Art and Sodomy Under Lorenzo il Magnifico

Unlike his grandfather Cosimo, Lorenzo enjoyed pageantry and displays of wealth. For example, when Lorenzo first met his bride Clarice Orsini he held a grand tournament in the Piazza Santa Croce that cost 10,000 ducats. Lorenzo proudly rode his white charger (a wedding gift from the King of Naples) and "wore a cape of white silk embroidered with roses, some withered, others blooming, and emblazoned with the aspirated motto, worked in pearls: LE TEMPS REVIENT. There were pearls also in his black velvet cap as well as rubies and a big diamond framed by a plume of gold thread". Lorenzo's armor was a gift from the Duke of Milan, and another large diamond was mounted in the center of his shield. Unsurprisingly, Lorenzo won the joust and received a silver helmet topped by a statuette of Mars. The wedding itself included three days of feasts, dancing, and even fireworks at night.64 He was also not as adept in business as Cosimo, by 1490 the Medici Bank was in serious trouble, many of its branches were forced to close.

Lorenzo, like his grandfather, was an able diplomat and tolerant to sodomitical activity. With his climb to power and the resulting political instability, the Office of the Night had its highest conviction rate. But once established, Lorenzo's reign brought the lowest conviction rate ever for sodomy in the Office's history. It was characterized by Rocke as a "comparatively permissive climate that had briefly allowed homosexual activity to flourish."65

Moreover, some of Lorenzo's closest friends and associates were probably bisexual or homosexual. For example, Luigi Pulci, a childhood friend of Lorenzo, was implicated, not by concerned citizens, but actually by three self-denounced youths who claimed that Luigi had sodomized them.66 Self-denounced sodomites are probably the best evidence for a true accusation. Similarly, Braccio di Domenico Martelli, an important member of Lorenzo's political
machine, was also denounced. The young Giovanni de Maltuzzi confessed that Martelli had sodomized him in Martelli's stable. Giovanni went on to explain that this was not an isolated instance, Martelli and two of his friends had been sodomizing Giovanne for five to six months in this stable.\textsuperscript{67} The Martelli's were also patrons of Donatello, who created numerous statuettes for the household.\textsuperscript{68}

Angelo Poliziano, perhaps the most intimate friend of Lorenzo, certainly preferred males. Agnolo’s father was murdered in a conspiracy against the Medici. The Medici paid for Poliziano’s education, which included studying philosophy under Marsilio Ficino. Angelo soon became a renowned scholar. Like Ficino, Angelo composed many poems and treatises celebrating homoerotic relationships, for example, The Orfeo, a drama which defends homosexual love. Furthermore, Angelo was implicated for sodomy to the Officers after Lorenzo’s death (1492) and in 1494 Angelo died "reportedly of a fever induced by his burning passion for a youth"\textsuperscript{69}. In 1496, Giovanni di Bernardo Bellacci, age 17, confessed, to an Officer, that he had sodomy with Angelo shortly before Agnolo’s death!

Lorenzo sent Angelo to tutor his elder sons who were staying in Pistoia in 1478 with their mother Clarice. Lorenzo was embroiled in a political struggle with the Pazzi family and the pope, which included assassinations. The pious Clarice and worldly Angelo never got along and she soon sent him back to Florence.\textsuperscript{70} Lorenzo welcomed Angelo back to Florence and gave him a room in his palace. However, Lorenzo also wrote Clarice a "sharp letter reproving her conduct”. The dismissal of Angelo and his subsequent stay with Lorenzo became the one serious issue and argument of Lorenzo’s and Clarice’s long marriage. The couple never fought over Lorenzo’s numerous love affairs with women, just Angelo.
Lastly, Lorenzo also continued patronize neoplatonism, not surprisingly for Marsilio Ficino was his teacher. Ficino would often debate platonic philosophy in the Medici garden or Lorenzo's villa at Poggio a Caiano, where they all celebrated Plato's birthday every November seventh. Artists also gathered in Lorenzo's garden in Florence, decorated with Donatello's David and Judith; the garden also included works by Bertoldo, Sandro Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, and latter Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. Another frequent visitor to Lorenzo's garden was Andrea Verrocchio, Lorenzo's favorite artist.\footnote{1}