

# The Donati-Ardinghelli Wedding of 1465: A Closer Reading of Braccio Martelli's Letter of April 27 to Lorenzo de' Medici

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*This article offers an intensive—although still not exhaustive—reading of a letter written to the adolescent Lorenzo de' Medici by Braccio Martelli, a member of his brigata. It is a document that focuses on the celebrations accompanying the wedding of Lucrezia Donati, the object of Lorenzo's affections, to Niccolò Ardinghelli, an anti-Medicean living in exile. I examine some of the letter's multiple overlapping topics and contexts, including private sociability (wedding practices, music, dance, dress), the trophy status of Lucrezia, sexual and political tensions, and the ties between the letter writer and his addressee in terms of client/patron and homosocial relations.*

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## INTRODUCTION

ON SATURDAY, 27 April 1465, Braccio Martelli, then in his early twenties, wrote to Lorenzo de' Medici, recently turned sixteen.<sup>1</sup> The latter had left Florence just over a week earlier, traveling via Bologna, Ferrara, and Venice, to Milan. There, his primary mission was to represent his father, Piero di Cosimo, and his city, at the proxy wedding of Ippolita, daughter of Duke

This article originated with a series of conference papers and invited talks delivered some years ago in Venice, Birmingham (UK), Rome, and Oxford. For a recent companion piece, see Bryce, 2020. All translations are the author's own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>1</sup> The original letter is in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF), Mediceo avanti il principato (hereafter MAP), XXII, doc. 28, fols. 29<sup>r</sup>–29bis<sup>r</sup>. It was published twice by Isidoro del Lungo (Del Lungo, 1913, 9–13 and 1923, 33–42). The latter is the edition used here. Both the manuscript and the 1923 edition are available online, respectively at <https://archiviodistatofirenze.cultura.gov.it/map/> (then search, by filza number, via “ricerca su filza”), and <https://archive.org/details/gliamoridelmagni00lungo>.

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doi: 10.1017/rqx.2022.433

Francesco Sforza, to Alfonso d'Aragona, son and heir of King Ferrante of Naples.<sup>2</sup>

The addressee, Lorenzo (1449–92), needs little introduction. The letter writer, Braccio di Domenico Martelli (1442–1513), belonged to a family whose urban properties lay in the administrative district (*gonfalone*) of the Golden Lion in the quarter of San Giovanni, principally in what was then Via degli Spadai, now Via de' Martelli, just north of the Baptistry and the Duomo, and a stone's throw from the new Medici palace.<sup>3</sup> He, like many of his numerous uncles, was involved in the business world, and specifically in the international silk trade, as well as in the public life of the city.<sup>4</sup> Probably thanks to his father's training as a lawyer and career as a lecturer at the Studio Fiorentino,<sup>5</sup> however, he also benefited from a humanist education, as attested by an autograph list of classical manuscripts owned by him, some of them dated pre-1465.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE LETTER OF 27 APRIL 1465

Braccio's letter is known, in the sense of having been cited, or at least alluded to, by a number of scholars following in the wake of Isidoro del Lungo (1841–1927) and his (virtually) complete transcription. The list includes André Rochon, Charles Dempsey, Gino Corti, F. W. Kent, Catherine Lawless, Ingeborg Walter and Roberto Zapperi, and Dale Kent.<sup>7</sup> This notwithstanding, considerably more work was clearly possible, not least because of the inevitably dated nature of Del Lungo's approach and the possibility of exploiting a wealth of relevant research conducted from the second half of the twentieth century

<sup>2</sup> The relevant part of Lorenzo's *Cronachetta* has not survived. See Zanato, 165–67, 185. For his trip, see his father's letters of May 4 and 11 in Fabroni, 2:51–53; Magnani, 32–33; Rochon, 74–76; Medici, 1977, 1:14–16. The Medici source (1:14) gives his departure date from Florence as April 23, but Braccio mentions that, on the evening of Sunday, April 21, Lorenzo was already in Bologna, from where he had written to his friends (Del Lungo, 1923, 34).

<sup>3</sup> On the Martelli in general, see Litta, Martelli family, tables 1–3; Martines, 1959; De Roover; D. V. Kent, 1978, 120–21; Pezzarossa; U. Martelli.

<sup>4</sup> Foà. See also Dei, 126, who refers to Braccio as being in partnership with his uncle, Bartolomeo, who also features in the letter of April 27.

<sup>5</sup> U. Martelli, 85–86n1.

<sup>6</sup> De la Mare.

<sup>7</sup> See Rochon, 92–97; Dempsey, 1992, 88–90, and 1999, 8; Corti, who includes a very partial transcription (the location of the Martelli letter as ASF, MAP, XX is presumably a misprint [275n1]); F. W. Kent, 1996, 2–3, and 2007, 34 (both now also in F. W. Kent, 2013); Lawless, 115; Walter, 68; Walter and Zapperi, esp. 25–26; D. V. Kent, 2009, 175–77.

onward. Also at issue, however, was the frequent brevity of the modern scholarly references (understandable, given their different research agendas), the occasional misrepresentations of the letter's contents—particularly of its central narrative—and the absence of the sort of intensive scrutiny suggested by traditional textual analysis as well as by the practices of (cultural) microhistory.<sup>8</sup> The letter is so rich, indeed, that the present study cannot claim to constitute an exhaustive reading.

In its concluding paragraphs, at least, Braccio's text seems routine enough, resembling many of the letters investigated by Paul McLean in his excellent 2007 study of Florentine Quattrocento patronage correspondence.<sup>9</sup> There is a plea or reminder for Lorenzo to expedite "my, or I should say our business"<sup>10</sup> with Pigello Portinari, manager of the Medici bank in Milan and the young Lorenzo's minder during his stay there.<sup>11</sup> A number of items of news follow, both of a personal and public kind: for example, the recovery from illness of Lorenzo's sister, Nannina, and the appointments (both significant in terms of Medicean political control) of Bartolomeo Scala as chancellor of the Florentine Republic, and of Cristoforo Landino to succeed Scala as chancellor of the Parte Guelfa.<sup>12</sup> The final paragraph refers to *raccomandazioni* on which Braccio is supposed to take action in Florence on Lorenzo's behalf (except that he admits he has not yet had the time), and the letter concludes with a postscript sending greetings to Lorenzo's brother-in-law and traveling companion, Guglielmo de' Pazzi, and to "Lottieri" and "Zanobi." These latter individuals are almost certainly the brother and son, respectively, of Dietisalvi Neroni, who, at this point, was Florentine ambassador

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Edward Muir who quotes Vincenzo Ferrone and Massimo Firpo. For these latter, microhistories are "an attempt to clarify all the complex density and the thick network of connections and relations that lie tangled together in facts, real situations, events, ideas, images, men, and social groups of the past" (Muir and Ruggiero, xxiii n13).

<sup>9</sup> See McLean. For the substantial and ever-expanding scholarship on Italian Renaissance letter-writing, see Shemek.

<sup>10</sup> "Quel mio, overo nostro fatto." Del Lungo, 1923, 41. Another of Braccio's letters confirms this to be "una nostra faccenda di bottega." ASF, MAP, XX, 650 (now online doc. 643<sup>7</sup>), quoted by Rochon, 103n49.

<sup>11</sup> For the Martelli and the Medici as business partners, see particularly De Roover; Pezzarossa. For Portinari, see De Roover; Zanoboni. For Portinari overseeing Lorenzo during his Milan visit, see Piero's letter to his son of 4 May 1465 (Fabroni, 2:51).

<sup>12</sup> Lucrezia di Piero de' Medici, known as Nannina (b. 1447), had been betrothed to Bernardo di Giovanni Rucellai since 1461. The marriage took place on 8 June 1466. See Rucellai, 1:28–34. For the appointments of Scala and Landino, see A. Brown, 1979, 28, 34, 42–60, 203; A. Brown, 1980, esp. 58–66 (also now in A. Brown, 1992).

in Milan.<sup>13</sup> Lottieri was to marry a daughter of Braccio's late uncle, Roberto, a few months later in October 1465.<sup>14</sup>

Of considerably greater interest, however, is the remainder, indeed the bulk of the letter, with its more unusual subject matter, namely a detailed description of a series of private social events which had taken place the previous week, beginning with Sunday, April 21, involving Lucrezia Donati, the object of Lorenzo's adolescent passion. The narrative climaxes in the breathless description of Braccio, two companions, and a lute player, making their way, at night, armed with torches of burning straw, across the fields of grain just outside the northern city walls, toward a villa where Lucrezia and her female companions can be heard singing. Soaked by dew, "so that we were wet through as if we had swum across the Arno," the young men arrive, "soaking outside and burning inside, at the desired place."<sup>15</sup> The text is replete with gendered language and imagery: the virility, physical energy, and desire of the young men; the enclosed, apparently receptive women with their siren song. And the pleasure was doubled because—Braccio reports—unlike the occasions described earlier in his letter, this time no other men (or at least no other significant men) were present: "il mele era senza mosche," "just the honey—no flies!"<sup>16</sup> In short, this would appear to be primarily an intimate letter from a close friend belonging to Lorenzo's *brigata*, the group of young men with whom he consorted socially in the 1460s.<sup>17</sup>

The tonal range of the letter writer is considerable—by turns emotive and subtly calculating, serious and humorous, flattering and eager to please, as well as teasing, even controlling, by virtue of its author's status as a correspondent in possession of information of intense personal interest to his absent addressee, matters which will be the focus of the concluding section of this article.

<sup>13</sup> On Pazzi (1437–1516), who married Bianca di Piero de' Medici (b. 1445) in 1460, see Tripodi, 2015. For Dietisalvi Neroni as Florentine ambassador in Milan, where he was knighted by Francesco Sforza, see Medici, 1977, 1:15 and 16n2. His shift from Medici supporter to opponent was already known there (Rubinstein, 152n3). For Dietisalvi and his family, see also U. Martelli, 244n5; Arrighi.

<sup>14</sup> See the letter of 26 October 1465 in Strozzi, 1877, 502.

<sup>15</sup> See original in Del Lungo, 1923, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 40.

<sup>17</sup> The word *brigata* carries a range of meanings. For McLean, 240n5, it sometimes signifies "a group of friends or clients surrounding the recipient of patronage letters," a definition that is certainly relevant here, while Barolini, 15, usefully glosses the non-literary use of the word as "primarily a vehicle for male interaction and socialization." See, too, D. V. Kent, 2009, esp. 161–77. While broadly related to European princely and aristocratic entourages, in the present context a model very close to home would have been the *brigata* of Lorenzo's uncle, Giovanni di Cosimo.

Braccio's stylistic choices range from the literary and sophisticated to the downright crude, the latter attested by the allusion, albeit veiled by his use of code, to the prodigious size of the male organ of one of the text's key actors. Not for nothing does one scholar describe Braccio's letter as "boccaccevole" (Boccaccian).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Giovanni Boccaccio is its presiding genius, hailed as "the divine narrator of such things" (*divino narratore di simili cose*), whom he, Braccio, an "ignorant and inexpert youth, unskilled in writing" (*giovene indocto et inexperto senza alcuna facultà di scrivere*), cannot hope to emulate—although he cannot resist adding that even that "fount of eloquence" would be unable to do justice to this particular descriptive challenge!<sup>19</sup> Boccaccio is interpellated as an author for whom the letter writer and target reader are assumed to share a mutual love and admiration. His *œuvre* is placed in an intertextual relationship with the main body of the letter where, presiding over the narrative as a teacher and guide in matters of love, he authorizes, as it were, the amorous pursuits of Lorenzo (and of the *brigata*).

The text is further characterized by its plurilingualism. For example, Braccio writes principally in the vernacular, but with frequent recourse to Latin phraseology. A significant amount is encoded using a variety of systems. One of these, based on letter substitution, is employed even for the names of individual songs and dances, while other solutions are adopted for proper names involving mathematical symbols—for example, an obelus (÷) for Lucrezia Donati, and arabic numerals for many of the men present, as well as letters from the Greek alphabet. Del Lungo did sterling work in attempting to unlock much of this encrypted material.<sup>20</sup>

#### A VILLA WEDDING BEYOND THE PORTA A PINTI

To understand the nature of the social events described, as well as much of Martelli's tone, style, and narratorial procedure, it is essential to place the letter in its proper context, one frequently passed over in the scholarly literature. That context is the period of the wedding celebrations (*nozze*), just after Easter 1465, of Niccolò di Piero di Neri Ardinghelli (ca. 1432–96) to Lucrezia Donati (ca. 1447–1501), younger daughter of Manno di Manno di Messer Manno Donati and his second wife, Caterina di Benedetto di Lipaccio de' Bardi,<sup>21</sup> and the

<sup>18</sup> Parigi, 108n33.

<sup>19</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 34.

<sup>20</sup> See the tables of *dramatis personae* in Del Lungo, 1923, 32–33.

<sup>21</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 32, places the two wives (Velluti and Bardi) in the wrong order. The second marriage took place around 1444. See Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (hereafter BNCf), Poligrafo Gargani, 725, 186, also 728, 111 (Caterina's will of May 1469), and 728, 123 (her death in 1471). See also, Manno's tax return for 1457–58, ASF, Catasto 832, fol. 114<sup>r-v</sup>.

writer's keen awareness of the impact of this event on the apparently lovelorn Lorenzo. It is fortunate that Ardinghelli was someone in whom Alessandra Macinighi Strozzi (ca. 1406–71) took a personal interest, due principally to his connections with her own marital lineage by virtue both of his mother, Caterina di Niccolò di Nofri Strozzi, a niece of the great Messer Palla, and of his paternal grandmother, Caterina di Michele di Carlo Strozzi.<sup>22</sup> In 1427, Niccolò's parents owned a town house sited two doors along from that of Alessandra and her husband, Matteo di Simone Strozzi, on the Corso degli Strozzi.<sup>23</sup> The two families also shared a common experience of exile, consequent, in the first instance, upon the return of the Medici to political preeminence in Florence in 1434, and then again in the autumn of 1458 when they reasserted their authority over political opponents.<sup>24</sup> Alessandra mentions the recently exiled Niccolò, his brothers Luigi and Francesco, and their mother Caterina, in letters to her sons from July 1459 onward, with some of the forwarded information gleaned firsthand from conversations between the two women.<sup>25</sup> A crucial observation for the purposes of the present study comes in her letter dated Saturday, 20 April 1465, to her eldest, Filippo: "Niccolò Ardinghelli is to receive his bride tomorrow and there will be great celebrations."<sup>26</sup> "Tomorrow" is therefore Sunday, April 21, the first date with which Braccio's letter is concerned.

A complicating factor here is that the bridegroom, as an exile, was not, of course, currently resident in Florence and was merely benefiting from a special

<sup>22</sup> Niccolò, writing to Filippo Strozzi in May 1460, sent his respects to Alessandra (Strozzi, 1877, 227). As a merchant, he was much involved with trading in the Levant (Strozzi, 1877, 344 and 575). For the web of business and other connections between at least two generations of the Ardinghelli and Strozzi families, and the involvement of Giovanni Rucellai, see Bryce, 2020, esp. fig. 1, and 22–23. It seems highly likely that Rucellai had a hand in negotiating the Donati-Ardinghelli match. For Ardinghelli's mother, Caterina, who married in 1424, see Bryce, 2020, 17 and 19. For his Strozzi grandmother who married Neri Ardinghelli in 1409, see Gregory, 101.

<sup>23</sup> See the plan, "Il centro di Firenze nel 1427," in Carocci, 1889, and the enhanced detail in Strozzi, 2016, fig. 3.

<sup>24</sup> For 1434, see ASF, Otto di Guardia e Balia della Repubblica, 224, fol. 49<sup>v</sup> (Matteo di Simone Strozzi) and fols. 40<sup>r</sup>–41<sup>r</sup> (Piero di Neri Ardinghelli). For 1458, see fol. 89<sup>r-v</sup> (Filippo, Lorenzo, and Matteo di Matteo Strozzi), fol. 88<sup>v</sup> (Francesco and Luigi di Piero Ardinghelli), and fol. 90<sup>r</sup> (Niccolò di Piero Ardinghelli). See also A. Brown, 2002, Appendix [365] and [381]. The political tensions associated with the theme of exile are explored later in the present article.

<sup>25</sup> Strozzi, 1877, 344, 367.

<sup>26</sup> All translations of this source are from Strozzi, 2016, in this case 159. The original is Strozzi, 1877, 396.

licence to visit his home city, presumably obtained specifically for his wedding. Alessandra Strozzi reported to Filippo on March 29: “Niccolò Ardinghelli is expected today at the city gate. He’s had a permit for twelve days.”<sup>27</sup> As this period does not cover the actual dates of the wedding celebrations in late April, a subsequent extension must be assumed. As can be seen in the very recent case of Alessandra’s younger surviving son, Lorenzo, permission granted to an exile to come to the city gates did not automatically mean that he would then be allowed to enter the city itself.<sup>28</sup> And even if this were possible, there was the problem, in Ardinghelli’s case, of his family’s ancestral properties in the administrative district of the Unicorn in the quarter of Santa Maria Novella, having been confiscated at some point post-1434. Three years after his eventual pardon, his mother was claiming in her 1469 tax return: “We have no house of our own to live in, either in Florence or elsewhere.”<sup>29</sup>

The evidence of Braccio’s letter suggests that all the wedding festivities in fact took place outside the city. Topographical indicators provided include the Porta a Pinti, sited at the end of Borgo Pinti, on the northeast perimeter of Florence’s third set of walls, and the monastery of San Giusto alle Mura or San Giusto dei Gesuati (or degli Ingesuati), located in the countryside just beyond it and destroyed in the run-up to the siege of Florence in 1529.<sup>30</sup> Both structures are visible in the *veduta*, attributed to Francesco Rosselli, belonging to the Società Colombaria di Firenze. The whole zone was massively altered in the second half of the nineteenth century by the destruction of the city walls, the coming of the railway line, the construction of the Campo di Marte, and the inexorable spread of the Florentine urban periphery.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Strozzi, 2016, 155. Original in Strozzi, 1877, 385. See, too, Parenti, 1996, 54.

<sup>28</sup> Strozzi, 1877, 365–84, letters of 5 and 7 February 1464/65; also Bryce, 2020, 19n43.

<sup>29</sup> ASF, Catasto 917, fol. 253<sup>r</sup>: “Non abbiamo chasa in Firenze ne altrove per abitare.” See F. W. Kent, 1981, 92n4. For the dispute between Niccolò Ardinghelli and the Strozzi over his claim to the *palazzo* of Messer Palla (by virtue of his Strozzi mother), see F. W. Kent, 1981, 92–93, and ASF, Catasto 1010 (1480), fol. 345<sup>v</sup>. Their own confiscated property was used by the Florentine government for distinguished visitors such as Neapolitan and Venetian ambassadors in 1451, and Jean d’Anjou who lodged there for eighteen months around 1453 (respectively, Parenti, 1996, 41; Rucellai, 1:53).

<sup>30</sup> For the Porta a Pinti in 1469, see Fanelli, 75, fig. 26 (Pietro del Massaio). For Borgo Pinti and the gate, see Bargellini and Guarnieri, 3:114–23. On the Gesuati, see Uccelli.

<sup>31</sup> For the Rosselli engraving (between 1482 and 1490), the only original part to survive from the whole *veduta*, see Friedman, 58 and fig. 2, but for a more legible reproduction of the fragment, see Boffito and Mori, fig. facing page 24 (the Porta a Pinti, with the Gesuati beyond, are on the extreme right of the image). For the development of the whole zone, see Detti; Fanelli, 199–229; Piccardi and Romagnoli.

Del Lungo identifies the villa of the events described by Braccio as belonging to the Martelli family, citing Carocci in suggesting a name, “I Merli,” and this is echoed by more recent scholars.<sup>32</sup> Certainly, toward the end of his main narrative, Braccio does mention a property belonging to his uncle, Bartolomeo (“il luogo di Bartolomeo Martelli”), with the proper name only very lightly encoded. A closer reading of the text would suggest, however, that Bartolomeo hosted only the final event described, the one held during the second half of the Thursday evening when, as mentioned earlier, the women, including the bride and her sister, were present, but without their husbands (just the honey—no flies!).<sup>33</sup> The *ricordanze* of Bartolomeo’s brother, Ugolino, reveal that, on 8 September 1433, the latter’s bride, Betta di Francesco Serragli, had been escorted by young men on horseback “to our place at San Gervasio outside the Porta a Pinti, and there we celebrated the wedding.”<sup>34</sup> In the formal division of the brothers’ inheritance (*divisa*) in 1451, this property was allocated to Ugolino, Bartolomeo, and Martello di Niccolò Martelli, and described in some detail as a farm comprising the owners’ and farm workers’ dwellings, orchard, courtyard, outbuildings, and a number of parcels of land with a variety of agricultural uses.<sup>35</sup> Certainly, by 1480, as a result of another, unfortunately undatable, *divisa*, Bartolomeo seems to have enjoyed sole possession.<sup>36</sup> The property is just possibly to be identified with the current, although much altered building, divested of its agricultural land, occupying a site between Via San Gervasio and the western stretch of the Viale Manfredo Fanti which encircles part of the Campo di Marte.<sup>37</sup>

A complicating factor in this story, however, is that Braccio’s letter specifically reveals that the events of Sunday, April 21 and subsequent days took place in the home of someone designated with the code name 16 (“a casa .16.”), whom Del Lungo was not able to identify, but who seems, in any case, not to be Bartolomeo Martelli.<sup>38</sup> This 16 must therefore have been someone closely linked to Ardinghelli and/or to the Donati, as well as to the Rucellai—Bernardo

<sup>32</sup> Carocci, 1881, 34. Cf. Del Lungo, 1923, 39n4; U. Martelli, 96n4. In Braccio’s text, an encoded reference to the location of the villa has been subsequently deleted by the writer himself and is, in any case, more resistant to decipherment.

<sup>33</sup> For such a reading, and for Bartolomeo Martelli (b. 1409) and his wife, Maria di Tommaso di Giannozzo degli Alberti, see Bryce, 2020, 8–9.

<sup>34</sup> U. Martelli, 99.

<sup>35</sup> U. Martelli, 264. Ugolino and Bartolomeo were still together in 1457. See ASF, Catasto 823, doc. 181, cited by Goldthwaite, 999.

<sup>36</sup> U. Martelli, 302n2 and Goldthwaite, 1002.

<sup>37</sup> See [https://luxforsale.it/vendita-villa\\_dilusso-firenze-citta-11177](https://luxforsale.it/vendita-villa_dilusso-firenze-citta-11177).

<sup>38</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 40n2, admits being puzzled by Braccio’s narrative. Cf. Bryce, 2020, esp. 8.



Rucellai having attended most of the festivities together with three of his five married sisters.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it was their father, Giovanni, who had solicited Medici family support for the bridegroom in his application for permission to visit Florence, as is clear from Alessandra Strozzi, in waspish mood: “There are some who say he [Ardinghelli] obtained it very easily and others who say he didn’t. It was Giovanni Rucellai who requested Piero [de’ Medici] for it. Perhaps his Lorenzo got involved in the matter in order to please his lady, Niccolò’s betrothed, so she could give pleasure to him in turn, because he sees her often enough!”<sup>40</sup>

Giovanni Rucellai is not codename 16, not least because his country properties lay to the west of the city rather than the north, but I have recently proposed the name of Francesco di Domenico Caccini (1414–65), together with his wife Ginevra (“la donna di .16.”), daughter of Felice Brancacci (1432–ca. 1491) and his second wife, Lena di Messer Palla Strozzi, as fulfilling the necessary criteria.<sup>41</sup> Caccini, exiled in August 1458 shortly before Niccolò Ardinghelli and Filippo and Lorenzo Strozzi, took up residence just outside the Porta a Pinti in a villa belonging to his brother-in-law, Belfradello di Niccolò degli Strinati (sometimes Strinati Alfieri or Alfieri Strinati) (1421–97), the husband of Ginevra Caccini’s sister, Maria Brancacci.<sup>42</sup> According to Belfradello’s tax submission of 1457–58, this villa was located in the immediate neighborhood of the Ingesuati, in the area of the present-day Piazzale Donatello, and therefore closer to the city walls than Bartolomeo Martelli’s property.<sup>43</sup>

It is the individual coded as 16—possibly Francesco Caccini—who is Braccio’s source of information about the consummation of the marriage, said to have taken place six days earlier—that is, on Monday, April 15—presumably also in 16’s villa: “and I [16] was the one who kept watch.”<sup>44</sup> This part of Braccio’s letter is characterized by a flurry of the special linguistic markers mentioned earlier. 16, as cited by him, uses obscurely colloquial and allusive as well as explicit and even obscene language, with Del Lungo choosing

<sup>39</sup> For the possible contenders and their husbands, see *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone*, table 2 (unpaginated). Nearly all the sisters (together with Niccolò Ardinghelli’s mother) are listed as ring donors at the wedding of Bernardo and Nannina de’ Medici in 1466 (Rucellai, 1:29–30).

<sup>40</sup> Strozzi, 2016, 155. Original in Strozzi, 1877, 385–86, letter of 29 March 1465.

<sup>41</sup> See Bryce, 2020, including fig. 1, for the dense interconnections among the Caccini, Rucellai, Ardinghelli, and Donati, with, crucially, the Strozzi as the central connecting thread.

<sup>42</sup> Bryce, 2020, 26–28.

<sup>43</sup> Bryce, 2020, 26n73.

<sup>44</sup> “E io [16] gli fe’ la guardia”: Del Lungo, 1923, 35. The phrase smacks of prurience rather than protectiveness.

to censor the encoded information that the bridegroom has “a prick the size of a bull’s horn.”<sup>45</sup> Having delivered this unwelcome news, Braccio employs a strategy of indirection as he seeks to protect himself with a Latin disclaimer: “Et ista sunt verba .16., et illi imputes.”<sup>46</sup> To translate loosely: “These are 16’s words—he’s the one responsible for them.”

Echoing in a minor key the pattern of grander events associated with the Medici, or with princely families elsewhere on the peninsula, the series of social gatherings celebrating the Donati-Ardinghelli marriage ran over several days.<sup>47</sup> These consisted of soirées at the villa of 16 on Sunday and Monday, April 21 and 22, the first attended by Braccio in person, the second briefly recounted by him using secondhand information. On Tuesday, April 23, the new couple went with friends and relatives on an outing to Fiesole. Again, Braccio was not present, but other correspondents, he promised, would supply further particulars. On Thursday, April 25, the feast of San Marco, there was yet another evening event hosted by 16, followed, as has been argued above, by a second phase of celebrations at the villa of Bartolomeo Martelli. It is for these two events that Braccio supplied his most detailed descriptions.

Song and dance naturally feature largely among the entertainments, encouraging the writer to revel in the sensual delights of hearing, seeing, and being in physical contact with the young women present, particularly the bride, Lucrezia, and to take pleasure in conveying these to the absent Lorenzo. As well as any other response he might expect to elicit, Braccio could be certain of Lorenzo’s keen interest in such activities in their own right. After all, he would very shortly be required to demonstrate his skills as a dancer in the grander (and altogether scarier) environment of the Sforza-Aragonese wedding celebrations, where at least two, but probably three, of the most notable dance creators and theorists of the century, Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro (Giovanni Ambrosio, or Ambrogio, after his conversion to Christianity), Domenico da Piacenza, and Antonio Cornazano, were in attendance.<sup>48</sup> In addition, evidence dating from the mid-1460s onward reveals Lorenzo’s own venture into

<sup>45</sup> “Uno cazzo che pare un corno di bue.” The encoded phrase occurs on fol. 29<sup>f</sup>, line 19 of the ASF, MAP manuscript. Del Lungo, 1923, 60, coyly admits his editorial decision. Rochon, 125n308, appears to be the first to include the missing text.

<sup>46</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 35.

<sup>47</sup> For Lorenzo’s wedding to Clarice Orsini in 1469, see Parenti, 1996, 247–50; for the Medici-Rucellai wedding in 1466, see Rucellai, 1:28–34.

<sup>48</sup> For the Sforza-D’Aragona wedding, see Magnani, esp. 31–35, and Southern. For the dance masters, see also McGee, 206–09.

choreography with the creation of at least two *basse danze*,<sup>49</sup> as well as his talents as a singer and a player of the *viola da braccio*, and his desire (unfulfilled) to have his own poetry set to music by the leading Flemish composer of the day, Guillaume Dufay.<sup>50</sup>

Of the Sunday evening's vocal entertainments Braccio records only the "angelico canto" of unspecified women without giving further details. In relation to the first part of the Thursday evening, however, he mentions an unidentified polyphonic song performed by Lucrezia Donati, her older married sister Costanza, known as Tancia, coded □, and one of Bernardo Rucellai's sisters, together with their host, 16, "who took the tenor part," a phrase that could refer to either vocal performance or instrumental accompaniment.<sup>51</sup> Braccio stresses that the words of this and other songs sung during this session were highly appropriate to Lorenzo's situation. In other words, they were relatable in a sense that is as recognizable to modern readers as it was to Boccaccio's, perhaps involving expressions of passionate attachment, frustrated desire, and aspiration to amorous conquest.<sup>52</sup>

Having returned to the city after this latest round of festivities, there was a change of plan. Exiting the Porta a Pinti for a second time, and ascertaining that his erstwhile hosts had now apparently retired for the night, Braccio, now with just two companions, plus the unidentified lute player called Lo Spagnuolo, was approaching the country property belonging to his uncle, Bartolomeo, when the group heard the same trio of young women singing, "A, canacci, crudeli, turchi" (Ah, curs, cruel ones, Turks) followed by "A ballare, a ballare, a ballare" (Dance, dance, dance). Unfortunately, neither title occurs in the known repertoire of the period.<sup>53</sup> What can be said of them is that they appear to be secular polyphonic songs, probably in Italian (rather than Braccio here translating the titles from the French), and that the intriguing title of the first seems to imply that its subject was perhaps male cruelty in love, written from a female viewpoint.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> On Lorenzo's *basse danze* *Venus* and *Lauro*, details of which appear in three manuscripts of the treatise of Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro, see McGee, 210–13; Padovan; Gargiulo; Nevile, 19, 31–32, 125.

<sup>50</sup> On Lorenzo and music, see Valori, 127; Parigi; D'Accone, 1993 and 1994; Wilson, 189–96. On the apparently unsuccessful request to Dufay to set "Amor, che hai visto ciascun mio pensiero" and the subsequent version by English composer John Hothby, see Memelsdorff; Haar and Nádas, esp. 291–92 and 298–303.

<sup>51</sup> See Bryce, 2020, 14.

<sup>52</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 38. Boccaccio's Fiammetta reacted similarly to songs which corresponded with her situation. See Boccaccio, 1988, 99.

<sup>53</sup> E-mail communication from David Fallows on 11 June 2020.

<sup>54</sup> The issue of language is a contested one in an era in which French song dominated, but see H. M. Brown, 1993. For (ventriloquized) women's songs, see H. M. Brown, 1986, 74–79.

Sunday's celebrations had also featured dancing, but once again more detail is offered in relation to the first part of Thursday evening. Del Lungo transcribes one encoded sentence which translates as follows: "no *arrosto*, no *carbonata*, no *gioioso*, no *chirintana*, in *fine* not even a bagpipe was left out," identifying the third and fourth elements as the names of contemporary dances and suggesting that the first two terms refer to food served to the guests.<sup>55</sup> That these too are dances, however, seems to be confirmed by an anonymous poem describing a major festivity organized during the 1459 visit to Florence of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, in which the same terms occur.<sup>56</sup>

The dances mentioned above are elite social ones belonging to the genres of *balli* or *basse danze*. Created primarily for the Northern Italian courts, they were widely disseminated across the peninsula and duly adopted by men and women of the Florentine mercantile elites, who performed them at private events like the present one, but also at public functions such as the Sforza visit in April 1459. At one point on the Thursday evening, however, three of the male guests, encoded 2, 0, and 5, performed a rather different genre of dance, namely a *moresca*.

Rochon has fairly convincingly identified code name 2 as Dionigi di Puccio Pucci (1442–94).<sup>57</sup> Like Braccio, Dionigi was a member of Lorenzo's *brigata*, featured in comic-grotesque mode in Lorenzo's *Uccellazione di starne*, and as a combatant in the 1469 joust.<sup>58</sup> 0 and 5 would almost certainly have belonged to this same circle, not least because Braccio refers to them as a group, acting together. Possible contenders as the other *morescantì* would therefore include

<sup>55</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 37 and 37n1. He references Boccaccio's *brigata* dancing to the *cornamusa* (e.g., at the conclusion of days VI and VII of the *Decameron*), but for young women dancing to the same instrument in the house of Guglielmo de' Pazzi's father, Antonio, as entertainment for Ippolita Sforza's party in Florence on its way south in June 1465, see Rochon, 104n58. On women as amateur performers of dance in mid-Quattrocento Florence, see Bryce, 2001.

<sup>56</sup> See the edition and translation by Giovanni Carsaniga, in Nevile, 141–57: "And after dancing the *saltarello* for a long time, / they danced a variety of dances, / as one or the other desired. / They danced an ornamented version of *Chiarintana*, / and both *Arrostiti*, / with *Laura*, *Mumma*, and *Carbonata*" (156). The majority of these are to be found in the dance treatises of the period, as Nevile notes (42–43). "Arrosto" in Martelli's letter is probably the dance called *Rostiboli* (*Rôti Bouilli*), with "amendue gli arrostiti" (both *Arrostiti*) in the 1459 poem referring to *Rostiboli* and *Rostiboli gioioso*. For the latter, by Domenico da Piacenza, see Guglielmo Ebreo of Pesaro, 13, 146–47. For the *chirintana* as a dance associated with weddings, see Nevile, 48–49.

<sup>57</sup> Rochon, 125n308.

<sup>58</sup> For *Uccellazione di starne*, see Medici, 1992, 2:656–58 and 667, stanzas 5–9 and 34–35. For Dionigi in the joust, see Luigi Pulci, 1986, 77–80, stanzas 42–48; for further biographical details, see Tripodi, 2016.

those of the *brigata* who are known to have been present at some of the festivities, namely Giovanfrancesco di Francesco di Iacopo Ventura or Venturi (1442–after 1478), and Giovanni di Antonio di Messer Andrea de' Pazzi (1437–1516), brother of Guglielmo.<sup>59</sup> Guglielmo, then accompanying Lorenzo on his journey north, is out of contention here, as is Bernardo Rucellai, always identified in the letter with the phrase “il cognato di 8 [Lorenzo]” (Lorenzo’s [future] brother-in-law). Other possibilities are Gismondo (Sigismondo) di Agnolo della Stufa, who, with Braccio Martelli, had accompanied Lorenzo on a jaunt to Pistoia, Lucca, and Pisa in July 1463,<sup>60</sup> and Pietro Alamanni (1434–1519).<sup>61</sup>

0 emerged from an adjacent room which was apparently familiar to Lorenzo (“[the room] where .8. [Lorenzo] once sat on the daybed”). One can make what one will of the innuendo, with its eroticization of domestic space.<sup>62</sup> 0 was strangely attired or strangely got up (“stranamente aconcio”) and was followed by 2 (Dionigi) and by 5, the latter wearing a dress belonging to Lucrezia. You know which one, Braccio writes, the blue one with the motto “SPERI” embroidered on the sleeves (“in sulle maniche”).

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider the blue dress, almost certainly part of the counter-trousseau, gifts of clothing conventionally made to the bride

<sup>59</sup> A letter of Giovanni de' Pazzi to Lorenzo, also dated April 27, shows that he attended some of the week's events. See ASF, MAP, XX, doc. 149<sup>f</sup>. His remark about one soirée ending at around the fourth hour of the night matches the same detail in Braccio's letter referring to the first part of the Thursday evening festivities (Del Lungo, 1923, 39). He concludes that Lorenzo can expect to receive further information from Dionigi Pucci and Giovanfrancesco Venturi.

<sup>60</sup> Medici, 1977, 1:7–8. There is an unusually wide variation among scholars regarding Gismondo's dates: for example, his birth date appears as 1442, 1445, or 1452. Assisted by Cosimo Bartoli, he represents himself as desperately seeking Lucrezia in spring 1466 in order to gather material for a letter. ASF, MAP, XX, 137 (now online doc. 135<sup>f</sup>), March 8, quoted by Rochon, 163n29.

<sup>61</sup> For all of these members of the *brigata*, see, for example, Rochon, 88–93 and Walter, 59–73. Most, like Dionigi, appear in *Uccellagione*, while Luigi Pulci makes fairly frequent reference to individuals in the group in letters to Lorenzo of this period. See Luigi Pulci, 1962, e.g., 944 (1 February 1465/66); 951 (23 August 1466); 958 (12 August 1468); 962, “tutta la tua academia” (4 December 1470). As is apparent from their birth dates, most were older than Lorenzo and some, at least, were already married: for example, Giovanni de' Pazzi to Beatrice di Giovanni Borromei in 1463 and Venturi to Giovanni's sister Antonia di Antonio di Messer Andrea de' Pazzi in 1462. See ASF, Manoscritti 402, Carte Dei, famiglia Pazzi, “donne entrate” and “donne uscite.” New work on Lorenzo's *brigata* over time, and on that of his uncle, would be most welcome.

<sup>62</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 39. For a similar situation regarding a daybed in the *Decameron*, see Boccaccio, 2013, 1095 (day VII, 3).

by the bridegroom, and worn by Lucrezia either during the engagement or perhaps even—as he was clearly expected to recognize it—during Lorenzo’s above-mentioned visit to the villa before his departure for Milan.<sup>63</sup> More specifically, it is worth focusing on the sleeves, a clothing item of interest to recent historians.<sup>64</sup> It was not uncommon for a device or a motto to be inscribed on the apparel of brides, a practice likened by Orsi Landini and Bulgarella to a form of branding.<sup>65</sup> Lucrezia’s motto may well have been chosen by Ardinghelli as the self-selecting target reader, but in this epistolary context, Lorenzo is positioned as an alternative and rival reader of the erotic language of clothes and the clothed body. It is his memory (a “material memory,” to use Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass’s suggestive phrase), and his desire and amorous aspirations, which are addressed and engaged, as they are elsewhere in the letter.<sup>66</sup> Aby Warburg, using the decoded form SPERO (I hope), is followed by Rubin and Wright, among many others, in connecting the sleeve motto to the enigmatic Paris Otto plate print, with its visual pun in which the two facing figures (Lorenzo and Lucrezia?) point upward toward an armillary sphere (“sfera,” “spera”),<sup>67</sup> “spera” most likely in its symbolic connotation of a “confident expectation of love being reciprocated.”<sup>68</sup>

Returning to the *moresca*, 0 and 2 (Dionigi) repeatedly embraced the cross-dressed 5, occasioning a good deal of laughter (knowing, nervous, embarrassed, or a mixture?) among the guests, some of whom—perhaps most of whom—would have read the incident as an allusion to the absent Lorenzo’s passion for the new bride, in other words viewing the performance as an overt dramatization of a scarcely concealed love triangle.<sup>69</sup> A recent scholar has interpreted

<sup>63</sup> For the counter-trousseau, see Alessandra Strozzi’s letter of 7 February 1464/65 (“His betrothed [Lucrezia] still has all her jewels and fine things,” Strozzi, 2016, 154). More generally, see Klapisch-Zuber, esp. 218–28; Kirshner; Randolph, 1998; Bestor; Frick, 128–31.

<sup>64</sup> Welch; Frick, 191–97.

<sup>65</sup> Compare, for example, Filippo Lippi’s portrait of a young woman whose sleeve displays the word “Lealtà,” and see Orsi Landini and Bulgarella, 93, 95, and 106–09 (cat. no. 3).

<sup>66</sup> Jones and Stallybrass, 2.

<sup>67</sup> See Warburg, 1905, esp. 9 and 13. The article is now also in English translation in Warburg, 1999, 169–83 and 431–35. See further, Rubin and Wright, 339 (cat. no. 89), and the discussion in Randolph, 2002, 223–28. For apparent echoes of the Otto plate in Luigi Pulci’s *canzone* “Da poi che ’l Lauro,” sent to Lorenzo in Rome, and in his *La giostra*, see Luigi Pulci, 1986, 50, line 159, and 65, stanza 11, lines 5–6.

<sup>68</sup> *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, 19:817, s.v. “spera<sup>2</sup>,” 2: “aspettativa fiduciosa di una corresponsione d’amore.”

<sup>69</sup> Nevile, 37, terms the form “pantomimic” as opposed to “social” dancing.

this case of transvestism as deviant, relating it to information unearthed by Michael Rocke about Braccio Martelli.<sup>70</sup> The homoerotic may very well have formed part of the culture of the *brigata*, as it did in other such groupings (as Rocke convincingly argues), and been part, therefore, of the interpretation given the performance by some, at least, of the participants or spectators.<sup>71</sup>

But it can also be read in a rather different key. Once again, the wedding context is crucial, and the fact that the *moresca*—often including an element of cross-dressing, with men got up to represent Venus or Beauty—was a hugely popular dance, and fashionable at aristocratic weddings in Renaissance Italy and beyond. Examples might include the nuptials of Tristano Sforza and Beatrice d'Este or the betrothal of Ippolita Sforza, both in Milan in 1455, or, just a couple of months after the Ardinghelli-Donati wedding, in Siena, as Ippolita journeyed south to Naples to meet her new husband in late June 1465 after her brief sojourn in Florence.<sup>72</sup>

As for the “strange get-up” of 0, and perhaps 2, there are various possibilities, including faces being blackened or bells being worn. Their bizarre attire would have been designed to match the *moresca's* characteristically athletic and exaggerated or grotesque leaping movements, although the result on this occasion was perhaps more a matter of spontaneous and improvised horseplay than a rehearsed performance of a dance form which, certainly by the later fifteenth century, was more often executed by professionals. The suggestive elements of the *moresca* could easily tip over into the obscene, but the wedding context should again be borne in mind—namely as a rite of passage associated with sexual union and fertility. This is reinforced by the references to grain and water as chosen descriptive elements elsewhere in Braccio's letter. In this particular case, however, the appropriation of the *moresca* by members of Lorenzo's *brigata* chiefly suggests possible readings of the event, by some or many of the guests, as a virile contestation between rivals for the lady represented by the cross-dressed 5 (the agonistic motif being another characteristic of the genre, intensified, on this occasion, by a further strongly political dimension) and/or as an intervention by proxy of the disappointed lover, Lorenzo, and a manifestation of his continuing, but now illegitimate, desire.

<sup>70</sup> D. V. Kent, 2009, 177; see also Rocke, 198 and 317n10. Braccio, like other members of the Florentine elite in similar circumstances, was absolved.

<sup>71</sup> For example, Rocke, 14–15, 126 and, on sodomy and male sociability, see esp. 148–91.

<sup>72</sup> See Pontremoli and La Rocca, 219–34 (esp. 221–24), and Nevile, 22–23, 33–34, 36–40. Also of interest is Wright, esp. 61–65.



## THE BRIDE

For Lorenzo de' Medici's early biographer, Niccolò Valori, Lucrezia's defining characteristics were, on the one hand, her rare beauty, to which a number of her contemporaries testify; on the other, the fact that she was of the noblest ancestry (in Florentine terms).<sup>73</sup> As well as the universal sine qua non of female value, namely physical beauty, Lucrezia, as a descendant of one of Florence's ancient lineages, had prestige status in terms of the city's historical and cultural memory. Lorenzo, writing a letter of introduction on 9 February 1482/83 to King Louis XI of France on behalf of her younger brother, Bernardo, who was about to act as a Florentine envoy, was to describe him as "one of Florence's noble young men and from one of its best families."<sup>74</sup>

On a number of counts, Lucrezia seems to have been ideally suited as an object of desire for the elder son of Florence's leading citizen, who had learned since childhood how to occupy and maintain the Medici's often precarious position of political dominance.<sup>75</sup> Apart from the physical attraction clearly felt by Lorenzo in 1465, he must have appreciated and valued the many symbolic resonances of Lucrezia's name in Florentine history and literature, which gave enhanced status to his passion, raising it above the realm of unruly human physical and emotional experience, above the merely sensual. The coterie of Medici poets, with their personal agendas in mind, certainly exploited this rich resource in the period 1465–70 and beyond. Piccarda Donati, celebrated in Dante's *Paradiso*, was an obvious choice for Luca and Luigi Pulci.<sup>76</sup> And Luigi was to elaborate this connection in his *canzone*, "Da poi che 'l Lauro più, lasso, non vidi," enclosed in a letter of 22 March 1466 sent to Lorenzo after the latter's departure for Rome and Naples. The poem entertains some fairly extreme fantasies as regards Lucrezia's options: abandoning her marriage, seeking a divorce, or taking the veil. There are even thoughts of suicide, a course of action from which she was dissuaded by the figure of Piccarda.<sup>77</sup> More soberly, Niccolò

<sup>73</sup> Valori, 28–29.

<sup>74</sup> Medici, 1998, 7:194–96: "uno de' nobili giovani e de le migliori famiglie di questa città" (194). The editor, Michael Mallett, uses Piero Guicciardini's definitions of social status to locate Bernardo's family in the category of "extremo nobile" (194n1). For Guicciardini's text, see Rubinstein, 363–72 ("estremo nobile" on 368). On the French mission, as well as Mallett's notes to Lorenzo's letter, see Cornelison, esp. 448–52.

<sup>75</sup> See Alamanno Rinuccini on Lorenzo's relentlessly competitive personality (Giustiniani, 471), and also the insights of F. W. Kent, 1996. For the ongoing but still inconclusive debate as to the precise nature of the Medici's position in Florence over the fifteenth century, see Black and Law.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Luca Pulci, 94, and Luigi Pulci, 1986, 64, stanza 7, line 8.

<sup>77</sup> See Luigi Pulci, 1986, 47, lines 89–91, and, for thoughts of suicide, Luigi Pulci, 1986, 49–50, lines 152–57, a response to a suggestion by the poem's narrator in lines 144–45. On the realities of divorce, see Seidel Menchi and Quagliioni. Dempsey, 1992, is one scholar who unquestioningly accepts the "essential truth" of Pulci's story of Lucrezia's distress (92–98, esp. 96).



Valori inscribes Lucrezia within the discourse of patrilineal identity, as a descendant of Piccarda's brother, Corso Donati, airbrushed as "a valiant knight and well versed in the art of war, head and defender of the Guelphs not only of our city but of the whole of Tuscany."<sup>78</sup> Angelo Poliziano's choice falls, instead, on the Roman Lucretia—but only her chastity, not, of course, her rape.<sup>79</sup>

Lorenzo's love is often presented in the literature of his own time and in modern scholarly writing as courtly and *onesto*. It is a form of desire that has the merit of being culturally approved (except, perhaps, by Alessandra Strozzi), manifested in behaviors modeled on an idealized aristocratic masculinity as imitated by the Florentine mercantile elite. In reality, three years after the wedding, Giovanfrancesco Venturi is to be found encouraging Lorenzo to take advantage of Niccolò Ardinghelli's continuing absence abroad on business finally to consummate his relationship with Lucrezia: "now is the moment to seek that delightful conclusion and to waste no more time . . . it is a crime to leave such sweet terrain to lie fallow."<sup>80</sup> The agricultural metaphor is reminiscent of those used by the transgressive character of Dionè in the *Decameron* and the register shifts abruptly from the mystifications of chivalric love to a more commonplace lust.<sup>81</sup> A year later, however, the deed was apparently still not done. Venturi writes: "I'm able to give you news of your gentle Lucrezia, with all her excellent qualities, and also of my and your G. [unidentified], for nature spared no effort when it created such beautiful women, so pleasing and so deserving of adoration by worthy lovers such as we are. God grant that they reward us before we die."<sup>82</sup> In his 1465 letter,

<sup>78</sup> Valori, 28–29. The name of Lucrezia's great-grandfather, Messer Manno di Aparado Donati (ca. 1320–after 1370), also still resonated in the mid-Quattrocento. Magnate, knight, and condottiero, he was buried in the cloister area of the basilica of St. Anthony in Padua with a funerary monument bearing an epitaph by Petrarch. See Kohl; Damiani; Wilkins, 1959, 160, 213–15; Wilkins, 1960; Wilkins, 1978, 168–84, and for the tomb, King, 2:116 (plate 138). The positive recognition value of his name explains its reuse for both Lucrezia's grandfather and father.

<sup>79</sup> Poliziano, 1:31 (*Stanze per la giostra*, book 2, stanza 4). For other contemporary writers such as Naldo Naldi and Ugolino Verino who reference Lucrezia, see, for example, Rochon, 95; M. Martelli, 1996, 79–82; Carrai, 22–23.

<sup>80</sup> ASF, MAP, XXI, doc. 139<sup>r-v</sup>, letter of 27 August (1468), to Lorenzo. See Rochon, 96, and F. W. Kent, 2007, 34, where the date is given as August 28.

<sup>81</sup> For the metaphors, see, for example, Boccaccio, 2013, 1167 (day VII, 10), and 1459 (day IX, 10). See also Baxter.

<sup>82</sup> See ASF, MAP, XXII, doc. 217<sup>r-v</sup>, 22 July 1469, Venturi to Lorenzo, quoted by Rochon, 132n387. Cf. the conclusion of Lorenzo's *Giacoppo*: "And thus their long love came to be consummated. May God grant that the same happens to us with ours" (original in Medici, 1992, 2:831), with its echoes of Boccaccio—e.g., the conclusions of *Decameron* III, 6; III, 7; and VII, 9.

Martelli had, modestly or not, laid aside any claim to write like Boccaccio, but Lorenzo himself was later to step up to the mark with two self-consolatory short stories. The *Novella della Ginevra*, set in Pisa, is unfinished, breaking off in a bedroom prior to any actual physical union. *Giacoppo*, set in Siena, is a literary wish fulfilment, its plot involving the classic triangle: older husband, dissatisfied young wife, virile young lover, and successful seduction.<sup>83</sup>

Rochon's nuanced interpretation of the relationship remains fundamentally valid today: in short, Lucrezia, while undoubtedly Lorenzo's *dama*, was probably not his mistress.<sup>84</sup> Silent apart from the written echo, in Braccio's text, of her singing voice and her laughter, Lucrezia's views and feelings are unknown and unknowable. The flattering fiction of reciprocity spun by Braccio, by the letters of others of the *brigata*, by the related poetry, and by some recent scholars, perhaps remains just that—a fiction.<sup>85</sup> In the face of textual harassment,<sup>86</sup> combined with relentless public pursuit by Lorenzo's friends (including behavior that would now be widely perceived as stalking and voyeurism),<sup>87</sup> one might consider Lucrezia to be a victim. An alternative view is also possible, however—namely, to understand her as newly empowered by marriage, with its social validation and the possibility of increased visibility, as experiencing an exhilarating sense of self-worth, enhanced (although simultaneously also endangered) by the game of courtly love played by Lorenzo and the *brigata*.

<sup>83</sup> Medici, 1992, 2:819–31 (*Giacoppo*) and 832–42 (*La Ginevra*). On the debate over dating, see Orvieto's introduction (Medici, 1992, 2:813–17).

<sup>84</sup> Rochon, 94–97, at 97. Sexual gratification could, of course, be sought elsewhere; see Rochon, 93–94 and 128n346. For Lorenzo's sexuality, see also F. W. Kent, 2007. Valori, 28, naturally insists on Lucrezia's absolute chastity, and this may even be true. She is undoubtedly not the sex goddess of recent television series such as *Da Vinci's Demons* or *Medici: Masters of Florence*, which would, in turn, require a different sort of analysis. For her as a later vehicle for "a public and princely staging of love" by Lorenzo, and as a convenient symbol of the Medici wooing of Florence, see Randolph, 2002, 134–35 and 205.

<sup>85</sup> "I often saw her eyes glisten, moved by pity for you, before she veiled such sorrow with laughter." Original in Del Lungo, 1923, 38. Cf. Gismondo della Stufa's letter of 8 March 1465/66 with its rather weak attempt to interpret, in a way favorable to Lorenzo, the reason for Lucrezia's social invisibility during his absence in Rome: "I have searched [for her] ceaselessly" and ending "Now it's up to you to gloss the rest as you see fit." Original in Rochon, 163n29, quoting ASF, MAP, XX, 137 (now online doc. 135<sup>r</sup>), 8 March 1466. For Kent's assumption of reciprocity, see F. W. Kent, 2007, 34.

<sup>86</sup> I owe the phrase to Jacobus, 85.

<sup>87</sup> For the former, see, for example, ASF, MAP, XX, online docs. 135<sup>r</sup>, 140<sup>r</sup>, and 198<sup>r</sup>, Gismondo della Stufa to Lorenzo in Rome, letters of 8, 12, and 29 March 1465/66, respectively. For Giovanfrancesco Venturi spying on the women fishing in the Bisenzio and praising "that flesh of ivory and pearl," see Rochon, 166n49, quoting ASF, MAP, XXII, doc. 217<sup>r-v</sup>, 22 July 1469.

The potential for her involvement in a different, but not unrelated, game will be explored in the next section.

### POLITICAL TENSIONS

Before moving to an examination of the central epistolary relationship of Braccio and Lorenzo, something should be said, even if briefly, about just one of the letter's complex subtexts, namely the political.<sup>88</sup> Although not mentioned overtly, this must nevertheless have resonated in the consciousness of the letter writer and his addressee, as well as in that of the bridal couple and their guests. And nowhere more powerfully than in Lorenzo and Niccolò Ardinghelli themselves: aspiring lover and new husband, significant member of Florence's dominant family and exiled political opponent, respectively.

The Ardinghelli are identified by Gene Brucker as belonging to an elite constituting the "virtual rulers of the republic" during the oligarchic regime of the early fifteenth century. Comprising lineages such as the Albizzi, Strozzi, and others, this group "provided most of the leaders of the anti-Medicean party" pre-1434.<sup>89</sup> Niccolò's father, Piero di Neri, was listed by Giovanni Rucellai, along with Palla Strozzi and Rinaldo degli Albizzi, as among the "principali confinati" in September 1434 after the return of the Medici from their own period of exile.<sup>90</sup> In the new clampdown of 1458, perceived anti-Mediceans were once again targeted, with Niccolò Ardinghelli and his brothers formally exiled.<sup>91</sup>

With hindsight, it can be seen that the Donati-Ardinghelli wedding lies within a period of renewed tension in the midcentury struggle for political control of the republic. A major catalyst is easy to identify: the death, on 1 August 1464, of Cosimo de' Medici, principal architect of Medici hegemony. His departure from the scene created a new set of circumstances—and

<sup>88</sup> Another such subtext would be that of social status. The individuals who populate the letter range from magnate or ex-magnate (Donati, Pazzi), through "popolani antichi nobili" (non-magnate old nobility), to use another of Piero Guicciardini's terms (Medici and Ardinghelli, but with the latter already featuring in public life from the late twelfth century), to the "uomini nuovi" (new men) represented by the Martelli and the Pucci. For the terminology, see Rubinstein, 368. For the early Ardinghelli, see Diaciatì, 41.

<sup>89</sup> D. V. Kent, 1978, 140, referencing Brucker, esp. 268. For Ardinghelli membership of the traditional oligarchy in the Trecento, see Najemy, 1982, 118, 260, and 298.

<sup>90</sup> Rucellai, 1:49. For Piero Ardinghelli's exile, see ASF, Otto di Guardia e Balìa della Repubblica, 224, fols. 40<sup>r</sup>–41<sup>r</sup>; for his social and political standing, see D. V. Kent, 1978, 140 and 164–65.

<sup>91</sup> For details, see ASF, Otto di Guardia e Balìa della Repubblica, 224, fol. 88<sup>v</sup> (Francesco and Luigi) and fol. 90<sup>r</sup> (Niccolò).

opportunities—for all opponents interested in regime change. These naturally comprised the exiles of 1434 and 1458, but also an emerging group, led by men like Dietisalvi Neroni, who, having previously supported the Medici, were now turning against them.<sup>92</sup> Already by the autumn of 1465 Alessandra Strozzi was writing to her sons that the current political situation “reminds me of what happened in 1434.”<sup>93</sup> When the final challenge did come the following year, however, it was to be ultimately unsuccessful, culminating in the Medici victory of September 1466 and its extended aftermath.<sup>94</sup>

Any close scrutiny of the identity and family history of those who attended the April 1465 wedding will reveal the existence of discrete political groupings, leading to the possibility that Braccio’s use of code may not just have been protecting any moral sensibilities raised by the actions of the *brigata* in their pursuit of Lucrezia on Lorenzo’s behalf. On the one hand, there is the central figure of the exiled bridegroom himself but, if 16 is indeed Francesco Caccini, then a rather larger constellation of past and present anti-Mediceans is involved: the exiled host, Caccini himself, and his wife, Ginevra Braccacci, the daughter and granddaughter of two men who had died in exile in 1449 and 1462 respectively, namely Felice Braccacci and Messer Palla Strozzi.<sup>95</sup> In the middle are the Rucellai with their strong connections to the Strozzi but now allied to the Medici through the betrothal in November 1461 of Bernardo and Nannina. In the solidly pro-Medici camp, there are long-term clients and supporters, namely the Martelli in the persons of Bartolomeo and Braccio, and members of Lorenzo’s intimate friendship group, the *brigata*, representing his interests.<sup>96</sup>

Within the economy of Braccio’s letter, the sexual triumph of the well-endowed bridegroom, Ardinghelli, can be set against his current political emasculation or impotence, his dependence on Medici favor for permission to return home, both temporarily for the wedding, and in terms of definitive repatriation. The text could be said to play with notions of borders and boundaries

<sup>92</sup> As early as 1463, Nicodemo da Pontremoli (Tranchedini) was reporting to Francesco Sforza from Florence that Cosimo and his family had no greater or more ambitious enemy in the city than Dietisalvi (letter of August 17 quoted by Rubinstein, 152n3). On Alessandra Strozzi’s response to Cosimo’s death and her singling out of Dietisalvi, see Strozzi, 1877, 323–24, 15 September 1464.

<sup>93</sup> Strozzi, 2016, 205, 22 November 1465 and Strozzi, 1877, 520 (“mi fa ricordare del 34”).

<sup>94</sup> For the turbulent period from 1464 onwards, as well as Strozzi, 1877, see Rubinstein, 155–98; Parenti, 2001; Ganz (one of a number of relevant studies by this author); Najemy, 2006, 298–306.

<sup>95</sup> For the date of Braccacci’s death, previously uncertain in the literature, and for Caccini’s earlier friendship with Giovanni di Cosimo de’ Medici, see Bryce, 2020, 17n39 and 12–14.

<sup>96</sup> Any early solidarity of the *brigata* was not to last, the Pazzi example being the most obvious. See Fubini, 87–106; Martines, 2003, 106, 126–27, and 208–09; Fabbri.

in the form of reference to the city's walls and gates, symbols of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, there is the free movement in and out, of Braccio and the *brigata*, part of the politically dominant group for whom the territory just beyond the walls is an extension, and mutually sustaining aspect, of the urban environment; on the other hand, the exiles, denied access to their city but forever hopeful of restoration, and continuing to marry Florentine women, as in the present case, by way of an investment against that happy day.<sup>97</sup>

Alessandra Strozzi wondered if the Ardinghelli were indulging in a calculated exploitation of Niccolò's beautiful wife as a pawn in their repatriation project. After her suggestion, quoted earlier, that Lorenzo had perhaps supported the bridegroom's permit application in order to please his "dama e donna di Niccolò," she continues: "They're hoping they'll receive another favor [repatriation], and before too long. Please God this is so, and that others [i.e., her own sons] don't get left out. Perhaps it's more useful to have a beautiful wife than the support of 47 [King Ferrante]!"<sup>98</sup> Whether this was originally in Ardinghelli's mind in contracting the marriage, or during the extended period of his engagement (depending on when, exactly, Lucrezia first attracted Lorenzo's attention), and whether he was aware of Lorenzo's visit to the villa beyond the Porta a Pinti and his encounter with the bride—possibly wearing her blue dress with its motto "SPERI," possibly in the room with the *lettuccio*—remain matters for speculation. As is the question whether Lucrezia herself actively collaborated in the project to restore her new husband and his family to the city. The internalizing of such an agenda (as in the example provided by Alessandra Strozzi) would certainly make perfect sense from a personal point of view. Her emotional state (as reported by Bernardo Rucellai) at the prospect of Ardinghelli setting off once more for the Levant on business just a few weeks after the wedding might suggest where her loyalties lay: "On the last night she was with him she couldn't stop crying so that in the morning she was utterly wretched, and pale with grief."<sup>99</sup> As for the event organized in her honor by Lorenzo in the Sala del Papa at Santa Maria Novella on 3 February 1466 before his departure

<sup>97</sup> A relevant example here would be the exiled Giovanfrancesco di Messer Palla Strozzi and Lucrezia's older half-sister, Luigia Donati. See Bryce, 2020, 24–25, but particularly Di Crescenzo, esp. 103–05. For Filippo Strozzi's long-drawn-out negotiations for a Florentine bride (ultimately Fiammetta degli Adimari), see Strozzi, 2016, index under "Strozzi, Filippo, marriage of."

<sup>98</sup> Strozzi, 2016, 155–56. Original in Strozzi, 1877, 386. For such calculations of family interest as against conventional honor, albeit in the different social and political environment of the Italian princely courts, see Ertlinger, 771: "families found these liaisons advantageous and actively cultivated such relationships."

<sup>99</sup> Bernardo Rucellai to Lorenzo, letter of 16 May 1465 (ASF, MAP, XX, doc. 153<sup>b</sup>): "L'ultima notte stette chon lui non restò mai di piagnere per modo che la mattina era sconfitta e palida per lo dolore."

for Rome and Naples, perhaps this was an opportunity, as much as anything, for a further investment by the Ardinghelli in their repatriation campaign.<sup>100</sup> Whatever the truth of the matter, a few months later her husband's name appears immediately after those of the Strozzi brothers on Marco Parenti's list of those pardoned by the Balìa of 20 September 1466, albeit in his case without the restoration of full political rights.<sup>101</sup> Post-1466 he is to be found as apparently part of the Medici's client system, with Lorenzo writing letters of recommendation, for example to Ludovico Gonzaga, marquis of Mantua, and with Lorenzo's wife, Clarice Orsini, acting as godmother to Lucrezia and Niccolò's first child, Piero.<sup>102</sup> This latter was the son, later personal secretary to the first Medici pope, Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici, who was to acquire Verrocchio's portrait of his mother from the Medici estate in 1495.<sup>103</sup>

### BRACCIO AND LORENZO: HOMOSOCIAL AND PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

This final section of the article will refocus on the apparent dynamics of the relationship between the two young men as evidenced at a particular moment in time by this single letter.<sup>104</sup> Braccio's epistolary play—with the heterosexual norms and practices of his day, with male sexual desire and rivalry, with masculine identities—is ultimately all about relations between and among males. Lucrezia Donati appears to be the central focus of the letter, but only because she has been appropriated and narrated by Braccio for his own purposes. In short, the text is usefully viewed through the lens of the homosocial—that is, of same-sex relationships that are not, or are not necessarily, of a sexual nature.<sup>105</sup> Several interrelated issues

<sup>100</sup> Strozzi, 1877, 575, 7 February 1465/66; Ciappelli, 150.

<sup>101</sup> Parenti, 2001, 138.

<sup>102</sup> Respectively, Medici, 1977, 1:305–06, letter of 25 June 1471 (Niccolò and his brother Luigi are described, whether sincerely or not, as “excellent men and close friends of our house”), and Giovanni Poggi citing Filippo Strozzi in an addendum to Warburg, 1905, 19.

<sup>103</sup> See Luchs, 94n36.

<sup>104</sup> In spite of the age difference between the two sets of correspondents and the regrettable absence of an epistolary dialogue between Braccio and Lorenzo, I have particularly profited from Najemy's 1993 study of the Machiavelli-Vettori letters. Dealing, for example, with the vagaries of male desire, it also resonates with the present study on account of its references to members of the same set of families who populate Braccio's letter: Medici, Strozzi, Ardinghelli, and Rucellai, the latter including Francesco Vettori's mother, Caterina di Giovanni Rucellai (74–75), perhaps one of the three Rucellai daughters who were guests at the 1465 wedding.

<sup>105</sup> The concept was already present in earlier feminist writing, but the term was introduced and theorized, notably, by Sedgwick. For another later fifteenth-century Florentine example, see Bryce, 2009.

present themselves here: the prioritization of those male-male relationships, the power of shared male experience, and the potency of male bonding with its associated techniques and tools, notably involving women and their instrumentalization.

There are further complicating factors, however. The tone of the letter might perhaps suggest a relationship of equals but, in this particular context, the cultivation of the homosocial should be viewed as a powerful behavioral and emotional tool operating in an intensely interpersonal society dominated by asymmetrical patronage relations. The Martelli were Medici clients and “new men,” whose political choices and loyalties—for instance in the autumn of 1434—bore subsequent fruit through business collaboration, resulting in an upward trajectory toward wealth, status, and influence.<sup>106</sup> Braccio’s inclusion in Lorenzo’s *brigata* in the 1460s contributed simultaneously to his own individual position in Florentine society and to that of his family. He refers overtly to friendship in the phrase *pro iure amicitie*—a reminder that he owned a copy of Cicero’s classic work—but this occurs in the paragraph about the business he wishes Lorenzo to conduct on his (or their) behalf in Milan, rather than in the narration of more intimate social events. Although the letter might indeed be read as a communication between friends in the modern sense of the word, it is also a service rendered, a gift from client to patron, and marked by clear signs of deference.<sup>107</sup> As a friend and/or as a client, Braccio has Lorenzo’s best interests at heart, to the extent that in the latter’s absence, he acts as proxy, mediator, and go-between, making (he insists upon the point) repeated efforts to speak to the bride on Lorenzo’s behalf. What is offered here is an amorous version of the oral *raccomandazione*, while the letter of April 27 itself becomes a pledge of love—a love letter—directed to Lorenzo.<sup>108</sup>

There is also the matter of age discrepancies within the *brigata*. Made up of young men (*giovani*), including Braccio, who were virtually all in their early twenties, the group was nevertheless dominated in status terms by the adolescent Lorenzo in his mid-teens, occupying the prestige position. Within the economy of the letter, however, Braccio temporarily inhabits the position of power, supported by the presence/absence dichotomy combined with another conscious coupling, namely the giving of pleasure or consolation but also of pain

<sup>106</sup> For autumn 1434, see U. Martelli, 115–21, and Martines, 1959. For business ties, see esp. De Roover; Pezzarossa.

<sup>107</sup> On instrumentality and the affective in Florentine friendship, see McLean, 41, 152; Najemy, 1993; D. V. Kent, 2009; James; James and Kent.

<sup>108</sup> For expectations relating to the “legge d’amicizia” (the law of friendship) in the sexual realm, see the figure of Maffio Grimaldo in Lorenzo’s *La Ginevra* (Medici, 1992, 2:834–41).



through his narrative.<sup>109</sup> Both aspects are present in the teasing rhetorical address to his target reader: “Oh, 8 [Lorenzo], where are you at this very moment? Why are you not, I don’t suggest in the place of 4 [Ardinghelli], but at the very least in the place of one of us, and able to enjoy so many worthy sights.”<sup>110</sup> And power is also inherent in the writer’s choice of what to include and what to omit, what to tell and what not to tell. For example, the second-hand information derived from code name 16 about the bridegroom’s physical attributes is deliberately included in the knowledge of Lorenzo’s probable reaction to the news of Lucrezia’s passage from virginity to womanhood. The immature adolescent, only very recently turned sixteen, is juxtaposed with the fully adult male. One might view the older Braccio as generally fulfilling the role of guide to Lorenzo’s erotic education. Here, however, instead of bolstering his pupil’s self-esteem, he comes perilously close to undermining it.

The notions of absence and presence are of course standard topoi of the epistolary genre and Braccio makes repeated rhetorical play on them—a case of theme and elaborate variations. As Lorenzo’s alter ego, he contrives to see with Lorenzo’s eyes. One is aware, for instance, of the powerful focus of attention on Lucrezia with only an occasional shift to the woman in whom Braccio is supposedly interested, Lucrezia’s married sister, Tancia.<sup>111</sup> The absent Lorenzo is invited to see the social events described; to read the motto on the blue dress; to hear the songs whose lyrics are, Braccio suggests, particularly apposite to the amorous situations of both of them, but particularly Lorenzo; and to be virtually present, whether through the private words spoken to Lucrezia on his behalf by the *brigata*, or through the play-acting of the *moresca* involving the “lady” and the two rivals.

The letter is intense, exuberant, and seemingly testosterone-fueled, the sexual tensions described heightening consciousness and leading to a sort of stimulus overload. The erotic and emotional histories and geographies presented here are inevitably dominated by the body and by the senses. The former is represented by the narrative of human action: dancing, singing, running, swimming; by the body dressed, cross-dressed, undressed (the “prick the size of a bull’s horn”), and engaged in the sexual act (the news of the consummation

<sup>109</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 34.

<sup>110</sup> Original in Del Lungo, 1923, 37.

<sup>111</sup> Braccio’s name had been linked with that of Marietta Strozzi in 1464 (M. Martelli, 1980). Now, the adoption of Tancia/Costanza Donati as his *dama* creates a quasi-fraternal relation to Lorenzo. He was shortly to be betrothed to another Costanza, a daughter of Piero de’ Pazzi. See Parenti, 1996, 157, 30 December 1465, and Strozzi, 1877, 551, 11 January 1465/66. According to Pulci’s *La giostra*, the wedding, held in the spring of 1466, was attended by Lucrezia and her sister (Luigi Pulci, 1986, 64, stanza 7).



of the marriage). There is textual saturation by all available categories of sensuous experience—the whole sensorium—in which Lorenzo can participate vicariously.<sup>112</sup> The visual inevitably predominates, but there is also the auditory (music and singing, the latter particularly powerful in both sensual and emotional terms, especially where the performers are women). The metaphorical honey suggests the olfactory sense as well as the sense of taste, while examples of the sense of touch, including the locomotive and the somatic, range from dance (performatory movement) and the drenching of the young men passing through wet fields (the kinesthetic and locomotive), to the following more narrowly focused and highly charged example with its eroticized triangulation of bodily contact: “I send you no other relic than the present letter written by the very hand that, on several occasions, touched ÷ [Lucrezia].”<sup>113</sup> Touch in Renaissance culture is usually presented as being at the low end of the hierarchy of senses, but that is, of course, in the moral, religious, and philosophical domains. In the real world, touch represents a culmination, a fulfilment of desire. Conscious of sensual as well as sensuous excess, it is no wonder that Braccio also takes pains to add occasional linguistic markers of restraint in the attempt to rebalance his text in the direction of *honestas* (decorum, propriety, restraint)—particularly as regards the women—both in the vernacular and in Latin.<sup>114</sup>

In conclusion, Braccio is a sophisticated and artful narrator, and the letter of April 27 is a bravura performance on a number of levels, notably in terms of elite heterosexual masculinity and *amicizia* in its various forms. He is operating simultaneously as an intimate friend engaged in the maintenance work demanded by homosocial bonding, as a political supporter in time of increasing factional strife, and as a client constantly negotiating unequal interpersonal relations.<sup>115</sup> Lastly, it is a performance in the sense of a consciously competitive display of linguistic and narrative skill, demonstrating a masterly deployment of the epistolary conventions available to him and giving the lie to the insufficiency topos quoted earlier where he presents himself as “an ignorant and inexperienced youth, unskilled in writing.”<sup>116</sup>

Running, in effect, out of performative energy, Braccio finally calls a halt to his principal narrative, shifting down several gears into the more routine,

<sup>112</sup> For what follows, I am particularly indebted to Rodaway.

<sup>113</sup> “Non ti mando altra reliquia, se non questa lettera scripta da quella mano che più volte toccò ÷ [Lucrezia]”: Del Lungo, 1923, 38.

<sup>114</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 37, 40, and 41.

<sup>115</sup> For the performance or construction of the self or selves in this context, see McLean, esp. 193–223.

<sup>116</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 34.

though far from unimportant, territory of business and general news, with a final promise (in spite of an apology for writing at such great length), that “I’ll write in more detail next time if you think I haven’t done so here.”<sup>117</sup> If any additional letters were sent by him in relation to the events of late April 1465, they have not survived. Or else they were never written, Braccio being confident in the knowledge that the baton would be picked up (whether collaboratively or competitively) by other members of the epistolary community of the *brigata*.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Del Lungo, 1923, 42.

<sup>118</sup> For Giovanni de’ Pazzi’s letter of April 27, and other possible ones written by Giovanfrancesco Venturi and by Dionigi Pucci, see ASF, MAP, XX, doc. 149<sup>f</sup>.

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