/48/IIAS_NL48_3435.pdf> [accessed 6 August 2014].
- Rubin, P. L. (2000) The seductions of antiquity. In: C. Arscott and K. Scott (eds.) *Manifestations of Venus. Art and Sexuality*. Manchester; New York, Manchester University Press, 24-38.
- Rubin, P. L. (1999) 29. Andrea del Verrocchio. Studies of a female head. In: P. Rubin and A. Wright (eds.) *Renaissance Florence. The Art of the 1470s*. London, National Gallery Publications Limited, 184-187.
- Ruggieri, R. M. (1959) Letterati, poeti e pittori intorno alla giostra di Giuliano de' Medici. *Rinascimento*, 10, 165-196.
- Ruskin, J. (1906) *The Works of John Ruskin. Vol. 22: Lectures on Landscape; Michael Angelo and Tintoret; The Eagle's Nest; Ariadne Florentina* (1872). London, George Allen.
- Ruvoldt, M. (2004) *The Italian Renaissance Imagery of Inspiration. Metaphors of Sex, Sleep and Dreams*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Santore, C. (2008) Like a Nymph. *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, 27(4), 20-26.
- Sasser, K. (2011) *Magically Strategized Belonging: Magical Realism as Cosmopolitan Mapping in Ben Okri, Cristina García, and Salman Rushdie*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh.
- Schibanoff, S. (1994) Botticelli's Madonna del Magnificat: Constructing the Woman Writer in Early Humanist Italy. *PMLA*, 109(2), 190-206.
- Schier, R. (2014) Identifying Giorgione's Laura. *Italian Studies*, 69(1), 24-40.
- Schmitter, M. A. (1995) Botticelli's Images of Simonetta Vespucci: Between Portrait and Ideal. *Rutgers Art Review*, 15, 33-57.
- Schumacher, A. (2009a) The Painter Sandro Botticelli. An Introduction to his oeuvre. In: A. Schumacher (ed.) *Botticelli. Likeness, Myth, Devotion*. Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 15-55.
- Schumacher, A. (2009b) Sandro Botticelli. *Idealised Female Portrait (Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci as a Nymph)*. In: A. Schumacher (ed.) *Botticelli. Likeness, Myth, Devotion*. Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 152-155.
- Schumacher (2009c) 2/3. Unknown Master. *Apollo, Marsyas, and Olympus (Sigillo di Nerone)*. Lorenzo Ghiberti? Workshop. *Apollo, Marsyas, and Olympus*. In: A. Schumacher (ed.) *Botticelli. Likeness, Myth, Devotion*. Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 156-159.
- Schumacher (2009d) 4. Sandro Botticelli. Workshop. *Allegorical Portrait of a Lady (Simonetta Vespucci?)*. In: A. Schumacher (ed.) *Botticelli. Likeness, Myth, Devotion*. Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 160-163.

- Séris, E. (2004) Ange Politien, Poète de l'amour: Entre Lucrèce et Ficin. *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 66(2), 261-283.
- Sframeli, M. (2003) Venus in Florence. In: M. Sframeli (ed.) *The Myth of Venus/Le Mythe de Vénus*. Milan, Silvana; Arthemisia, 37-61.
- Simons, P. (2011-2012) Giovanna and Ginevra: Portraits for the Tornabuoni Family by Ghirlandaio and Botticelli. *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 14/15, 103-135.
- Simons, P. (1995) Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women. In: A. Brown (ed.) *Languages and Images of Renaissance Italy*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 263-311.
- Sozzi, L. (1994) Poliziano e la 'Dignitas Hominis' o l'Elogio della Dolcezza. In: L. Secchi Tarugi (ed.) *Poliziano Nel Suo Tempo. Atti del VI Convegno Internazionale (Chianciano-Montepulciano 18-21 luglio 1994)*. Florence, Franco Cesati Editore, 11-20.
- Spongberg, M. (2002) *Writing Women's History Since the Renaissance*. Basingstoke; New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Steinberg, R. M. (1977) *Fra Girolamo Savonarola, Florentine Art, and Renaissance Historiography*. Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press.
- Storey, C. (2003) The Philosopher, the Poet, and the Fragment: Ficino, Poliziano, and *Le stanze per la giostra*. *The Modern Language Review*, 98(3), 602-619.
- Strocchia, S. T. (1998) Gender and the Rites of Honour in Italian Renaissance Cities. In: J. C. Brown and R. C. Davis (eds.) *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*. London; New York, Longman, 39-60.
- Strocchia, S. T. (1992) *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence*. Baltimore; London, The John Hopkins University Press.
- Syson, L. (2008) Belle: Picturing Beautiful Women. In: A. Bayer (ed.) *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 246-254.
- Taylor, J. H. M. (2007) *The Making of Poetry. Late-Medieval French Poetic Anthologies*. Turnhout, Brepols.
- Tazartes, M. (2010) *Piero di Cosimo, 'ingegno astratto e difforme'*. Florence, Mauro Pagliai Editore.
- Tinagli, P. (1997) *Women in Italian Renaissance Art*. Manchester; New York, Manchester University Press.
- Tipping Compton, R. (2009) *A Cultural Icon: The Currency of Venus in Sixteenth-Century Florence*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley.
- Tognarini, I. (2002) *L'identità e l'oblio. Simonetta, Semiramide e Sandro Botticelli*. Milan, Mondadori Electa.

- Tomas, N. R. (2003) *The Medici Women. Gender and Power in Renaissance Florence*. Aldershot; Burlington, Ashgate.
- Torre, A. della (1902) *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze*. Florence, Tipografia G. Carnesecchi e Figli.
- Trexler, R. C. (1980) *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*. Ithaca; London, Cornell University Press.
- Tylus, J. (2010) Epic's Endless Deferral: Vernacular Masculinities in the Florence of Lorenzo de' Medici. In: G. Milligan and J. Tylus (eds.) *The Poetics of Masculinity in Early Modern Italy and Spain*. Toronto, Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 75-100.
- Tylus, J. (2001) *Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici. Sacred Narratives*. Chicago; London, The University of Chicago Press.
- Van der Sman, G. J. (2010) *Lorenzo and Giovanna. Timeless Art and Fleeting Lives in Renaissance Florence*. Trans. D. Webb. Florence, Mandragora.
- Vannucci, M. (2004) *Le Grandi Donne del Rinascimento Italiano. Da Simonetta Cattaneo A Isabella D'Este; Da Lucrezia Borgia Dd Artemisia Gentileschi: Una Affascinante Storia Tutta Al Femminile*. Rome, Newton & Compton Editori.
- Vasiljeva, I. (2011) *The Magic of Beauty in Salman Rushdie's Novel The Enchantress of Florence*. Unpublished Masters thesis, Stockholm University.
- Warburg, A. (1999) *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity (1893)*. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities.
- Warner, M. (1976) *Alone of all her Sex. The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*. London, Picador.
- Waterman, J. P. (2013) 20. Venus with Cupid the Honey Thief. In: M. Wynn Ainsworth and J. P. Waterman, with D. Mahon (eds.) *German Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1350-1600*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 90-93.
- Weickgenannt Thiara, N. (2011) Enabling spaces and the architecture of hybridity in Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence*. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 46(4), 415-431.
- Weinstein, D. (1970) *Savonarola and Florence. Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Weppelmann, S. (2011) Some Thoughts on Likeness in Italian Early Renaissance Portraits. In: K. Christiansen and S. Weppelmann (eds.) *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 64-76.
- Werner, I. M. (2009) *Antonfrancesco Grazzini 'Il Lasca' (1505-1584) and the Burlesque. Poetry, Performance and Academic Practice in Sixteenth-Century Florence*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Utrecht University.

- Williamson, E. (1950) Form and Content in the Development of the Italian Renaissance Ode. *PMLA*, 65(4), 550-567.
- Woods-Marsden, J. (2001) Portraits of the Lady, 1430-1520. In: D.A. Brown (ed.) *Virtue and Beauty. Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*. National Gallery of Art, Washington; Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 64-87.
- Woolfson, J. (2009) The Renaissance of Bees. *Renaissance Studies*, 24(2), 281-300.
- Yates, Frances A. (1988) *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*. London; New York, Routledge.
- Yuen, T. E. S. (1969) The Tazza Farnese as a Source for Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and Piero di Cosimo's *Myth of Prometheus*. *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 74, 175-178.
- Zak, G. (2013) 'Ethics and Literary Form in the Works of Angelo Poliziano', paper presented to the 59th Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America, San Diego, 4-6 April 2012.
- Zanato, T. (1992) Notes. In: L. de' Medici, *Opere*. Firenze, Olschki.
- Zemon Davis, N. (2000) *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Zirpolo, L. (1991) Botticelli's "Primavera": A Lesson for the Bride. *Woman's Art Journal*, 12(2), 24-28.
- Zöllner, F. (2005) *Sandro Botticelli*. Munich; Berlin; London; New York, Prestel.
- Zucker, M. (ed.) (1980) *The Illustrated Bartsch, Vol. 24. Early Italian Masters*. New York, Abaris Books.

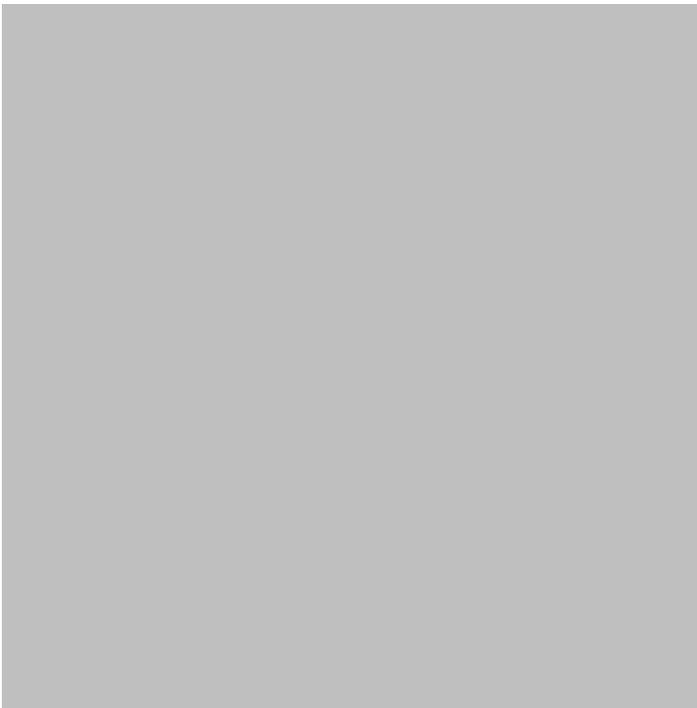
APPENDIX ONE: THE ‘SIMONETTA POEMS’

I have included here all of the poetry and prose to which I refer in the thesis, with two exceptions. The first relates to Girolamo Benivieni’s self-commentaries, which I have viewed and read in detail but not had time to transcribe definitively. Since I do not, in any case, refer them to at length in the course of the text I have decided to limit myself to reproducing his sonnets in their various forms. The second involves Francesco Nursio Timideo’s elegy. Since the poem is available in two separate manuscripts, one of which I have not had much opportunity to study, and since an edited version of the poem has never been produced, I do not wish to discourage others from such an undertaking by effectively publishing the text in its entirety. I have therefore only included the sections of the poem that refer directly to Simonetta, using my transcription of BNCF MS II II 75, 192v- 202r, with the aid of Neri 1885: 139-140. The reader will also note that, for reasons of practicality, in transcribing the works of Poliziano, Lorenzo and Tommaso Sardi I have restricted myself to reproducing the passages in which Simonetta appears.

a) Girolamo Benivieni

The sonnets as they appear in *Canzone e Sonetti di Girolamo Benivieni fiorentino (circa 1489)*:

Ad Giuliano de’ Medici. Consolatione per la morte de Simonetta
Sonetto quinto



Per la morte della Simonetta. In persona de Giuliano de' Medici

Sonetto Sexto



(Transcribed in Leporatti 2008: 218- 219)

'Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è'l chiaro sole', as it appears in *Commento di Hieronymo B. sopra a piú sue canzone et sonetti dello amore et della bellezza [sic] divina* (1500):

Sonetto V (Parte Seconda)

Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è el nostro sole
Che già gran tempo ci fe' lume in terra,
Ma ben lasciato ha el cor che, in pianto e'n guerra,
Di sé, dell'alma e del suo vel si duole:

Del suo corporeo vel che l'alme et sole
Beltà a' nostri occhi involve, absconde et serra;
Di sé, che co' suoi strali più non atterra
L'alma; di lei, che'l cor seguir non vuole.

Et perché io so che vana è la speranza
Di veder quel mentre el corporeo velo
Sguardar tanto alto a' nostri occhi contende;

Se dentro al breve corso che ne avanza
Priego alcun per Lui, mosso in Lui ne ascende,
Spero anchor nudo en sé vederlo in cielo.

(46v- 47r)

‘Se morta vive ancor colei che in vita’, as it appears in the 1519 *Opere di Hierony. Beniuieni*:

Se morto vive anchor colui ch’in vita
Troppo certo al tuo cor fu grato et piacque
Mentre ch’in quest’humane membra giacque,
Ond’era al suo disio la via impedita;

Se lieta et in grembo al suo fattore salita
Quest’anima gentil, dov’ella nacque,
Se da quest’impie ad quell’nitid’acque
Ti chiama alletta ogn’hor lusinga e ‘nvita;

S’ivi fruir la puoi più che mai bella,
Volendo poi che ‘l mal tessuto velo
Rotto fia di tua veste infetta et egra;

Apri hormai gli occhi, et per la via che quella
Ti scorse in terr’a lei tornand’ in cielo,
Pon fine al pianto, et del suo ben t’allegra.

(115v- 116r)

‘Sparito, occhi miei lassi, è’l chiaro sole’, as it appears in the *Rime, con commento* (circa 1530):

Sparito, occhi mie’ lassi, è ’l nostro sole
Che già gran tempo ci fe’ lume in terra,
Ma ben lasciato ha ’l cor che ’n pianto e ’n guerra
Di sé, del’alma et del suo amor si duole.

Di amor, che gli occhi al’increase in sole
Sole vere belleze ingrato hor serra,
Di sé, che co’ suoi strali più non atterra
L’alma, di lei che più obbedir non vuole.

E perché io so che vana è la speranza
Di veder quel mentre il corporeo velo
Sguardar tanto alto a’ nostri occhi contende;

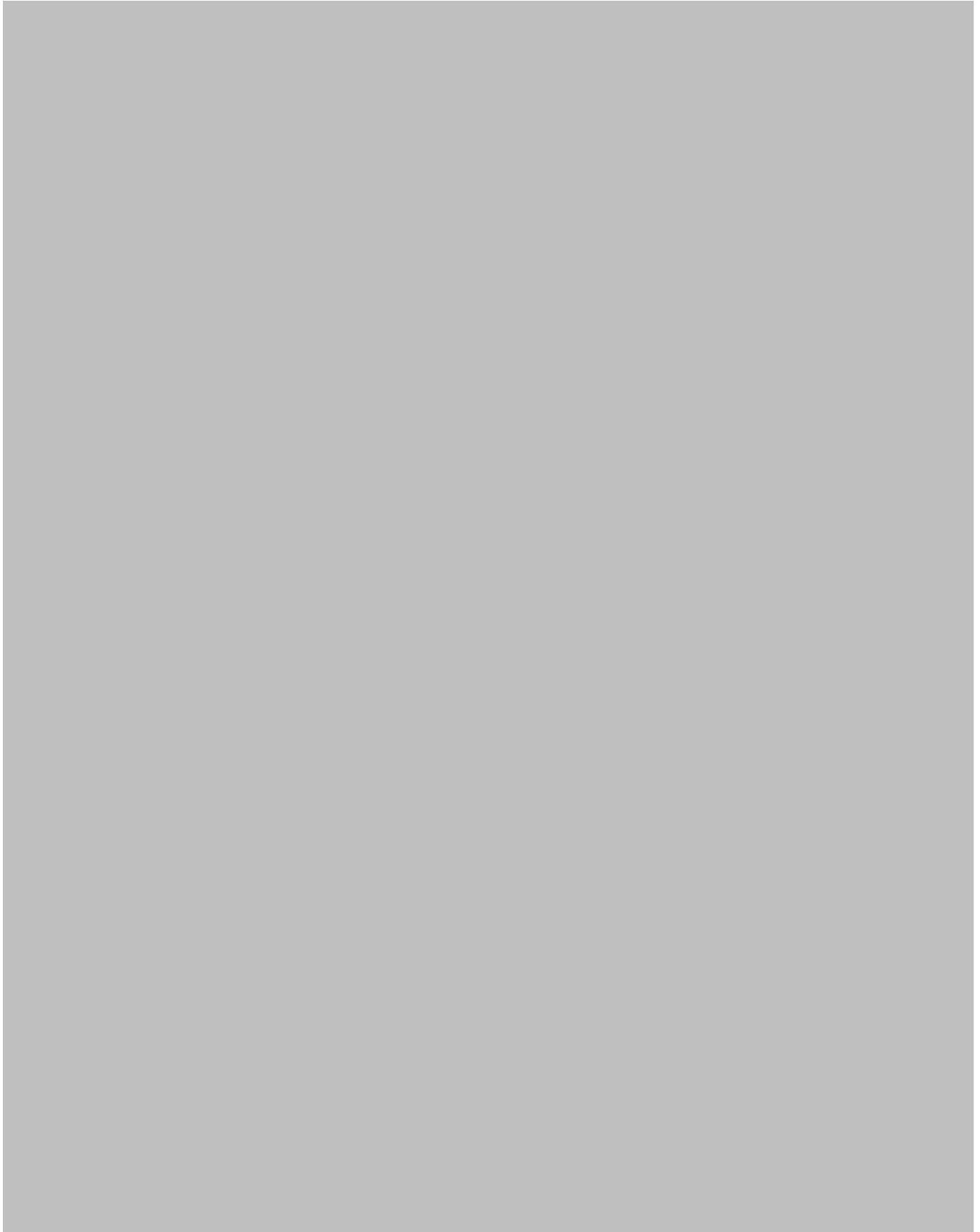
Se dentro al breve corso che n’avanza
Priego alcun da Lui mosso all’Lui transcende
Spero anchor nudo e ’n sé vederlo in cielo.

(25v)

b) Lorenzo de' Medici

I transcribe below the sections of the *Comento de' miei sonetti* in which Simonetta appears, including the four sonnets.

From the 'Argumento':















(589-604)

From the 'Nuovo Argumento':



(606-607)





(611-612)

c) Angelo Poliziano

I transcribe below the sections of the *Stanze per la giostra* in which Simonetta appears:



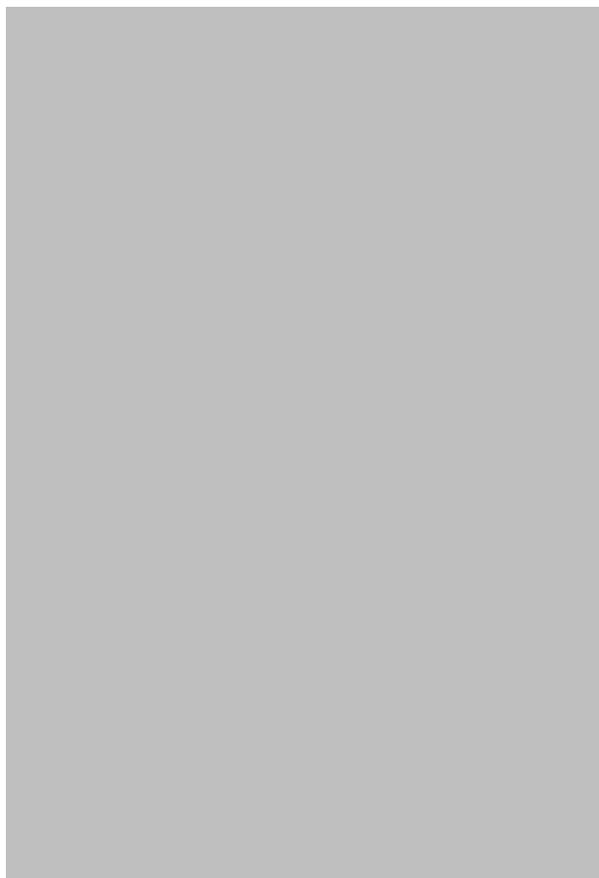


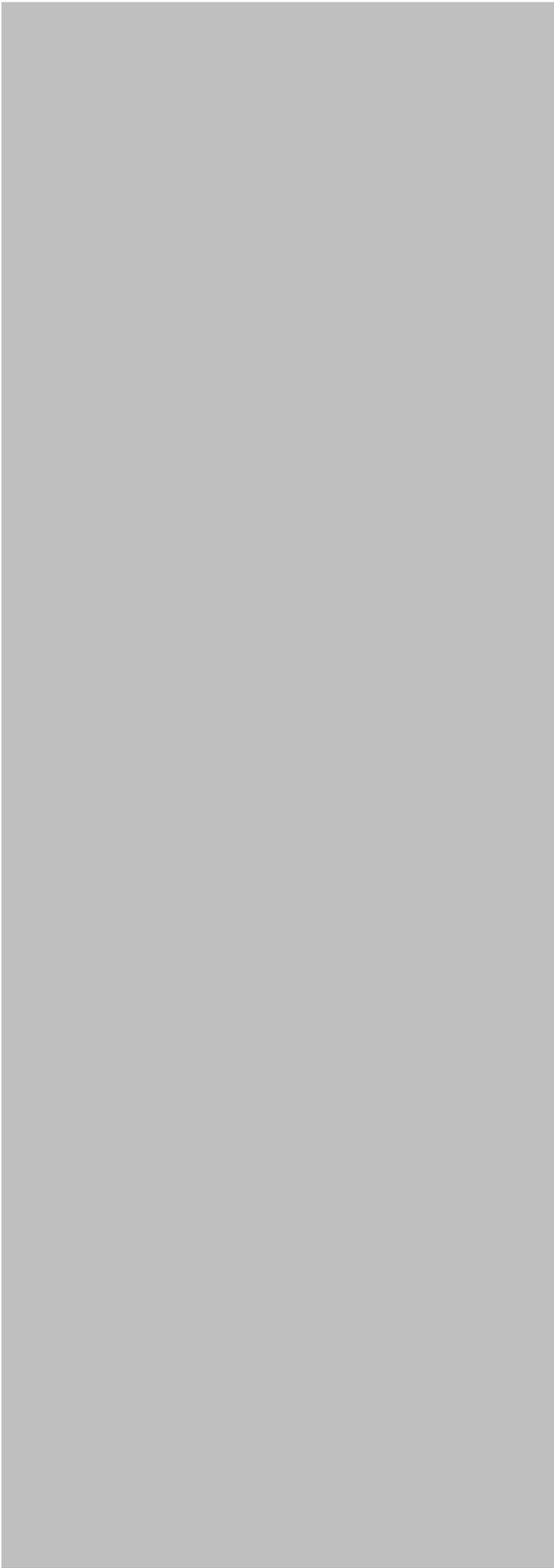






(I. 37-59)







(II. 27-34)

d) Bernardo Pulci

Bernardo's elegy and sonnet, as transcribed by Fabio Barricalla (2007: 19-24 and 36):



3

6

9

12

15

18

21

24

27



30

33

36

39

42

45

48

51

54

57

60

63



66

69

72

75

78

81

84

87

90

93

96

99



102

105

108

111

114

117

120

123

126

129

132



135

138

141

144

147

150

153

156

159

162

165

168



171

174

177

180

183

186

189

192



e) Luigi Pulci

Luigi's sonnet, as transcribed by Stefano Carrai (1985: 89):



f) Tommaso Sardi

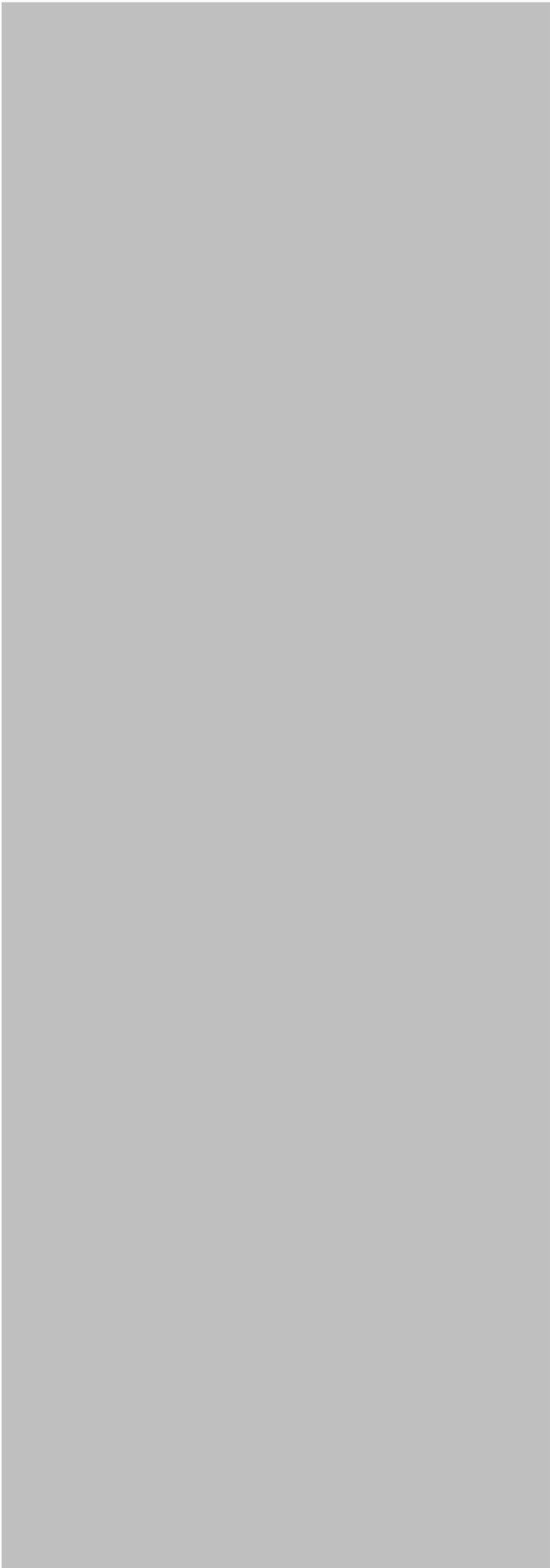
I here transcribe in full Chapter Thirteen of *De Anima Peregrina*, as presented by Rooke 1929: 37-39, with slight amendments to enhance the readability of the text:

Capitolo tertio decimo dove dalli spiriti si da al peregrino uno anello in rimedio del fuecho et di poi s'entra in quello et trovassi la symonia che movalica per lo elemento del fuecho d'avaritia.



3

6



9

12

15

18

21

24

27

30

33

36

39

42



45

48

51

54

57

60

63

66

69

72

75

78



81

84

87

90

93

96

99

The following is a transcription of Sardi's self-commentary, based largely on my transcription of ASMN MS IB 59, 29-30r. The opening four sections can also be found in Farina 2001: 57-58.

Il poeta vedendo la bella donna, domanda alla sua guida:

“È ella cristiana o infedele?”

La guida gli rispose: “Parla con lei”.

Questo parola certo? fu d'ammirazione nello autore quando lei disse essere la Simonetta, perché l'auctore conobbe una nobile et gentile donna chiamata Simonetta che per la sua bellezza et virtù fu grandemente in istima et amata da signori et gran maestri, come si dirà, et universalmente fu amata da ciaschuno che la conoscessi o sentissila nominare. Morì giovane con piancto quasi di tucta la nostra città, donna fu di M[arco] V[espucchi], però stupendosi disse certo? io ad ella, cioè quella Simonetta di tanta fama et gratia.

Che tanto in quello, l'archo et suo saetta, cioè sì che tu se' la Simonetta, che tanto l'archo et saepta di sue bellezze percosse tanto in quello, cioè in colui che poi fu re et hor perde el suo regno. Qui è da notare brevemente che sendo nella nostra città venuto Alfonso, duca di Calabria, figliuolo del Re Ferrando di Napoli, et intendendo le bellezze di costei se ne innamorò et dal dardo et volto bellissimo et dalla sua onesta et gentileza percosse in modo el duca che fece ougni studio et pose pugni a scoprire el suo amore accosti, et nota che fu poi Re di Napoli et hora perde el suo regno, perché actualmente l'auctore scriveva questi stessi versi quando passò re Carlo per acquistare el regno di Napoli; perciò dice et hor perde el suo regno.

Che ti fe barchetta, per intelligenza di queste due parole è da intendere che la casa dove abitava la decta Simonetta confinava con Arno fiume, immodo che una sera sendo caldo entrorno rinfrescarsi nell'acqua el duca et lei. Qui si dice che la fe barchetta- moralizza tu, lettore.

Donde ne nacque poi quel giusto sdegno, perché di qui nacque nel marito sdegno giusto. Che tanto t'atristi che morte venne, cioè tanto se n'acorò la decta Simonetta ch'el marito havessi tanto fisso sdegno che morte venne in lei et scolori al mondo el bel disegno, cioè la morte oscurò el colorito volto della Simonetta, che era al mondo un bel disengno perché era de' belli visi che adì sua fussino visti.

Non ella ad me: qui risponde la Simonia et dice che non è quella Simonetta et adgiungne et dice: "ne mecho si convenne perché à uno sine stima la Simonia et à un altro sine era amata la Simonetta. Qui nella Simonia si cerca beni spirituali, et la Simonetta era bene temporale però non era capace lei di benefici; però convene non con la Simonia et pratica, et se amata fu la Simonetta, assai più io Simonia sono amata; però dice più alto volon mie dorate penne perché se la Simonetta fu amata da un duca et io sono amata da' papi et cardinali et da' mperadori et re etc.", et dice ch' vola con dorate penne perché nella simonia el fine sie l'oro.

Et io, cioè io auctore, la domandai "de dinmi se tu se' in dysio come tu di', cioè se tu se' amata da' papi, imperadori etc. o dov'è haram gli amanti a ricordati over porti in oblio?" Qui adomanda dove habiti perché gli amanti solgliono frequentare intorno all'abitathione delle donne et qui chiamarle con serenate et suoni et strambotti, et qualche volta per sdegno et per damenticare la donna amata suolsi fuggire l'abitathione di lei et così porla in oblio fuggendola.

Et ella: "io miricuopro con col gli ammanti di color che piu m'amon per fuggire la pena che si scrive alli mia incanti; qui non vuol dire dove habiti perché non si truova nissuno che volglia dire apertamente havere in casa la Simonia. Ma dice che si nabsconde soto gli ammanti cioè de' prelati et grandi maestri che la tengono nabscosa per fuggir la pena, cioè la privatione de' benefici ch'nastie dalla Simonia che si scrive, cioè è scripta tal pena nelli decreti; all'incanti, cioè alle lode, a'presenti et doni, al servire come è detto di sopra che tucte queste servitù et doni et presenti et lode che si fanno per acquistare benefici sono incanti della simonia a'ffare innamorare el simoniacho.

"Cotanto sono di cuore che pilglio ardire" dice la simonia che è di tanto cuore che la pilglia ardire, laudar, servir, et al donar cortese; questi sono gl'incanti come è decto; però dice che "per me si cancella ongni disdire", cioè, a' llei non è negato nulla, né alcuna cose gli è disdecta perché in corte chi loda e serve e presenta optiene ciò che vuole.

Et io: “de’ dinmi el primo che s’accese del tuo amore che el primo amor sempre arde et come tanti t’amon senza offese”, cioè e si vede che quando uno ama vehementemente una persona che non vuole compagnia et vedesi che quando e’ sono più ad amare una persona ne seghuita offese, o d’occiosioni o d’altra offesa pratica; però domanda l’auctore come ella sia amata da tanti senza offese et maxime come el primo che l’amò sopporta che altri l’ami, et tanti.

Et ella ad me: “quel primo amor si m’arde”, cioè quel primo amore di Simon Mago tanto m’arde, “ch’io amo tucti in suo amor s’infiammi”; cioè la Simonia amò tucti coloro che s’inamorano et ardono d’amore di Simon Magho, et si come lui me amò ha piacere che lui et io siamo amati benché lor fiamme affiammeggiar siem tarde”; cioè benché e’ simoniaci sieno tardi ad iscoprirsi simoniaci per el timore della pena.

“El mio non è amore, amor lo dragmi, cioè l’amore del simoniacho è amore spirituale, et circa alle cose spirituale, le quali non hanno amore tanto temporale che le si possino pareggiare et dragmare, cioè colli beni temporali che sono in amor grande non si può pagare l’amore delle cose spirituale perché sono tanto care et dengne che con beni temporali non si può agiustare et dragmare loro prezzo et valuta”; però dice “col prezzo ch si preza prezzo in terra”, cioè non si può pagare el bene spirituale con alcuna moneta et prezzo che si paghi et prezzi beni terreni però cotanta guerra el ciel sol fammi; però la chiesa sola fa gran ghuerra che è cielo, cioè cosa spirituale fa ghuerra al simoniaco perché vuole pregiare el bene spirituale col bene temporale.

Quanto è maggior l’amor, maggior la ghera, perché quanto è maggiore el simoniacho, maggior ghuerra gli fa la chiesa co’lla pena. El grande amor del nome chi mi nomò, cioè quanta guerra fussi facta all’amor grande che mi portò del nome chi mi nomò, cioè Simon Magho perché Simonia è decta da Simon Magho, et da llui ho tracto el mio nome Simonia. Quanto dispiacque, cioè l’amor di Simon Magho ad amare le cose spirituale et quelle voler comperare da sam Piero et sam Paulo. El suo fim tel diserra, cioè el fine di Simon Mago ti diserra et apre quanto dispiacque l’amor di Simon Magho perché e dianzi se no lo portorno, come tu hai nelle Acti delli Appostoli capº [...]

El mio amore è tanto acerbo pomo, cioè tanto et tanto è acerbo et grave questo peccato ch’è bene che el simoniachio non lodi, non doni, non presti obsequio di servitio. Però che dice ben non ti laudi o doniti o ancilli uno occulto pensiero non lo tiem dono, cioè se tu havessi solamente nella mente uno pensiero di volere conpiacere per acquistar bene spirituale non lo tiem dono tal pens(iero), cioè non è cancellato né domato tal pens(iero) ma è Simonia peccando solamente nella mente sua.

Ma perché pochi fior son non distilli mio amore, dice la Simo[ni]a; ma perché pochi fiori, cioè poch’opera spirituale sono che non vi s’aconmetta Simonia in predicando, in celebrando, in ministrando sacramenti, in ufficiando, in cantando et pratica allungho che vuol gustar quella dolcezza, cioè l’amor del simoniacho vuole gustare la dolcezza de’ beni spirituali cioè l’utilità che viene da quelli che vi’ à grande dolcezza; havere uno beneficio di milgliaia di fiorini certo è una delizia al simoniacho che dolce et sancta pena ci scintilla, cioè che tal dolcezza naschi et scintilla ad noi da una sancta et dolce pena, cioè naschi et scintilla dalla passione sancta di Christo donde sono proceduti questi beni spirituali et chiese etc. est spedali et benefitii, et però oggi ongnuno vorrebbe di questi beni proceduti dalla passione di Christo et poche case oggidì sono che non volglino el prete in casa o, miseria grande, non più virtu si stima né bontà.

L'utile amore et non l'honesto apreza perché oggi di non s'apreza l'honesto amore de' benefici, cioè la sollicita cura dell'anime, lo maestrare e' populi, hedificarli nella legge di Christo; questo è amore honesto ma non s'apreza questo ma l'amore utile, cioè porsi in casa grano, vino, olio, legne, denarii, cera, el malanno che Dio dà loro, cioè a quelli che giocano, godono, tengono concubine. Et cosi tucti ei preti che sono senza benefitio et frati et tucti per questo bene utile cantono et predicano et uficiono et perché ciascuno religioso quasi cascha in questo peccato et però glosa scusa pero una glosa del decreto scusa et fanno la simonia mentale che non se ne perde el beneficio perbene sia peccato, però dice per solamente leggie non si speza, cioè peccando colla mente non si rompe la leggie perché se s'avessi a punire non si troverebbe chi volessi andare in coro, ne predicare, ne uficiare . Perché ciascuno almeno colla mente pecca in simonia.

Perché di troppi si porria la scusa sendo cotanto amata et tu m'amasti ; qui dice che l'auctore anchora lui amò la Simonia benché la fiamma in te fussi rinchiusa, cioè benché el tuo amore et la tua Simonia fussi mentale et chiusa che non appari per segni exteriori cioè con prezo.

Et io: "et quando, cioè et quando t'amai? Et quando m'infrontasti, cioè quando m'infrontasti ch'io t'abbia amata, chi t'abbia conosciuta amata. Et ella, cioè la Simonia, rispose all'auctore et dixit: "et pur m'amasti et non mi vagheggiasti"; qui s'accusa l'auctore che essendo stato religioso che ancora lui predicava per guadangnare et potersi provvedere alle cose necessarie pratica.

"Che tucti entrate in quella navicella", cioè tucti noi religiosi, dice la Simonia, entrate nella nave di sam Piero, cioè desiderate e' beni spirituali et per venire al dysiato porto, cioè per venire al consehguire qualche vostro disio di qualche benefitio mi fate carta, cioè carta da navigare et per venire all'attento vostro, et fatemi bossola et la stella, perché non volete perdere di non optenere el beneficio adoperate me per carta et bossola et stella come opera el marinaio a trovare et per venire al porto maxime quando ha contradictioni di venti et fortuna, così voi quando havete contradictione a consehguire el vostro dysio d'octenere el beneficio come vostro porto vi difendete dalle contradictioni per mio mezo adoperandomi con presenti, lode et servitio, così mi sono carta, bossola et stella.

O io v'acciecho, in quanto voi non vedete nel peccato grande che voi cadete o 'l veder vostro accorto, cioè o io vi fo parere più leggieri che non è cotal peccato; el ciecho non si crede esser veduto et quanto più s'acciecha più è scorto, cioè quanto maggiormente pecca in cotal peccato tanto più è conosciuto dalli altri perché tale acquista beneficio per Simonia che per virtù che gli abbia non lo merita puncto, et però è scorto simoniacho perché si conosce apertamente che per Simonia ha tal beneficio, come el ciecho quanto più è ciecho più è scorto per cieco perché o va col cane o va colla marza taston et gli è ghuidato o percuote. Pratica.

Se tu canmini tal fie conosciuto, cioè nel peccato dall'avaritia inferno se tu canmini tanto che tu pervenghi al luogho dove sono puniti gli avari; che nello spechio mio esser non crede, cioè perché io v'acciecho et non vedete el vostro peccato dell'avaritia et Simonia, però nello inferno vi sarà conosciuta tale et molti che si sono specchiati nell'avaritia et Simonia che hora non crede offendere in tali peccati; che sol quivi arde sordo ciecho e muto, cioè onde nello inferno solo per tali peccati et sordo, cieco et muto perché l'avaritia non ghuarda per persona in volto et non ode e' poveri, né parenti, né amici, né leggie, ne ragione, ne pietà. Et non parla in favore d'altrui et mai a pieno se ne confessa ma mutolo perché non dice apertamente e' sua inganni.

In questo sito non ci regna fede perché l'avaritia rompe ongni fede nelle mercantire, ne' contracti, nell'arte; et noi sorelle, cioè no[i] figliuole dell'ava[riti]a, che una è la Simonia che l'abbiamo per dote, cioè di non conservar fede diamo et togliamo et promectiamo herede, cioè facciamo et diciamo et promectiamo con più fede che el padre al suo erede et non observiamo poi la fede.

Chi nostra madre macina a suo rotte; et così tucti li avari che macinano e' poveri colla macine dell'avaritia rubandoli, usurpandogli, negando el dare et tuta et macina per infino a uno picciolo, et tucti questi tali sono heredi dell'avaritia, cioè della infidelità, che mai conservano intera fede ma sempre l'avarò inganna.

g) Francesco Nursio Timideo

Fu lei che harebbe facto in pioggia d'auro
Scender Saturno e bere in Phlegetonta,
E muggier Marte come horribil tauro;

Lei che nasconder fece a Venere ontà,
Qual scapigliata pianse in concistoro [...]

(58-61)

Fur tutte in Simonetta le virtute,
Et benché svolta al ver sia ogni radice,
Tutte le lingue contro allui son mute;

Che se 'l pastor troyano triste et infelice
Tornasse in libertade harebbe il pomo
Costei, che mal iudicio mutar lice.

Quel che perfectò non si può dir huomo,
Lei fu sola perfecta per potentia,
De chi lo primo et ultimo deo ha domo.

Guarda se la bellezza ha in sé excellentia,
Mentre è nel tempio della pudicitia,
Che dentro non ha paro o in aparentia [...]

(145-156)

Sicome era felice al mondo solo
Mirando il più bel viso che natura
Veder potesse sotto il nostro polo [...]

(163-165)

Gli occhi stellati et l'amorose ciglia,
Le labbra di corallo ognihor gioiose
De cui lo mondo, el ciel si meraviglia;

Le guancie del color di quelle rose
Che Venere col pié pietoso tinse
Quando che a Marte il bello Adon prepose;

Il lume del suo viso, quale extinse
Più fiate i raggi al sol sì che intervallo
Fra l'uno et l'altro fue ma lei pur vinse;

Le maniere da far Heliobagallo
Sacerdote di Vesta e a mosche amicho
Domitian, per lor che feo gran fallo;

Le perle inusitate dell'anticho
Platano ch'ebbe Dario assai più degno,
Che appella denti il vulgo al ver nimicho;

La bocca che ha oriente l'odor spegne,
Qual lascia sì ciaschuno sospir soave
Ch'indì esce che ibbeo mel par ch'ivi regne;

Lo candido suo collo che non have
Paro nel seno al sir degli elementi
Quando scielse la iddea che l'altre pave;

Il pecto d'alabastro et gli fulgenti
Pomi ivi nati e magestà del riso,
Da poner freno alle procelle e venti;

L'harmonia del parlare, che 'l paradiso
Ingonbra di dolceza, et l'honestà
Che 'l regno con beltà non ha diviso;

Gli angelici costumi et humanità,
Da innamorar i boschi i ciptadini
Et nel ferino core porgli pieta;

I cenni gratiosi et acti divini,
Le celeste accoglienze, i sguardi honesti,
E gli ornamenti vaghi et lieti inchini.

Foron d'amor gli [*sic*] pirati infesti
Et il dolce fuecho in cui lieto già risi,

Ma gaudio in terra non si trova sodo.

(256-291)

Ognun sa ch'ella fue alle Muse un tempio,
In tanto honore et gloria e tanto preggio
Che chi lo fe' rovinar fu artifice empio;

Ciascun sa che firmato il proprio seggio
Havean le Gratie nel suo pecto quando
Fece tal strage chi non può far peggio [...]

(379-389)

Lei che sapeva che 'l suo toscho in manna
Cangiava, et la mia nectare in assentio,
Con atto che a mirarla il cor condanna,

Mostrò dolceza tal ch'avria Mezentio
Facto un ripheo, et com [*sic*] parole saggie
Puose al mio sospirar vero silentio.

Disse: “o mortali, come foglia caggie
D'il ramo, così speme dal cor vostro
Che 'l viver um [*sic*] balen corto sottraggie,

Siete voi d'ombra et l'adversario è dostro,
[...]

Ma questo cibo fa il mio vivere aspro,
Altro non scuopro copra da cothurno,
Et in questa di men andrò, men mi n'asprò” [...]

(466-480)

Chi vide all' hora del spirto la vesta
Dice che sì in bellezza era cresciuta,
Che viva fu deforme e sempre mesta [...]

(493-495)

Atropos fue da genio assai ripresa
Perché non fe' di lei come d'altrui,
Ma dalla morte la virtù è difesa.

(502-504)

h) Baccio Ugolini

I transcribe below both versions of Ugolini's sonnet, the first as it appears in *Alexandri Pueri Senensis multorum nostri temporis Poetarum Epigrammata foeliciter incipient*, the second from my transcription of BRF MS Riccardiano 2823, 185v:



(transcribed by Curti 1998: 198)

‘Simonetta moriente flebile carmen in mortem’

Quanto studio poté natura et arte
di gratia, di bellezza et di costumi
in uno subiecto porre, Morte or consumi
e involi al mondo la miglor [*sic*] sua parte?

Quante lagrime, lasso, a terra sparte
vedren, chiusi i celesti et chiari lumi;
quanti poi d’Elicone derivar fiumi,
quante penne stracharsi inchiostri et carte?

O Superi invidiosi, o crudel Parcha,
chi t’ha promessa potestà sì intera
ch’ardiscar anchor nelli Angeli seuire?

O non nascer costei che Stige hor varcha,
o per gratia del cielo, poi che ta[l] nata era,
dovea per certo non poter morire.

APPENDIX TWO: ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1: Leonardo da Vinci, *Ginevra de' Benci* (obverse), circa 1474-1478, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington.



Fig. 2: Attributed to Niccolò Fiorentino, *Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni*, circa 1486, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection, Luciano 2001a: 130.



Fig. 3: Niccolò Fiorentino, *Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni* (reverse: *Venus as Diana*), circa 1486, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection, Randolph 2002: 212.



Fig. 4: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Birth of St. John the Baptist*, circa 1486-1490, Cappella Tornabuoni, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Bridgeman.



Fig. 5: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Birth of St. John the Baptist* (detail), circa 1486-1490, Cappella Tornabuoni, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Bridgeman.



Fig. 6: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Visitation*, circa 1486-1490, Cappella Tornabuoni, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Bridgeman.

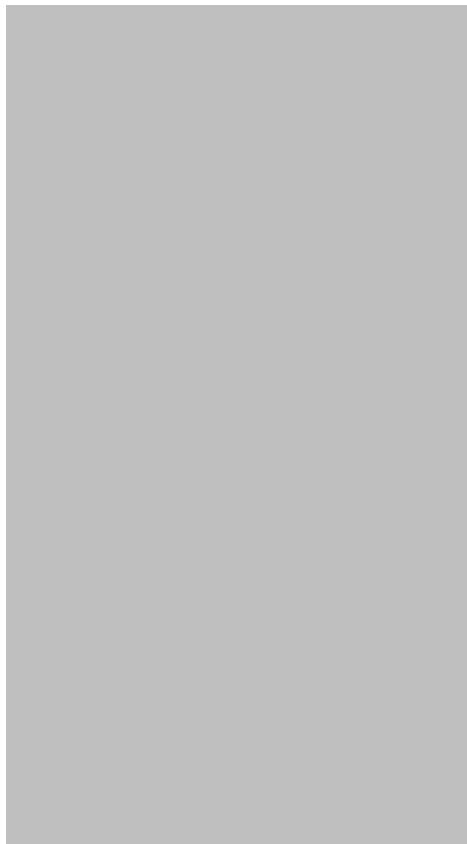


Fig. 7: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Visitation* (detail), circa 1486-1490, Cappella Tornabuoni, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, Weppelmann 2011: 69.



Fig. 8: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni*, circa 1488, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid, Bridgeman.



Fig. 9: Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Confirmation of the Rule*, circa 1483-1485, Cappella Sassetti, Santa Trinità, Florence, Bridgeman.



Fig. 10: Attributed to the workshop of Attavante degli Attavanti, MS Banco Rari 17, 24r, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. Courtesy of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo/ Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. Further reproduction or duplication of any kind prohibited.



Fig. 11: Attributed to the workshop of Attavante degli Attavanti, MS Banco Rari 17, 81r, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. Courtesy of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo/ Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. Further reproduction or duplication of any kind prohibited.



Fig. 12: Attributed to the workshop of Attavante degli Attavanti, MS Banco Rari 17, 154r, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. Courtesy of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo/ Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. Further reproduction or duplication of any kind prohibited.



Fig. 13: Attributed to Attavante degli Attavanti, MS 55 K 1, 13r, Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Paoluzzi 2002: 265.



Fig. 14: Attributed to Attavante degli Attavanti, MS 55 K 1, 96r, Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Paoluzzi 2002: 267.



Fig. 15: Attributed to Attavante degli Attavanti, MS 55 K 1, 154v, Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Paoluzzi 2002: 268.



Fig. 16: Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera* (detail), circa 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman.



Fig. 17: Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera*, circa 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman.



Fig. 18: Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera* (detail), circa 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman.



Fig. 19: Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman.



Fig. 20: Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus* (detail), circa 1485, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman.

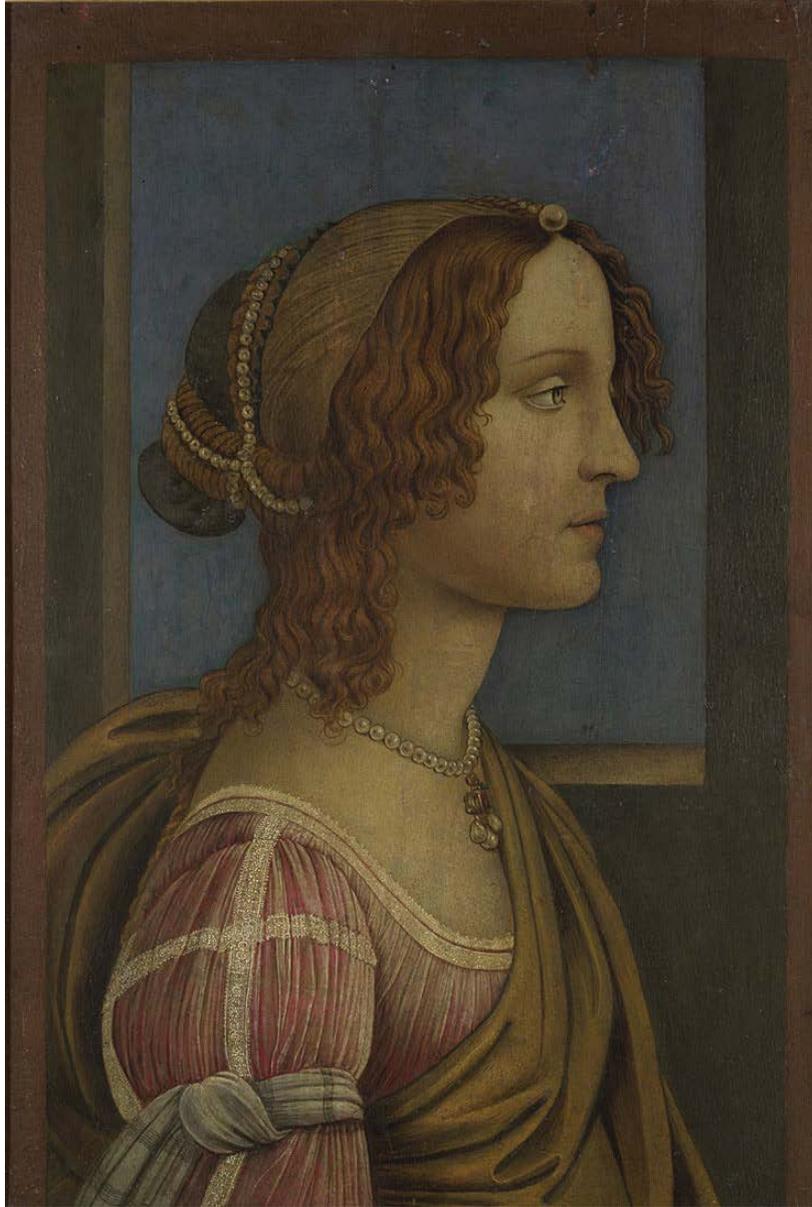


Fig. 21: Follower of Sandro Botticelli, *A Lady in Profile*, circa 1490, National Gallery, London. © The National Gallery, London.



Fig. 22: Workshop of Sandro Botticelli, *Ideal Portrait of a Young Woman*, circa 1475-1480, Marubeni Collection, Tokyo, Körner 2009: 69.



Fig. 23: Sandro Botticelli, *Profile Portrait of a Young Woman*, circa 1475-1480, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. © Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.



Fig. 24: Sandro Botticelli, *Idealised Portrait of a Lady*, circa 1480, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main.



Fig. 25: Workshop of Sandro Botticelli, *Allegorical Portrait of a Woman*, circa 1476, Kisters Collection, Kreuzlingen, Schumacher (2009d): 161.

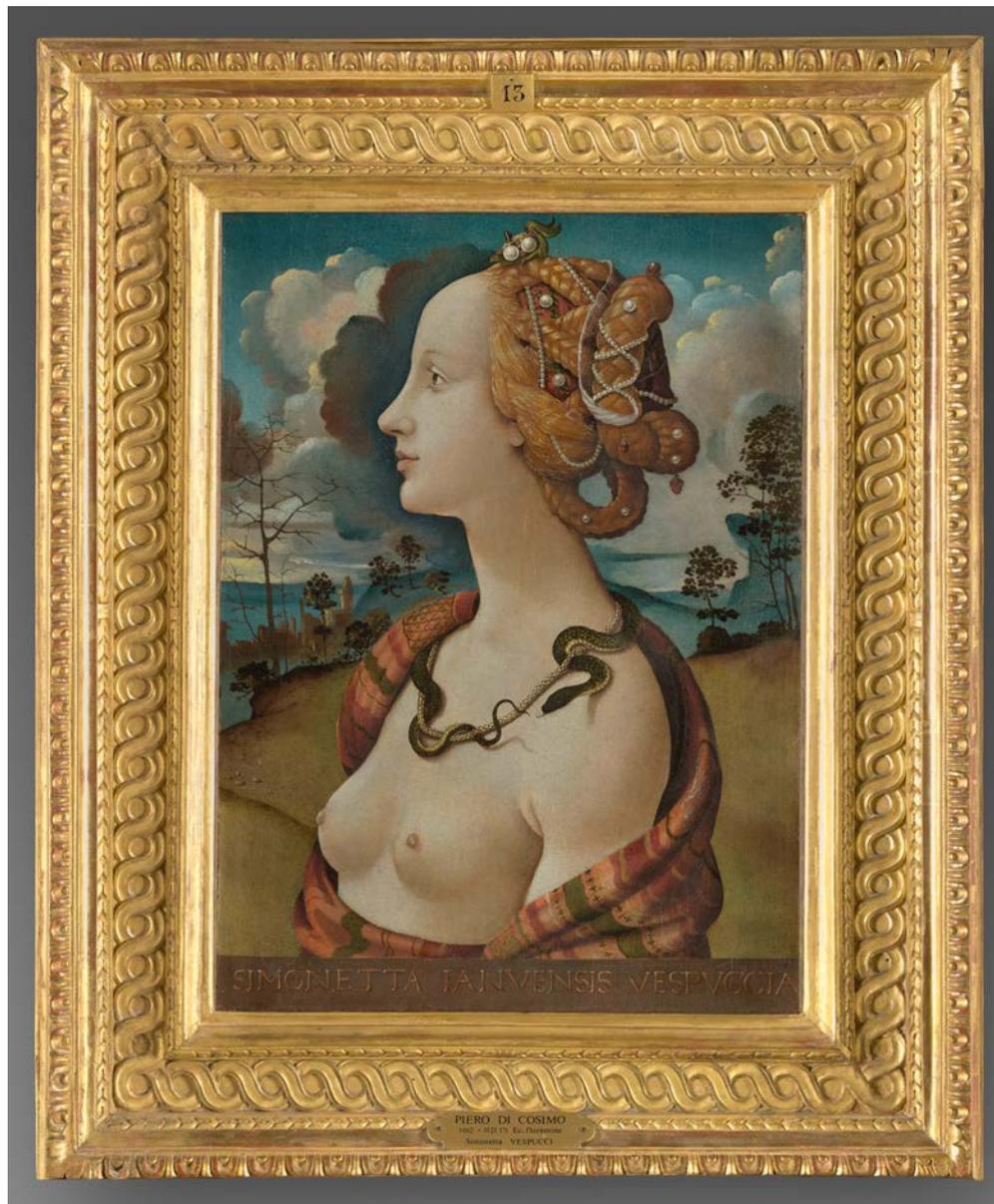


Fig. 26: Piero di Cosimo, *Simonetta*, circa 1480, Musée Condé, Chantilly. © RMN-Grand Palais (domaine de Chantilly)/Adrien Didierjean.



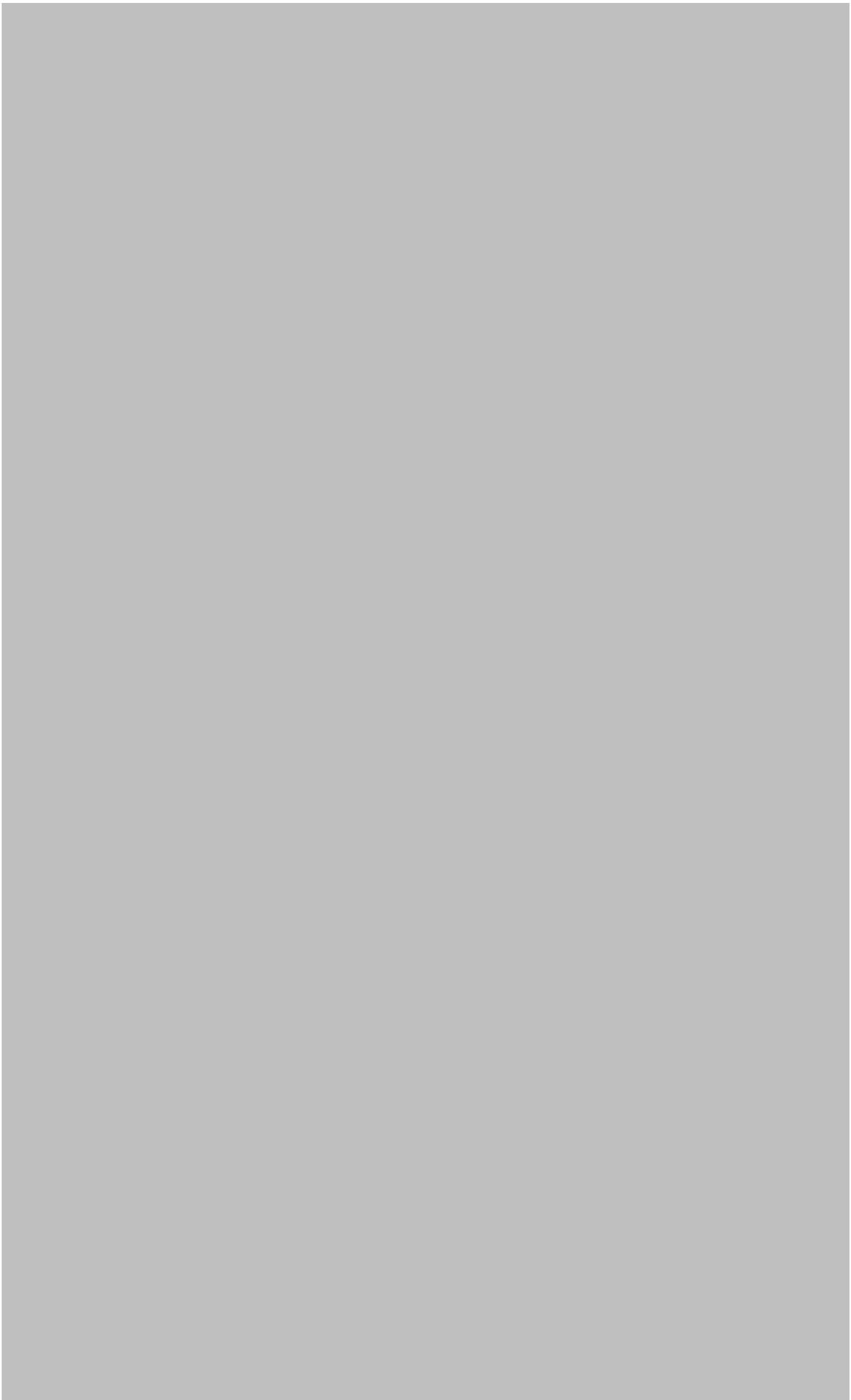
Fig. 27: Giorgione, *Laura*, circa 1506, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Bridgeman.



Fig. 28: Italian, Florentine, *An Allegory*, circa 1500, National Gallery, London. © The National Gallery, London.



Fig. 29: Workshop of Sandro Botticelli, *Venus and Three Putti*, late-fifteenth century, Musée du Louvre-Lens, Lens, Pas-de-Calais. © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Tony Querrec.



Figs. 30-31: Attributed to the Master of the Judgement of Paris, *Daphne Pursued by Apollo/ The Metamorphosis of Daphne*, circa 1450, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Birmingham. © The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham.



Fig. 32: Antonio del Pollaiuolo, *Apollo and Daphne*, circa 1470-1480, National Gallery, London. © The National Gallery, London.



Fig. 33: Lorenzo Ghiberti, *The Baptism of Christ*, circa 1403, panel for the North Doors of the Baptistery, Florence, Bridgeman.

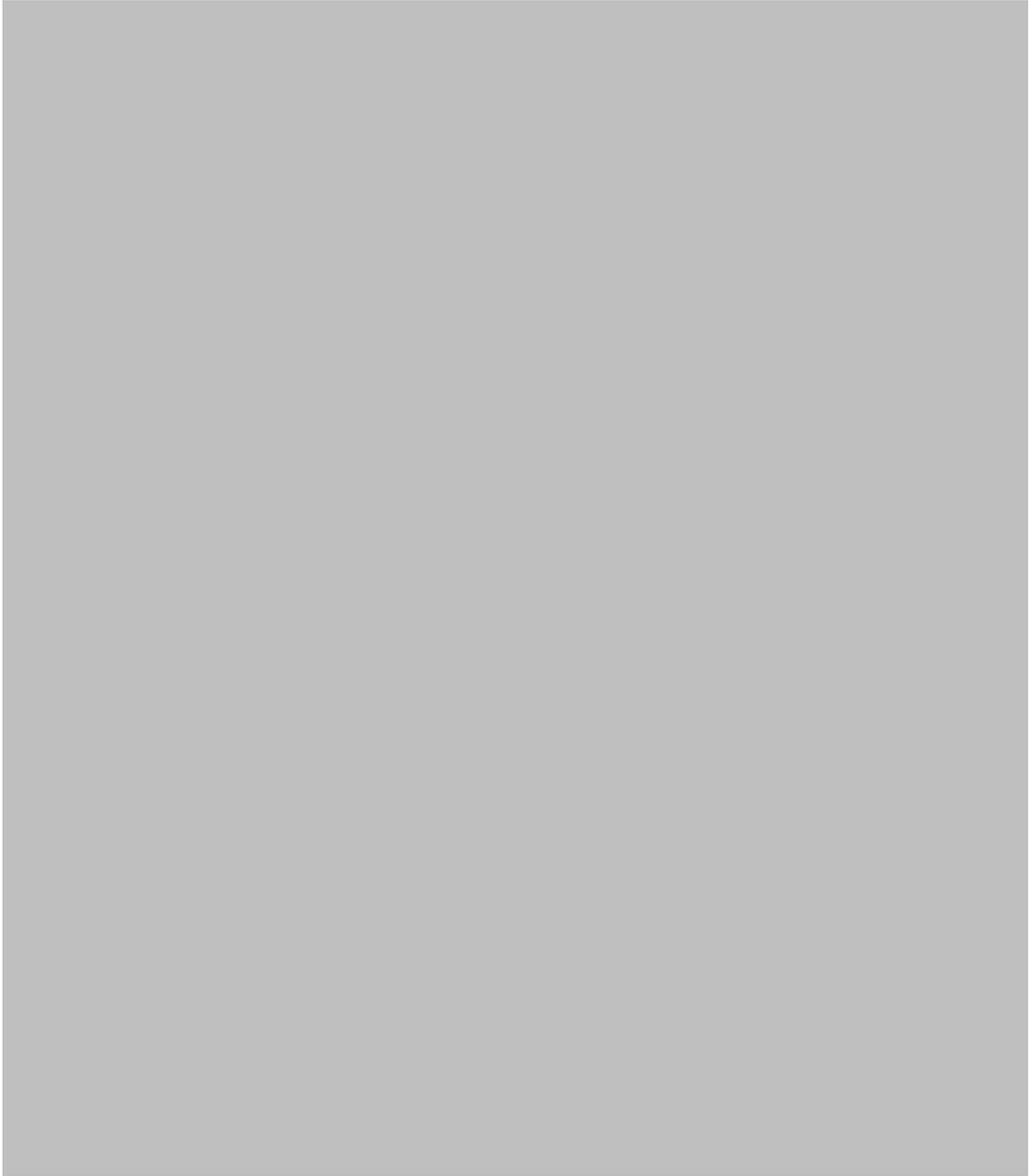


Fig. 34: Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci, *The Baptism of Christ*, circa 1475, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman.



Fig. 35: Sandro Botticelli and his workshop, *The Judgement of Paris*, circa 1483-1485, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Galleria di Palazzo Cini a San Vio, Venice.



Fig. 36: Sandro Botticelli, *Venus and the Three Graces Offer Gifts to a Young Woman*, circa 1483, Musée du Louvre, Paris. © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais Angèle Dequier.



Fig. 37: Follower of Sandro Botticelli, *A Lady in Profile* (reverse: *Allegory*), circa 1490, National Gallery, London. © The National Gallery, London.



Fig. 38: Sandro Botticelli, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, circa 1475, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Bridgeman.



Fig. 39: After Sandro Botticelli, Recto: *La Bella Simonetta* (WA1863.613), Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.



Fig. 40: Sandro Botticelli, *Fortitude*, 1470, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman.



Fig. 41: Sandro Botticelli, *The Return of Judith*, circa 1467, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman.



Fig. 42: Sandro Botticelli, *Venus and Mars*, circa 1485, National Gallery, London. © The National Gallery, London.



Fig. 43: Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera* (detail), circa 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Bridgeman.

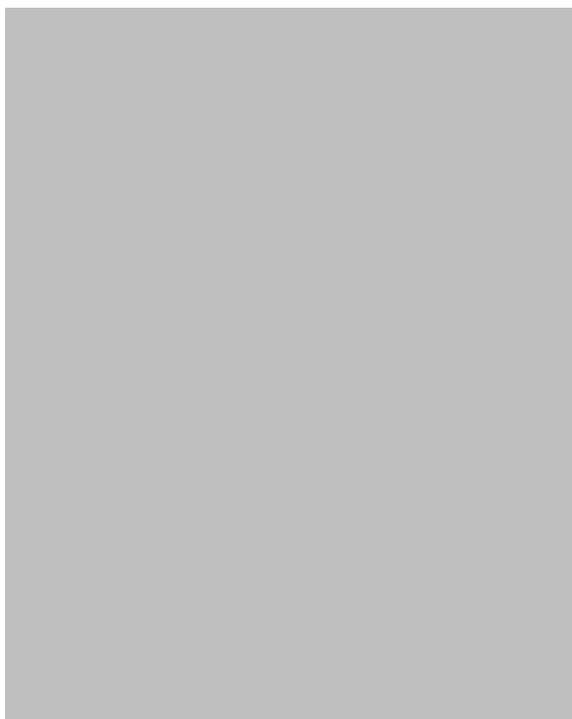


Fig. 44: Sandro Botticelli, *The Purification of the Leper and the Temptation of Christ* (detail), circa 1480-1482, Sistine Chapel, Vatican City, Bridgeman.



Fig. 45: Bartolomeo di Giovanni, *Apollo and Venus*, circa 1486, Private Collection, Bayer 2008b: 304.



Fig. 46: Attributed to Baccio Baldini, *Judith and the Head of Holofernes* (no. 1852,0301.3), circa 1460-1485, British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum.

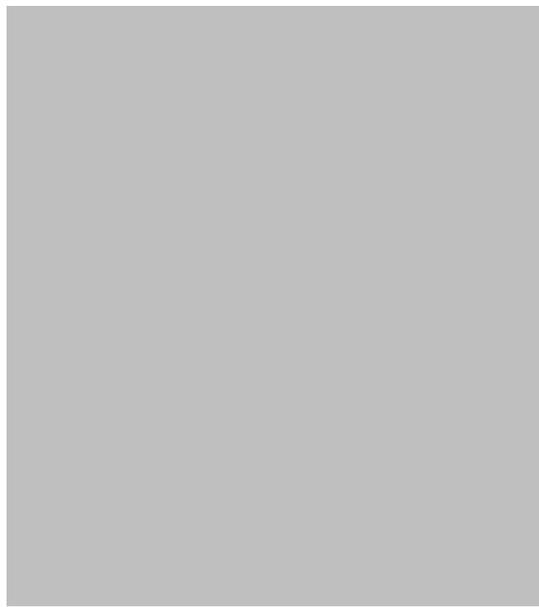


Fig. 47: Attributed to Andrea del Verrocchio, *Head of a Girl*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Pope-Hennessy and Lightbown 1964b: 123.



Fig. 48: Tullio Lombardo, *Double Portrait*, circa 1490, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice, Luchs 1989: 231.



Fig. 49: Tullio Lombardo, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, circa 1505, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Baldass 1926: 111.



Fig. 50: Copy after Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Venus with Cupid the Honey Thief*, circa 1580-1620, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, www.metmuseum.org.



Fig. 51: Attributed to Baccio Baldini, *Venus and her Children* (no. 1845,0825.467), circa 1464, British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 52: Attributed to Baccio Baldini, *A Pair of Dancers* (no. 1852,0301.1), circa 1465-1480, British Museum, London. © Trustees of the British Museum.

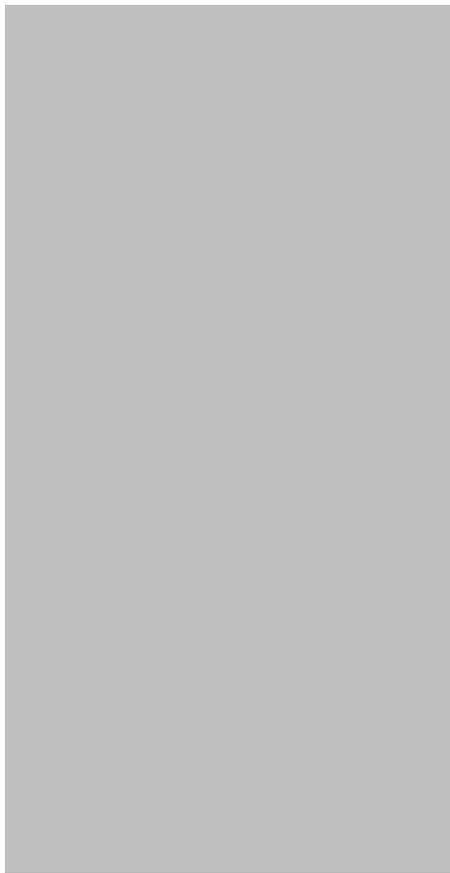


Fig. 53: *Pomona/Flora*, first-century AD, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Warburg 1999: 127.



Fig. 54: Piero di Cosimo, *Allegory*, circa 1500, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington.



Fig. 55: Jacopo del Sellaio, *Story of Cupid and Psyche*, circa 1490, Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg. © Abegg-Stiftung, CH 3132 Riggisberg (Photo: Christoph von Viràg).



Fig. 56: Jacopo del Sellaio, *Story of Cupid and Psyche* (detail), circa 1490, Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg. © Abegg-Stiftung, CH 3132 Riggisberg (Photo: Christoph von Viràg).