

Disegno and desire in Pontormo's Alessandro de' Medici

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As the portrait of a man drawing a portrait, Pontormo's painting of Alessandro de' Medici (Fig. 1) is imbued with self-consciousness about the fictive nature of art-making.¹ By examining its dynamic interplay of drawing and poetic desire, a more multi-dimensional understanding of the painting emerges, one that also throws light on other interpretations of the act of drawing and on the poetic conception of a lover's image. Portrayed around 1534–35, the first Medici Duke of Florence is shown sketching the outline of his beloved, whom the viewer is required to imagine seated in profile more or less directly ahead of Alessandro and thence projected into the viewer's actual space. Shadows indicate that light falls obliquely from the painting's upper left, falling on the nobleman's pensive face and especially his hands, highlighting his manual labour at the task of *disegno*. In these circumstances, the woman has a strong light behind her, probably a window, and Alessandro would indeed chiefly discern her silhouette and main details, just those features recorded on the sheet he holds. The sitter is presumed to be the young widow Taddea Malaspina, the lady who received the painting as a gift from Alessandro according to Giorgio Vasari's account published over three decades later.² Usually taken as a relatively straightforward avowal of love for the mistress whom the duke portrays from life, it need not refer to a direct model and may even represent another woman. In either case, the painting treats illusionary and metaphorical aspects of what the eye and hand could do.

This article is dedicated to Tim McCall, whose question on behalf of a class he was planning to teach in Philadelphia spurred its completion.

¹ On the painting, see Frederick Mortimer Clapp, *Jacopo Carucci da Pontormo: His Life and Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), 170–73, 280–82; Leo Steinberg, 'Pontormo's Alessandro de' Medici, or, I Only Have Eyes for You', *Art in America* 63 (January-February 1975): 62–5; Carl Brandon Strehlke, 'Pontormo, Alessandro de' Medici, and the Palazzo Pazzi', *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 81 (Autumn 1985): 3–15; Elizabeth Cropper, 'Pontormo and Bronzino in Philadelphia: A Double Portrait' in Carl B. Strehlke (ed.), *Pontormo, Bronzino, and the Medici: The Transformation of the Renaissance Portrait in Florence*, exhib.cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art with the Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 19–22, and Carl B. Strehlke's entry on the painting in *ibid.*, 112–15 no. 26, with further bibliography. Vanessa Walker-Oakes, 'Representing the Perfect Prince: Pontormo's *Alessandro de' Medici*', *Comitatus* 32 (2001): 127–46 discusses the otherwise neglected aspect of the painting's 'potential for public propaganda'.

² Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori scultori ed architettori*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Florence: Sansoni, 1906), Vol. 6, 278 (hereafter cited as Vasari-Milanesi).



Fig. 1 Pontormo, *Alessandro de' Medici*, c. 1534–35, oil on panel, 101.2 × 81.9 cm (J83, © Philadelphia Museum of Art; John G. Johnson Collection, 1917)

Drawing the outline of a beloved's face recalls Pliny's account of the invention of relief. Not popular as a subject for depiction, the tale was nevertheless known to the many humanists, art lovers and artists who read or heard about Pliny's famed, compendious *Natural History*. The potter Butades invented the making of modelled portraits, and 'he did this owing to his daughter, who was in love with a young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by a lamp. Her father pressed clay on this and made a relief.'³ The silhouette of a lover is Alessandro's subject, though the genders of Pliny's tale are reversed in Pontormo's retelling. First illustrated in 1668, by which time Pliny's anecdote was considered a story about the origin of painting, the Corinthian maid's motivation to use drawing in a new way and make a romantic memento was the focus of paintings and prints issued from that time forward, primarily from the late eighteenth century.⁴

³ Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1952), Vol. 9, 370–73 (35.151): 'eiusdem opere terrae fingere ex argilla similitudines Butades Sicyonius figulus primus invenit Corinthi filiae opera, quae capta amore iuvenis, abeunte illo peregre, umbram ex facie eius ad lucernam in pariete lineis circumscrispsit, quibus pater eius inpressa argilla tympum fecit.'

⁴ Frances Muecke, "Taught by Love": The Origin of Painting Again', *Art Bulletin* 81 (1999): 297–302. See also Robert Rosenblum, 'The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism', *Art Bulletin* 39 (1957): 279–90 (whose earliest example is Sandrart of 1675).

Around 1450, the originary story was well enough known for Pliny's account to be closely paraphrased by Lorenzo Ghiberti when writing a history of his own profession of sculpture. He repeats it as a tale of maidenly love and fatherly ingenuity.⁵ However, Pliny's anecdote foregrounding a woman's role was overshadowed by his more generic statement, in another section, that painting 'began with tracing an outline round a man's shadow'.⁶ No purpose for that tracing is mentioned there, nor by Quintilian in a similar passage.⁷ Alberti's *De pictura* paraphrased it in 1435: 'Quintilian believed that the earliest painters used to draw around shadows made by the sun'.⁸ For Alberti, circumscription or the 'process of tracing the outlines in the painting', was the fundamental rule for painting, followed by composition and the consideration of light and colour.⁹ Leonardo echoed the thought: 'the first picture was simply a line, drawn round the shadow of a man cast by the sun upon a wall'.¹⁰ The same fundamental rule of *disegno* applied also to sculpture, as Cellini observed by way of the example of drawing an outline around shadows cast on a wall when teaching the basic principles of design.¹¹

However, due to an erroneous reading of Pliny, possibly exacerbated by confusing punctuation, Vasari misidentified Gyges of Lydia as the inventor of painting.¹² The point about strong shadows and drawn outlines nevertheless remained clear, as it did in Vasari's two depictions of the origins of painting, one in his house at Arezzo (1548, Fig. 2), the other in his Florentine residence (early 1570s).¹³ The coincidence of an error in reading with the presumption about sole, masculine invention, ensured that Pliny's Corinthian maid was replaced in Vasari's paintings by a solitary, adult man seized with

⁵ Lorenzo Ghiberti, *I commentarii*, ed. Lorenzo Bartoli (Florence: Giunti, 1998), 53–4 (1.6.1).

⁶ Pliny, *Natural History*, 271 (35.15): 'umbra hominis lineis circumducta.' Modern scholars often conflate Pliny's two passages and therefore do not notice the gender differences.

⁷ Quintilian, *The Orator's Education [Institutio oratoria]*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 325 (10.2.7).

⁸ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture. The Latin texts of 'De Pictura' and 'De Statua'*, ed. and trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), 63 (2.26: 'Censebat Quinilianus priscos pictores solitos umbras ad solem circumscribere'), alluded to in his *De Statua*, 138, no. 13.

⁹ Alberti, *On Painting*, 67 (2.31): 'Circumscriptio quidem ea est quae lineis ambitum fimbriarum in pictura conscribit.'

¹⁰ Jean Paul Richter, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (1883; repr. New York: Dover, 1970), Vol. I, 332, no. 661: 'la prima pittura fu sol d'una linea, la quale circumdava l'ombra dell'omo, fatta dal sole ne'mvri' (translation adjusted).

¹¹ Benvenuto Cellini, 'Discorso sopra l'arte del disegno' in Paola Barocchi (ed.), *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*, Vol. 2 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1973), 1931–2.

¹² Pliny credited Gyges with the invention of ball-throwing, then immediately turned to the origins of painting, beginning in Egypt: 'athleticam Pytheus, pilam lusorium Gyges Lydus; picturam Aegypti . . .' (7.205). Vasari's *Proemio* to his whole work first named Prometheus as the inventor of art, but then he noted that Pliny gave the honour to Gyges, 'who, being by the fire and gazing at his own shadow, suddenly, with some charcoal in his hand, drew his own outline on the wall': Vasari-Milanese, Vol. 1, 218 (also present in the first edition of 1550).

¹³ For a reproduction of *Gyges outlining his shadow* in Arezzo, see A. Paolucci and A. M. Maetzke, *La casa del Vasari in Arezzo* (Florence: Cassa di Risparmio, 1988), 54. For the scene in Florence, appropriately placed to one side of the room's fireplace, see Fredrika H. Jacobs, 'Vasari's Vision of the History of Painting: Frescoes in the Casa Vasari, Florence', *Art Bulletin* 66 (1984): 404–7 and Fig. 5.

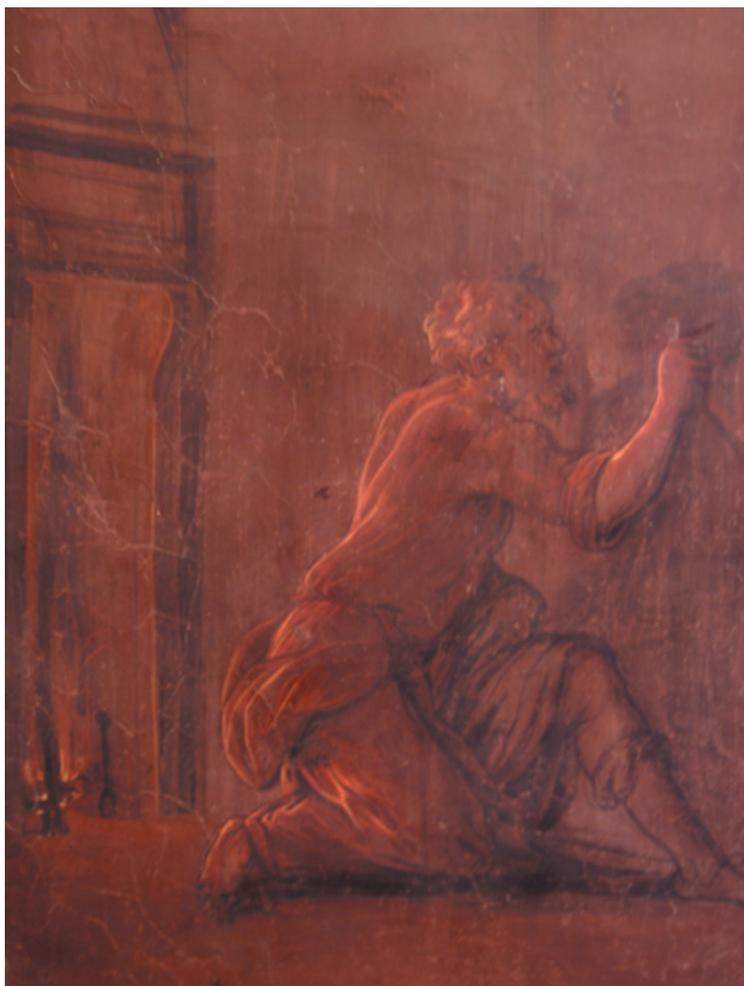


Fig. 2 Giorgio Vasari, *Gyges Inventing Painting* (detail), 1548, fresco, Arezzo, Casa del Vasari (photo: author)

the sudden, motiveless notion of drawing with charcoal his own outline cast by firelight. Pliny's elements of desire, absence and feminine ingenuity are rendered inconsequential.

The more generic story of art's origin in outlining shadows was reiterated by Bronzino in a dialogue written by his pupil and adopted son Alessandro Allori around 1565. He added, however, that the contrasting light might be cast either by the sun or by candles or lamps, a scenario of artifice that brings to mind engravings by Agostino Veneziano (1531, Fig. 3) and Enea Vico (early 1540s) showing pupils busily drawing by candlelight in Baccio



Fig. 3 Agostino Veneziano, *The Academy of Baccio Bandinelli in Rome*, 1531, engraving, 27.4 × 29.8 cm (reproduced by courtesy of the British Museum, London)

Bandinelli's academy.¹⁴ The shadows cast in Agostino's print by the statuettes on the shelf are telling. The central female figurine casts an inaccurate shadow. While its right side and contrapposto are similar enough in the shadow's outline, the gesture of the upper limb on the left has been altered. Raised much higher in the shadow than in the figurine, that arm makes an oratorical gesture as though in dialogue with the male figure to our right. The way in which art might deceptively animate its subjects is fittingly foreshadowed by this apparent error, and a viewer's acuity is set the test of noticing that naturalism results from careful study yet can nevertheless entail certain distortions in such aspects as scale and angle. The *paragone* or competition with sculpture is also engaged by the printmaker working on a two-dimensional surface, in that two aspects of a single object are here depicted on a flat surface.

Perhaps aware of Agostino's engraving, Pontormo nevertheless represents the art of *disegno* practiced in relation to living flesh rather than statuettes, and with less strict attention to silhouettes. Like the pupils in the engraving,

¹⁴ Alessandro Allori, 'Il primo libro de' ragionamenti delle regole del disegno d'Alessandro Allori con M. Agnolo Bronzino', in Barocchi (ed.), *Scritti d'arte*, 1945. On the prints see Ben Thomas, 'The Academy of Baccio Bandinelli', *Print Quarterly* 22 (2005): 3–14, which notes the correction of an erroneous shadow by a rather literal, pedestrian copyist (12, Fig. 3).

Pontormo's amateur artist has been taught well and he too works at portraying his model by means of circumscription, mapping her outlines in the rather outmoded, precise, demanding medium of silverpoint. By this time, the profile format for portraiture was largely anachronistic, a condition emphasized by Alessandro's contrasting depiction in frontal form. Tuscan art of the fifteenth century had favoured the profile for female portraiture, reserving for men more forceful interactions with the picture plane.¹⁵ The combination of distinctive profile mode, outlined features and image of the beloved suggests that an allusion is being made to Pliny's Corinthian maid, with the genders reversed. In addition, the profile format summons not only historical connotations but also refers to the essentials of *disegno*. The word 'profilo' meant border or 'portraying of any picture' and, in Vasari's technical vocabulary for drawing, 'profili' were distinct from sketches, being just the 'first lines encircling an object'.¹⁶ They were the 'lineamenti' or outlines that formed the basis of *disegno*, a definition present too in Piero della Francesca's treatise on perspective.¹⁷ In depicting Alessandro drawing a *profilo* in simple lines, Pontormo shows him mastering the fundamentals of *disegno*, which was in turn considered the basis of all the arts. In Vasari's terms, *disegno* was 'the father [padre] of our three arts' (painting, sculpture and architecture).¹⁸ Due to the very way in which it is being made, the portrait of the beloved is both a metaphor for and an example of *disegno*. Furthermore, as with Pliny's tale, it embeds desire in the process and signification of art-making.

Pontormo also elicits remembrance of Petrarch's artist, Simone Martini, who saw in paradise the 'bel viso' of the 'gentil donna' Laura and 'portrayed her on paper' by putting 'his hand to his stylus'.¹⁹ In both Pliny and Petrarch, the act of drawing was driven by desire. Pontormo simultaneously takes the place of the painter and poet, describing both the drawing artist Alessandro and the beloved's 'bel viso'. Further, the painting of the ruler of Florence

¹⁵ Patricia Simons, 'Women in Frames: the gaze, the eye, the profile in Renaissance portraiture', *History Workshop Journal* 25 (Spring 1988): 4–30. Although the difference between Pliny's two passages is not noticed in Alison Wright, 'The Memory of Faces: Representational Choices in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraiture' in Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Rubin (eds), *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96, the interesting suggestion is made that the shadow cast by the man in Lippi's *Double Portrait* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) may allude to the legend of the Corinthian maid.

¹⁶ Vasari-Milanesi, Vol. 1, 170 ('le prime linee intorno intorno, sono chiamati profili'); John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes* (1598), (facsimile, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1972), 297 ('a border, a limning or drawing of any picture'); John Florio, *Queen Anna's New World of Words* (1611), (facsimile, Menston: Scolar Press, 1968), 403 ('a limning or portraying of any picture. Also a border in armoury'). The word is used as a verb in Cellini, 'Discorso sopra l'arte del disegno', 1931 ('prestamente si proffilava la detta ombra').

¹⁷ Piero della Francesca, *De prospectiva pingendi*, ed. G. Nicco-Fasola (Florence: Casa Editrice le Lettere, 1984), 63: 'Desegno intendiamo essere profili et contorni che nella cosa se contene'.

¹⁸ Vasari-Milanesi, Vol. 1, 168: 'il disegno, padre delle tre arti nostre'.

¹⁹ *Petrarch's Lyric Poems. The 'Rime sparse' and Other Lyrics*, trans. and ed. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 176–7 ('Ma certo il mio Simon fu in Paradiso / onde questa gentil donna si parte; / ivi la vide, et la ritrasse in carte / per far fede qua giù del suo bel viso', 77.5–8), 178–9 ('ch' a mio nome gli pose in man lo stile,' 78.2).

alludes to another of Pliny's tales (35.86–87), about Alexander the Great and his lover Campaspe, whom the Greek king gave to his favorite court painter Apelles when he observed the artist's desire for her. When arguing that the knowledge of art was useful to courtiers, and citing Alexander's gift as a marker of the value of such discernment, one of Castiglione's characters in his influential *Book of the Courtier* (first published 1528) observed that 'it also brings one to know the beauty of living bodies'.²⁰ Visual training sharpened one's judgment of both artfully represented bodies and real ones.

As did Petrarch in the fourteenth century, Castiglione likened the sight of the beloved to a state of rapture only attainable in paradise: 'let those consider this who are so enraptured when they contemplate a woman's beauty that they believe themselves to be in paradise, and yet cannot paint: but if they could, they would gain much greater pleasure because they would more perfectly discern the beauty that engenders so much satisfaction in their hearts' (1.52).²¹ So too in Pontormo's panel the Duke is courtier, lover and artist all, thereby obtaining maximum pleasure from contemplation of his mistress's beauty. Beyond personal avowal of love, the Duke's painting also represents him exercising discernment. Like his namesake the ancient ruler Alexander, he keeps a mistress and employs artists to make portraits; like the skilled artist Apelles he draws an erotic object with acumen and desire. The wealth of allusions invoked when the prince is seen taking up a stylus makes for a multilayered representation of the Medici lover, eliciting comparisons with Apelles and Alexander, Simone Martini and Petrarch, the Corinthian maid and her beloved.

However, comparison with the Corinthian maid's situation or with Petrarch's ever-unattainable Laura might seem inappropriate because those love stories are necessarily about the pain of absence. And Alessandro's mistress is seated before him. Or is she? Although the lady is ostensibly sitting near a window passively accepting the Duke's regard, viewers may be expected to grasp the suggestion that she is really absent. She is, after all, literally outside the frame, present only as a thinly drawn image. Moreover, the painting engages with the period's rhetoric about presence and absence in relation to portraiture. Pontormo's portrait acts in an ambiguous manner, insisting on her presence beyond the frame because she is being drawn, but also forcing viewers, because of the entire panel's very immediacy, to realize that she is actually not sitting right beside them. I contend that Alessandro is probably shown in the act of drawing his favourite from memory.

²⁰ Baldassar Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, ed. Giulio Carnazzi (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1987), 111 ('fa conoscere ancor la bellezza dei corpi vivi'); *The Book of the Courtier: The Singleton Translation*, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 60–61 (1.52–53).

²¹ Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, 111: 'questo pensino quei che tanto godono contemplando le bellezze d'una donna che par lor essere in paradiso, e pur non sanno dipingere; il che se sapessero, arian molto maggiori contento, perché più perfettamente conosceriano quella bellezza, che nel cor genera lor tanta satisfazione'; *The Book of the Courtier*, 60–61.

'Memoria' was a crucial component of drawing, a skill that resulted from habitual practice, as Vasari advocated: 'the best thing is to draw nude men from life and women and thus fix in the memory [preso in memoria] by constant exercise the muscles . . . with the bones underneath. Then one may be sure that through much study attitudes in any position can be drawn by help of the imagination [fantasia] without one's having the living forms in view.'²² Repeated visual inspection of, say, a lover's face would instruct an artist so well that images of that face were always available in the storehouse of the memory, a specific area of the brain: 'drawing on paper furnishes the artist's mind with beautiful conceptions [concetti] and teaches one to depict everything in nature from memory, without having to keep them always before one.'²³ Shown as a skilful drawer, Alessandro is thus an artist who need not have his actual living subject seated near him. Instead, in the period's understanding of the psychology of perception as well as its conceptualization of contemporary poetry (to be discussed below), the devoted lover has the beloved's image embedded within.

The circumstance of the painting's production during a time of mourning also implies that no woman was literally present at its making, or at least not decorously so. A letter of 23 November 1571 informed Duke Francesco de' Medici about the discovery of Alessandro's portrait, for it was lost and he had instituted a search.²⁴ The writer, a former employee of Alessandro's, claimed that he had been given the portrait but that, upon the Duke's death in January 1537 he passed it along to Taddea Malaspina, granting himself an important intermediary role in the portrait's transmission to the same recipient named a few years earlier by Vasari. Ultimately, the portrait was found at Massa, home of Taddea's brother-in-law. The portrait was said to have been painted 'at the time of the death of our good Pope Clement', the Medici pope Clement VII who died in September 1534, and Alessandro was shown 'dressed in mourning, sitting at the table, fully frontal and half-length'.²⁵

Alessandro was either the illegitimate son or great nephew of that recently deceased pope (Giulio de' Medici), who had been the chief architect of Alessandro's rise to prominence. Many thought Giulio had sired Alessandro, others named him the son of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici (Duke of

²² Vasari-Milanesi, Vol. 1, 172 ('Ma sopra tutto il meglio è gl'ignudi degli uomini vivi e femmine, e da quelli avere preso in memoria per lo continuo uso i muscoli del torso, delle schiene, delle gambe, delle braccia, delle ginocchia, e l'ossa di sotto; e poi avere sicurtà, per lo molto studio, che senza avere i naturali innanzi si possa formare di fantasia da sè attitudini per ogni verso'; English from *Vasari on Technique*, trans. Louisa S. Maclehorse (1907; repr. New York: Dover, 1960), 210.

²³ Vasari-Milanesi, Vol. 7, 427: 'disegnando in carta, si viene a empiere la mente di bei concetti, e s'impara a fare a mente tutte le cose della natura, senza avere a tenerle sempre innanzi.'

²⁴ Costantino Ansolidi's letter is transcribed in Clapp, *Jacopo Carucci da Pontormo*, 280–82.

²⁵ Clapp, *Jacopo Carucci da Pontormo*, 281: 'fu fatto nel tempo che morse la bona memoria di Papa Clemente . . . per man di Jacobo da pontor famoso homo, in habito da corrotto, in tavola a tutta faccia et sin 'alla Cintura, al qual non gli manca altro che la favella'.

Urbino).²⁶ Alessandro's mother was also the subject of rumours, usually said to be a freed slave described as 'moro' (North African or Spanish of African origin).²⁷ Any portrait of Alessandro's is caught up in the nexus of social rank and what, in modern terms, would be called race. However, other nobles were rumoured to be born of slave mothers (including Carlo de' Medici), so the Duke was not unique and his mixed race did not attract written comment. The surviving polemic against Alessandro does not single out his race, focusing instead on his mother's lowly status and thence being snide about his lowborn, illegitimate status. His assassin went so far as to say he was not a Medici at all, so base was his mother, thereby severing Alessandro from the family's protective mantle.²⁸ It might, therefore, be more appropriate to say that Alessandro's questionable parentage gave rise to concerns that were voiced in terms of his social status and civic identity. Born with Medici privilege on the one hand, Alessandro nevertheless was frequently criticized for not upholding the core Florentine political value of *libertà*, implying that he was not a true son of that city. All the more then did his portraiture have to connect him with rhetoric that created and enhanced his reputation as an honorable, cultivated, measured man of Medicean ancestry.

Alessandro's dark, sombre costume and Pontormo's semi-monochrome palette indeed suit mourning, and the enclosed space with only a window or door ajar also suggests the afterlife. The feature of a shutter ajar, giving onto the view of an unspecified, ethereal beyond, formed the backdrop in Botticelli's portrait of Alessandro's own grandfather or grand uncle, Giuliano de' Medici, who seems to be portrayed posthumously.²⁹ The classical motif of the half-open window or door suggests Giuliano's passage to eternal life. Pontormo's portrait refers to personal grief but also family iconography and concerns about dynastic politics. Alessandro is depicted as the grieving heir of a famed patriarch. His notorious illegitimacy and rumoured parentage are subsumed under the greater embrace of Medicean visual rhetoric. Having recently lost his papal mentor and supporter, Alessandro as portrayed nevertheless continues to exist in the ambience of Medici iconography and loyalty.

²⁶ For example, Fra Giuliano Ughi, 'Cronica di Firenze o compendio storico delle cose di Firenze dall'anno MDI al MDXLVI', *Archivio storico italiano* Appendix 7 (1849): 171, 185.

²⁷ For an overview and historiography regarding the mother, see John K. Brackett, 'Race and rulership: Alessandro de' Medici, first Medici duke of Florence, 1529–1537' in T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe, eds., *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 303–25. I am grateful to Sean Roberts for a discussion on this issue.

²⁸ Lorenzino de' Medici, *Apologia e Lettere*, ed. Francesco Erspamer, (Rome: Salerno, 1991), 42–3.

²⁹ See Miklós Boskovits's entry on the painting, in Miklós Boskovits, David Alan Brown, et al., *Italian Paintings of the Fifteenth Century: The Collections of the National Gallery of Art* (Washington DC: Oxford University Press, 2003), 170–75, and, for the motif generally, Jan Bialostocki, 'The Door of Death. Survival of a Classical Motif in Sepulchral Art', *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen* 18 (1973): 7–32. A male figure, over half-length, was sketched in at the space adjacent to the shutter, but it was soon painted over with sky gray paint (Strehlke, 'Pontormo, Alessandro de' Medici, and the Palazzo Pazzi', 7–8, Fig. 7), probably when final plans for the composition turned the area into a window more than a door. The background figure's scale also made the room appear longer and less compressed.

On the other hand, the possible references to mourning are subtle and what is most emphatic is grave courtliness. The sitter is shown engaged in the art of drawing, and as though in the presence of a sitter who is particularly diverting and, perhaps, offering a degree of solace. Within his private chamber, perhaps a wood-panelled *studiolo*, the mourner Alessandro might more properly be shown alone, contemplating the import of death and loss, so the reference to Medicean iconography and death are secondary. In a sense, he is painted as a man in meditation upon more abstract things. Both his hands and his eyes are engaged in metaphorical performances.

Alessandro is shown adept at skills recommended for the well-rounded courtier by Castiglione, demonstrating 'a knowledge of how to draw and an acquaintance with the art of painting itself'.³⁰ He masters the difficult art of metalpoint, and as the presumptive commissioner of an excellent artist he is shown to be as discerning as Alexander the Great in his understanding of painting. As Castiglione and others knew well, both painting and sculpture 'spring from the same source, namely, good design', so Alessandro displays his bodily discipline and theoretical grounding in the important fundamentals of art.³¹ Although useful for many reasons, and informed by a wide range of knowledge, *disegno* was, according to Castiglione's text, especially practical at times of war, when 'drawing towns, sites, rivers, bridges, citadels, fortresses, and the like; for, however well they may be stored away in the memory (which is something that is very hard to do), we cannot show them to others so'.³² War planning required maps and plans, to be extracted from the memory and laid out visually for the strategists to see. First duke of Florence, facing resistance and required by the emperor who had appointed him to build a fortress to command the city, Alessandro is shown to be capable of all manner of drawing, implicitly including militaristic designs. In Pontormo's conspicuously anti-state portrait, however, the duke instead devotes his attention to another difficult task, showing to the world his memory-picture of his lover.

Although some nobles were amateur artists, there is no record of Alessandro's propensity with drawing. Rather, Pontormo's portrait depicts his duke as though he were adept at the painter's craft. That craft is thereby advertised as 'most noble and worthy in itself', as Castiglione had put it, exercised by those born of illustrious families.³³ The artist needed knowledge of a

³⁰ Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, 107 (1.49: 'il saper disegnare ed aver cognizion dell'arte propria del dipingere'); *The Book of the Courtier*, 57.

³¹ Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, 108 (1.49: 'pur l'una e l'altra da un medesimo fonte, che è il bon disegno, nasce'); *The Book of the Courtier*, 58.

³² Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, 108 (1.49: 'massimamente nella Guerra, per disegnar paesi, siti, fiumi, ponti, ròcche, fortezze e tai cose; le quali, se ben nella memoria si servassero, il che però è assai difficile, altrui mostrar non si possono'); *The Book of the Courtier*, 57.

³³ Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, 108 (1.49: 'in sé nobilissima e degna sia'); *The Book of the Courtier*, 57. Steinberg, 'Pontormo's Alessandro de' Medici', 62–4 focuses on the painting's argument about the ennoblement of drawing, only to reject it in favour of a purely amorous interpretation.

great many things, Castiglione noted, and Vasari elaborated on the intellectual basis of *disegno*. Drawing engendered a 'general judgement' of nature, and 'from this knowledge there arises a certain conception and judgement [conchetto e giudizio], so that there is formed in the mind that something which afterwards, when expressed by the hands, is called design'.³⁴ Encompassing in one Italian word what English signifies with two separate words, 'design' and 'drawing,' Vasari's *disegno* was 'a visible expression and declaration of our inner conception [conchetto che si ha nell'animo] and of that which others have imagined and given form to in their idea'.

If Pontormo's professional status is subtly elevated, so too the ruler's talent is expanded into the realm of aesthetic judgement and assessment of 'the beauty of living bodies'.³⁵ He traces not the terrain of a battlefield but the topography of his beloved's visage. He thus casts his gaze upon the element of 'paradiso' enthusiastically described by Petrarch and Castiglione. Whether the sitter is fictively represented as present before his eyes, or absent (and, ultimately, the painting insists on not providing a definitive answer about that), her beauty spurs in him a state of abstract contemplation. In classic Neoplatonic terms he moves from the sight of material beauty to reflection upon things unworldly and divine, a state appropriate to one soberly meditating about death. But that philosophical structure does not seem adequate to the painting, for Alessandro gazes not at the ethereal view out of the window but directly at the viewer. The painting's fiction is that Alessandro's audience is solely his lover, attentively regarded as he momentarily pauses from his labour, but thus the viewer becomes feminized, dependent and beloved in turn. While the ostensible object of his regard is seated in profile and cannot return his attentiveness, viewers are free to look back at their duke, cynosure of their devoted gaze, and to receive his steady assessment. The Medici duke is visualized as a masculine ruler who is seen by all and sees all.

Metaphorically, then, his eyes consider not only his court but also his lady, from the perspective of aesthetics, desire and power. In early 1975, Leo Steinberg cleverly applied to the painting a phrase that formed the title of a film song, 'I Only Have Eyes for You', written in 1934 but revived several times since, by such notables as the Flamingoes (1959, heard on the soundtrack of *American Graffiti* in 1973), and Art Garfunkel (1975). Typical of the modern, popular love song, it constructs a scenario of complete absorption in personal feelings and enrapture with only one other person: 'My love must be a kind of blind love/ I can't see anyone but you. . . . The moon may be high/ but I can't see a thing in the sky . . ./ Maybe millions of people go

³⁴ Vasari-Milanesi, Vol. 1, 168–9 ('un giudizio universale . . . e perchè da questa conginitione nasce un certo concetto e giudizio, che si forma nella mente quella tal cosa che poi espressa con le mani si chiama disegno'); *Vasari on Technique*, 205. Walker-Oakes, 'Representing the Perfect Prince', 135–9 argues for the 'intellectual pretensions' of the duke's activity, which presented him as 'the consummate intellectual'. I think, rather, that the painting positions Alessandro in the orbit of the era's perceptual psychology and amorous poetry.

³⁵ Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, 111 (1.52: 'la bellezza dei corpi vivi'); *The Book of the Courtier*, 60.

by,/ but they all disappear from view. And I Only Have Eyes For You'. In a sense, such obsessively ocular engagement continues Petrarch's poetic conceit, but in an emotional and individualistic vein. However, Steinberg did not mention Petrarch at all, preferring a reading of the painting in which it 'remains private' rather than offering a 'polemical' or 'propaganda' message about the nobility of drawing. Hence, the painting addresses only one woman, motivated by the 'philandering prince wishing to make her a gift that would protest his steadfast interest in her alone'.³⁶ On the other hand, Alessandro captures every viewer in the net cast from his eyes. I would argue that Pontormo's portrait, rather than presaging modern love lyrics, makes each audience member the subject of Alessandro's gaze, as they are caught up in the fiction of an intimate interlude.

Ideas about desire, central to Renaissance poetry, imbue the painting. The lover's image was so intense that it was likened to an engraving on one's heart, similar to the way in which Alessandro's metalpoint stylus marks the coated paper with the indelible image of his beloved. He draws the image of a pert woman, whose anachronistic profile and drawing on 'carte' with 'lo stile' reminds viewers of Simone Martini's famous depiction of Laura, Petrarch's object of unrequited love.³⁷ Sonnet 77 positions the artist as one who captures her incomparable, heavenly beauty due to the kind of visionary experience that art can put into effect. Sonnet 78 instead bemoans the disjunction between desirable yet illusory image and actual distance from the beloved, who is a mere image on this earth, one constructed as much by the poet's *concetto* or conceit as by the painter. The materiality of paint or the graphic medium might capture a beautiful likeness, but still the image does not speak or respond, just as Laura remains a remote, ideal figure. Wandering through the mountains in Sonnet 129, Petrarch's lover stops and 'in the first stone I see I portray [disegno] her lovely face with my mind', seeing her everywhere, 'so much the more beautiful does my thought shadow her forth'.³⁸ However, the separation is endless, 'from the lovely face that is always so near to me and so distant'.

In Pontormo's portrait too, the two likenesses are but constructed images. The woman's linear description is particularly evident as an invention because it is yet in the making, thereby drawing attention to Pontormo's wit and visual craft as well as to Alessandro's all-seeing persona. An important effect of the drawing is to accentuate absence. In Petrarchan terms, the true, complete attainment of desire, like the utterly faithful portrayal of heavenly beauty, is impossible. Only pale imitations and counterfeits result. The ideal lady remains ideal, an object of adoration drawn and poetically conjured from afar.

³⁶ Steinberg, 'Pontormo's Alessandro de' Medici', 62–3.

³⁷ Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The Worlds of Petrarch* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 27–30.

³⁸ *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 264–7: 'nel primo sasso/ disegno co la mente il suo bel viso . . . tanto più bella il mio pensier l'adombra. . . dal bel viso mi diparte/ che sempre m'è sì presso et sì lontano' (129.28–29, 48, 60–61).

That distance, both arousing and frustrating, is actualized by the dynamics of Pontormo's portrait because viewers understand that no such lady sits in perfect profile beside them. She is a figment of the painting's mythic story.

Alessandro draws more from memory than life, limning the image carved on his heart, as poetic convention of the time put it. Upon autopsy, the hearts of especially pious people sometimes revealed the name of Christ or images such as the cross, written or sculpted upon them, and secular discourse applied this language of devout inscription to the dynamics of earthly love.³⁹ The 'image of her beauty . . . descended through my eyes into my heart', making 'such an impression' that it was always held there.⁴⁰ At times, the figure of the beloved is poetically presented as being carved into the lover's soul or heart. According to Petrarch, *Amore* wrote Laura's name on the poet's heart.⁴¹ Or 'Love drew, nay sculpted . . . those gentle words he wrote, on a diamond in the midst of my heart'.⁴² Bellini's portrait of Pietro Bembo's mistress, painted around the year 1500, elicited from the poet two admiring sonnets, which compare it to the 'image . . . I have sculpted in my heart' or the 'face, imprinted on my soul'.⁴³ That imprinting operated in the same way as images were stored in the memory, linking the imagistic process of desire with that of artistic imagination and *disegno*.

Pontormo's drawing of the loved one is informed by a widespread, long-standing notion of imprinted images. Such an impression of beauty was cast in a Neoplatonic key by Bembo, as presented in Castiglione's *Courtier*, carried through the eyes and implanted on the soul ['imprime nell'anima'] so that the result was ardent desire for the divine (4.52). But the language was Christian, amorous and philosophical, so Pontormo's portrait of Alessandro need not be explained in Neoplatonic terms, especially given the dearth of

³⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, Vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 143; *The Florentine Fior di Virtù of 1491*, trans. Nicholas Fersin (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1953), 23; Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women. Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 41–9, 57–74 *passim*, 223 (especially on the autopsied hearts of Chiara of Montefalco and Margherita of Città di Castello in 1308 and 1320 respectively); Eric Jaeger, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁴⁰ Lorenzo de' Medici, *The Autobiography of Lorenzo de' Medici The Magnificent: A Commentary on My Sonnets*, trans. James Wyatt Cook (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995), 91 (on Sonnet 7): 'Era già per li occhi miei discesa al cuore la imagine della bellezza di costei, e gli occhi suoi avevano fatto in esso tale impressione, che sempre gli erano presente'.

⁴¹ *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 40–41 (5.2); see also Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Dino S. Cervigni and Edward Vasta (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 138–9 (39.13): 'quel dolce nome di Madonna scritto'.

⁴² *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 300–01 (155.9–11: 'mi depinse Amore./ anzi scolpio, et que' detti soavi/ mi scrisse entro un diamante in mezzo 'l core'); see also 121 (50.65–66); *Selva II* (10.3–4, 21.6) in Lorenzo de' Medici, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Paulo Orvieto (Rome: Salerno, 1992), Vol. 1, 592, 595; Ficino's *El libro dell'Amore*, 2.8.37–38 and 6.6.7, quoted in *ibid.*, 430 n. 224 (where the image is also sculpted). Love has sculpted ('Amor l'ha scolpita') her image on the heart in Lorenzo de' Medici, *Autobiography*, 236–7, 240–41 (Sonnet 35 and Commentary).

⁴³ Pietro Bembo, *Prose della vulgar lingua, Gli Asolani, Rime*, ed. Carlo Dionisotti (Turin: Tascabili degli Editori Associati, 1966), 521–2 (nos 19–20), 'imagine . . . che scolpita ho nel cor' and 'volto, che mi stai ne l'alma impresso'.

contemporary evidence for the duke's intellectual aspirations. The poetry and commentary of his ancestor Lorenzo de' Medici 'il Magnifico' (either his great grandfather or his great uncle) would have been more familiar, alongside poetic traditions in the Petrarchan vein. The conceit of the drawn image of a peerless creature held close to a man was already emerging in Dante's *Vita Nuova* (c. 1293), when the death of his lady led the poet's character to ponder his 'memoria' of her, while sitting and 'designing an angel on certain panels'.⁴⁴ Probably referring to his stylus sketching on a wax tablet, Dante's process of visual nostalgia foreshadows Pontormo's depiction of stylus marking the prepared paper.

In the poetic register, the process of desire was intensely visual; to painters working with the literati and urban elite, like Pontormo, their work was similarly poetic. The ennobled lover's heart is addressed in one of Lorenzo de' Medici's sonnets, envied for its intimate contact with the charming hand of his lady that gently presses all hardness from his heart.⁴⁵ Her white finger paints ('dipingere') on it her name to which Love has consecrated his heart, 'and now imprints her face angelic' on it too. Lorenzo's commentary returns to this 'likeness of my lady's face' that 'ornamented my heart' and so much is it like a painting that he makes a rare comment on the conditions for 'perfect painting'. One of these conditions must be 'a perfect master both of design and of colour' ['el maestro perfetto e di disegno e di colore']; her white hand is deemed utterly 'noble and expert' for the task. The male master is allegorized into feminine form when the commentary shifts from the actualities of good painting to the poetics of amorous discourse. The master of design is pictured as male in Alessandro's portrait, although that is Pontormo's poetic fiction, as though the duke is demonstrating that the image painted/carved on his heart/memory has left so deep an impression that he can recall and reconstruct her emblematic image even when she is absent. That was the very manner described by Vasari, of skilled artists who practiced sufficiently over time so that they could draw from memory.

Lorenzo de' Medici and Pontormo are each interested in the process of imagination and in the storehouse of images or 'memoria'. Explaining the process by which the internalized image of his lady brings consolation despite the torments of love, Lorenzo points out that his poetry operates on a symbolic plane. He explains that when he speaks of "eyes" and "seeing", one must understand "thoughts" and "imagining", because . . . every sense that is attributed to the heart are nothing other than thoughts, by whose means the heart, that is our mind, imagines and works, as the body does by means of the senses. . . . For the stronger the imagination is, the more it

⁴⁴ Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, 126–9 (34.1–4: 'disegnava uno angelo sopra certe tavolette').

⁴⁵ Lorenzo de' Medici, *Autobiography*, 133–9 (Sonnet 15 and Commentary), from whence the following quotations are drawn. On the text, see Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli's 'Primavera' and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 137–9.

seems to see that which it then imagines, and in imagining my lady merciful and lovely, it seems necessary that the more it imagines her, the lovelier and more merciful she becomes in thought.⁴⁶ Just so, Pontormo has Alessandro imagine with sensate specificity the picture of his lovely lady's face.

On another occasion, when Lorenzo fell to weeping because he could not find his beloved, 'leaving off searching for my lady with my eyes, I took refuge in searching for her with a thought'.⁴⁷ Alessandro too has halted his optical enterprise and now looks out of the picture plane, preoccupied with thoughts of the lady who is not necessarily in his presence. The imaginings were so strong, Lorenzo observes, that 'it was as if my eyes had looked upon the reality. And because a strong imagination, except in a very few and blessed, can last but briefly, I became aware of that exceedingly sweet deception almost as if I had wakened from a dream and found myself without my lady.'⁴⁸ The painter exercises 'una forte imaginazione', able to seize the transitory image of the beloved and turn it into a lasting, externalized impression, so that the sitter is awake but the product of his dream remains with him.

I suggest that Alessandro, in the process of drawing, personifies the Lover, displaying the medium through which his heart has been ennobled, the image 'carved' by the metalpoint stylus. And the woman he draws is almost a muse, the ostensible instigator of a pictorial discourse about desire that extends beyond any particular, personalized affair. In poetic conceit, not only did the beloved paint or carve on the lover's heart or soul, but Love itself was an artist. Love is the character who directly impresses images on the lover's heart in several of Lorenzo de' Medici's sonnets, for instance. *Amor pittore* recurs in early sixteenth-century poetry too, collaborating with Leonardo da Vinci to paint the portrait of a duchess (c. 1513–16), forming an image in the bosom of the poet Tebaldeo (1503), competing with Titian to produce images of a woman (1542).⁴⁹ In that *Amore* is an artist, Pontormo's painting externalizes the process, not only showing one lover smitten by imagery but also documenting the artist who stands back and creates the pictorial record of that process. After countless moments of admiring his

⁴⁶ Lorenzo de' Medici, *Autobiography*, 188–9 (Commentary on Sonnet 24): 'intendere, dove si dice "occhi" e "vedere", "pensieri" e "immaginare", perché . . . ogni senso che s'attribuisce al cuore non sono altro che pensieri, per mezzo de' quali el cuore, cioè la mente nostra, immagina e opera, come el corpo per mezzo de' sensi; . . . perché quanto la immaginazione è pur forte, più gli pare vedere quello che allora immagina, e immaginando la donna mia pietosa e bella, pare necessario che, quanto più la immagina così, più diventi bella e pietosa nel pensiero.'

⁴⁷ Lorenzo de' Medici, *Autobiography*, 198–9 (Commentary on Sonnet 26): 'lasciato il cercare con li occhi la donna mia, rifuggi' al cercarne col pensiero.'

⁴⁸ Lorenzo de' Medici, *Autobiography*, 240–41 (Commentary on Sonnet 35): 'che si li occhi la vera avessino veduta. E perché una forte inaginazione, se non in molti pochi et eletti, può poco durare, accordgendomi io di quell' dolcissimo inganno, quasi come da un sonno svegliato, trovandomi senza la mia donna.'

⁴⁹ John Shearman, *Only Connect . . . Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 124 and n. 36; Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli, Vol. 2 (Rome: Salerno, 1998), 433–4 (to Don Diego Mendoza, 15 August 1542).

mistress's beauty and imprinting her image in his 'memoria', just as Love fixes her image on the heart, Alessandro is represented drawing her from memory, impressing her face on paper. The setting for image production is not a workshop but a small chamber, the sort of intimate space imagined in Aretino's sonnet of 1542 regarding Titian's competition with *Amore*. There the painter's 'effigie' is contrasted with Love's 'imago', yet each are kept close, the painting in the patron's 'camera', 'the other in his heart'. Alessandro is situated in his own small 'camera', having imitated Love by drawing the 'imago' of his beloved. The image is more important than the actual lover, an ever-present ideal of poetic fantasy in contrast to her mundane, mutable and human condition.

The dialectic between ideal and reality operates with particular force in the case of the portrayal of beloved or beautiful ladies, who are constrained by poetic conventions, habits of pictorial generalization and social expectations.⁵⁰ In a variety of ways, Pontormo's portrait of Alessandro plays with the complex interchange between presence and absence, actuality and fantasy. The act of portrayal, performed within the image and testified to by the actual existence of the portrait as well, is intimately related to absence. As Alberti had put it, 'painting possesses a truly divine power in that not only does it make the absent present . . . but it also represents the dead to the living'.⁵¹ Pliny's Corinthian maid was impelled to 'invent' drawing because she wanted a record of her lover's face before he departed; Petrarch's Laura was captured in insensible materials as an only partially compensating image for a lover who was suffering the pangs of unrequited passion. The artistic process of seemingly drawing from life is often a myth masking the reconstruction of naturalistic appearance through the skills of memory and manual ingenuity. Alessandro resorts to his memory when using a stylus to draw an avowal of love for his idealized, absent mistress (at a time when death had removed a powerful family ally from the scene).

Rather than Hollywood lyrics about modern romance, poetic conventions for amorousness are applicable to Pontormo's portrait of the first duke of Florence, stage-managed to appear as though caught in an intimate moment. Sentiment had little to do with Renaissance portraiture. Alessandro is represented not as an emotional being but as someone familiar with the courtly game of amorous poetry, the accomplishment of drawing and the exercise of

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Cropper, 'On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo and the Vernacular Style', *Art Bulletin* 58 (1976): 374–94; Elizabeth Cropper, 'On the Beauty of Women: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture' in Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (eds.), *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 175–90; Patricia Simons, 'Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women' in Alison Brown (ed.), *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 263–311.

⁵¹ Alberti, *On Painting*, 61 (2.25: 'Non habet ea quidem in se vim admodum divinam . . . absentes pictura praesentes esse faciat').

discerning judgement.⁵² His visualized persona is cultivated and restrained, as mourner, courtier, lover, poet, and artist. He is also depicted as loyal and heterocentric, because it seems as though he is thoroughly immersed in the poetic trope of loving ladies to the point of drawing one special woman. Amongst his contemporaries, however, Alessandro's reputation was that of a carouser who visited brothels and penetrated nunneries to suit his appetites.⁵³

Some of the reports were fuelled by exiles hostile to the return of Medici rule in Florence, but even allies observed the indulgences of Alessandro, who was only around twenty years of age when appointed to the duchy. The sculptor Benvenuto Cellini, employed to produce dies for coinage and a friendly acquaintance since their days in Rome, visited the duke often. When writing his memoirs over two decades later, Cellini recalled that 'quite a few times I found him having an after-dinner nap all alone with that Lorenzo of his', a Medici relative who assassinated the duke in 1537.⁵⁴ On one occasion, Cellini 'discovered him in bed; they told me he had been enjoying a debauch', and the only other person present was Lorenzo. Cellini's innuendo about a sexual relationship between the two was perhaps motivated in part because he wanted to imply that even the Medici elite engaged in the sort of sodomitical acts for which Cellini was under house arrest while he was writing.⁵⁵ That is not to gainsay the likelihood that he indeed noted signals of homoerotic interest on Alessandro's part.

Pontormo's portrait is a clear case of image-making, and it offers the picture of a sombre man devoted to one lady. It is as much a public face as a personal one, presenting a persona suitable for viewing by Emperor Charles V or his emissaries once protests about Alessandro's political and personal excesses gave rise to some concern at the imperial level. Florentine exiles and republicans complained to the Emperor about Alessandro's villainies ('scelleratezze'), superiority, cruelty, lechery ('libidine' and 'lussuria'), and tyrannical, violent disregard for the city's tradition of 'libertà'.⁵⁶ The portrait conveys the kind of impression Alessandro would have needed to make on

⁵² Walker-Oakes, 'Representing the Perfect Prince', 129 concludes that the painting is an idealization and that the sitter is shown 'as a paragon of courtly and dynastic virtue'.

⁵³ Lorenzino de' Medici, *Apologia e Lettere*, 39, 40, 43; Jacopo Nardi, *Storie della città di Firenze*, ed. Agenore Gelli, Vol. 2 (Florence: Le Monnier, 1858, 238–9); Bernardo Segni, *Storie fiorentine dall'anno MDXXVII al MDLV*, Vol. 2 (Milan: Società tipografica de' Classici italiani, 1805), 19–20; Ughi, 'Cronica', 181, 186; Benedetto Varchi, 'Storia Fiorentina', in his *Opere*, Vol. 1, (Trieste: Sezione letterario-artistica del Lloyd austriaco, 1858), 356, 358–59, 369, 380, 387, 395, 410.

⁵⁴ For this and the following see Benvenuto Cellini, *Vita*, ed. Ettore Camesasca (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1985), 280–82 (1.80, 'molte volte lo trovavo a dormicchiare doppio desinare con quell suo Lorenzino, . . . e non altri'; 1.81, 'lo trovai nel letto, perché dicevano che gli aveva disordinato'); translation by George Bull from Benvenuto Cellini, *Autobiography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956, 147–9).

⁵⁵ Cellini's retort to Bandinelli's accusation that he was a sodomite, made in the company of Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, included the claim that 'here on earth it is the practice of the greatest emperors and the greatest kings of the world': *Autobiography*, 338; *Vita*, 557 (2.71, 'qui in terra e' la usano i maggiori imperatori e i più gran re del mondo'). Lorenzo's own pansexuality was noted in Varchi, 'Storia Fiorentina', 410 ('. . . ne' casi d' amore, senza rispetto alcuno o di sesso o d'età o di condizione').

⁵⁶ See especially Varchi, 'Storia Fiorentina', 377–90, 394–6 and *passim*.

Charles V when he met with him in Naples between December 1535 and early March the following year, not long after the portrait was probably completed.⁵⁷ Having lost papal support upon Clement's death (September 1534), and with rumours abounding about his part in the death by poisoning of Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici (August 1535), Alessandro was even more dependent on the backing of Charles V. Betrothed to Charles's illegitimate daughter Margaret since the Treaty of Barcelona between Clement and the emperor in June 1529, Alessandro finally married her, in Naples in 1536 when she was a few months past thirteen years of age.⁵⁸

That marriage, and its public celebrations, demonstrated imperial favour for Alessandro, but it had hung in the balance for a while as the emperor heard from the exiles and worried about whether Alessandro would maintain control of Florence. According to the contemporary chronicler Fra Giuliano Ughi, those concerns created a 'great difficulty' that was only overcome when Charles confirmed him as duke and allowed the wedding to go ahead.⁵⁹ It is just conceivable that the portrait's initial recipient was primarily Charles but ostensibly his daughter, Alessandro's fiancé, rather than his mistress, for the profile head is not very specific in its details (Alessandro had met Margaret during her visit to Florence in 1533). The painting's conceit is about a poetic, courtly lover, a persona that would fit the wooing of either a bride or a mistress. In either case, the panel ended up in Taddea's hands, whether by gift or chance, due to commission, changed circumstances or appropriation. According to the letter of 1571, she only received the painting after Alessandro's death. And whether or not one woman was initially posited as the painting's primary audience, Pontormo's fictive presentation of Duke Alessandro conveys the impression of a cultivated prince capable of decorous displays of loyalty, honour and desire.

Notorious builder of the *Fortezza da Basso*, and urged on in that task by Charles V, Alessandro was depicted in implacable armour by Vasari a year or so before Pontormo's panel.⁶⁰ In contrast, Pontormo's fictive staging of the same sitter has been taken as a personal, intimate characterization. Too easy a contrast between public and private representations makes little sense, however, as Vanessa Walker-Oakes has ably demonstrated. It is possible to frame Alessandro's depiction in relation to the international politics of marriage, although the first traces of ownership suggest that it was, or soon became, a love token for a mistress. It is possible to read Alessandro's image simultaneously in relation to the local politics of rulership, since it proposes loyalty, both to the Medici dynasty and to a single heterocentric focus, and presents the young duke endowed with skills of discernment, poetic imagery,

⁵⁷ Varchi, 'Storia Fiorentina', 377.

⁵⁸ Varchi, 'Storia Fiorentina', 404. A wedding mass was also celebrated in Florence after she had arrived there in June 1536.

⁵⁹ Ughi, 'Cronica', 180 ('grandissima difficoltà').

⁶⁰ Walker-Oakes, 'Representing the Perfect Prince', compares the two portraits at length.

hand control and mature thought. Locating Pontormo's pictorial discourse in personal sentiment precludes the artist's engagement with the intellectual, poetic and erotic resonances of *disegno*. One version of drawing's origin grounded it in desire, and later poetic imagery about the lover's engraved heart continued the close association. Those traditions inform Pontormo's panel, along with the understanding that one could ultimately draw from memory, so impressed on the artist's mind could be an image of an idealized beloved. Layers of presence and absence, naturalism and idealism are at work in Pontormo's portrait, which addresses the perspicacity of sight and the poetics of its very making. The duke adopts a mythic persona but so too does the painter endow his craft with a distinguished pedigree, ranging from Pliny and Petrarch to poets like Lorenzo de' Medici, activating also theories of the time about perceptual psychology, amorous imprinting and the conceptual basis of *disegno*. Desire couples with intellect to forge a portrait of power and longing.

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